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Youth Studies and Generations

Edited by
Vitor Sérgio Ferreira

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Values, Practices and Discourses on Generations

Special Issue Editor

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About the Special Issue Editor

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Preface to "Youth Studies"

There is currently much discourse about generations in the public sphere. A sequence of letters conflates generations and age cohorts born in the last few decades (generation "X", "Y", or "Z") [1] as well as multiple categories are used to describe today's young people as a generation that is distinct from its predecessors.

Since the adoption of Millennials [2]— the most popular generational category label for the cohort born after 1980—other such categories have subsequently been used to distinguish current young people: generation Me [3], iGeneration [4], global generation [5, 6], Erasmus generation [7], digital or net generation [8, 9], 1000-euro generation [10,11], lost generation [12,13,14], and precarious generation [15]. These are just some of the many labels that have recurrently been assigned to contemporary youth with a view to emphasising differences, conflicts, or flows between their and their parents' and grandparents'—who also received their own generational epithets, like "baby boomer generation" [16,13]—ways of life.

However, in the social sciences field, this proliferation of generational categories has not been followed by sufficiently broad empirical research with deep analytical engagement. Generational categories are usually produced as a result of market studies promoted by large companies and designed for marketing and business purposes [17,18], with analyses and conclusions that are driven more by market-centred than scientific interests. In general, such studies seek to evaluate the overall economic capacity and symbolic availability of specific youth segments to acquire certain consumer goods (objects, experiences, services, etc.), assigning them preferences, pointing out social practices, and defining lifestyles that are made available in the market, and then later, generating pop labels for specific consumption profiles.

Against this background, it is clear why, despite the popularity of generational labels in media, politics, or even academia, the use of *generation* as a conceptual tool in youth studies has been controversial [19,20,21]. Recently, Alan France and Steven Roberts [22] reacted to the wide-ranging and substantial impact of the social generational approach in youth studies "with limited critical reflection", stating that "a new orthodoxy in the study of youth" has emerged (p. 216). The debate that has arisen in the last few years identifies the danger that the generational approach will homogenise youth conditions and behaviours, blurring unequal social and cultural conditions in the light of experiences of Western youth located in Anglo-Saxon countries and among the white, urban, and more highly educated middle classes [23]. Alongside the risk of a reductionist harmonisation of young people's conditions, there is often simplistic use of the generational approach that takes the generational correspondence between distinct demographic cohorts—i.e., young people born between date x and date y—for granted.

Claims of rapid, sequential generational changes are often deterministic and muddled by excess speculation, universalistic exaggeration, and even contradiction. In fact, there are no consensually accepted definitions of the content of the generational labels that are created or their age cohorts. Even though we live in times in which historical temporality is accelerating, one cannot imagine changes that are fast enough to justify a succession of generations as quick as the recent profusion of vague and hasty qualifiers and categories of generational identification would imply. Having said that, and notwithstanding all the criticisms and scepticism, we see Ken Roberts—once a staunch critic of the concept of generation in youth studies—accepting "that the formation of a genuine new generation is now probable" [16] (p. 482).

Against this background, this Special Issue is free of generational labels and uses the generational perspective, very carefully, to identify, not a *social reality* full of unity and specificity, but *symptoms* of ongoing structural changes and, to that extent, *vestiges* of a new generation in the process of formation [24] (p. 139). The fact is that, as Roberts [16] (p. 479) asserted, the conditions which made the reproduction of the experiences and the living standards of the "baby boomer" generation possible have disappeared, thereby foreshadowing the likely, albeit still undefined, emergence of the conditions which will form a new generation among young people born after the 1980s, who know and live in a world that is distinct from both that of the past and that which is projected for the future.

The global context of systemic crisis, which has resulted in the implementation of austerity measures and neoliberal policies in many countries since 2008, is consensually seen in this Special Issue as a structural change that has imbued generational markers in many spheres of young people's life right around the globe. Not in the sense of forming an event that is responsible for abrupt ruptures, but of establishing a turning point marked by the intensification and acceleration of economic and social processes which were already happening and are generators of a context which is structurally differentiated from the past. The effects of austerity measures that international financial institutions have required some countries to adopt, in order to respond to the crisis, have ended up going well beyond the economic sphere and the original temporal conjuncture, jeopardising social citizenship rights that are critical to the organisation of young people's present and future life courses, in terms of their capacity for social autonomy and economic emancipation.

In the context of new material conditions of existence, young people are facing new transitional realities and challenges throughout their life courses, which are marked by added difficulties or even blockages. This Special Issue on youth studies and generations begins precisely with a set of articles discussing the transformations in both the ways people transition to adulthood and how they live the adult condition itself. Moreno and Urraco start by providing a useful theoretical state of the art on the generational approach's limits and potentialities when it comes to understanding the recent structural changes in youth transitional processes. Nevertheless, far from offering a homogeneous vision of the generational impacts, the authors argue the analytical relevance of an intersectional approach to the way young people are transitioning to adulthood. Variables such as social class, qualifications, gender, or national social protection regimes, among others, must be invoked if we are to explain the unequal "degree of exposure" of, and "structure of possibilities" available to, young people in order to respond to and cope with a similar set of sociohistorical conditions and crises at the core of a shared "generational connection".

Two research articles then empirically explore that perspective by analysing young people's trajectories in two Southern European countries—Italy (Magaraggia and Benasso), and Portugal (Ramos) —with common structural conditions in terms of extended school and academic paths, fragmented labour markets, precarious labour relations, and limited welfare measures in terms of transitional protection regimes—conditions that have been worsening since the 2008 financial crisis. Against the background of this set of conditions, the authors go beyond the more linear perspectives based on age paths and discuss how youth transition pathways have been subject to intergenerational change mechanisms and transitional blockages. The discussion includes theoretical debates about the extent to which there has been a reshaping of youth life courses (timing, sequence, and duration of transitional events); the question of just whose transitions are being postponed, protracted, and becoming less linear and predictable, given the constraints, resources, and possibilities regarding gender and social class; and whether there has been a remaking of the traditional boundaries of

transition to adulthood and of what it means to be an adult. Inasmuch as parents' experiences are no longer the helpful road map they used to be, different experiences and strategies for coping with the non-standard characteristics of life-course pathways that have emerged from the new set of structural conditions among young people are analysed from the perspective of a more nuanced view of social generations.

Hajdu and Sik are critical of the hasty and unprepared generalisations that have been promoted in some generational approaches. They demystify discourses that are currently present in the public arena, whereby younger generations are supposed to be less work-oriented, rejecting the idea that this attitudinal trend is propagated by the growing obstacles to labour market entry, such as unemployment, underemployment, and/or the spread of precarious work. On the one hand, they find no relevant gaps between birth cohorts regarding the relative importance of work in life among the European and Euro-Atlantic countries. On the other, when they look at how people value work, they find that the importance attached to having an interesting job, good pay, and good working hours decreases with age, but that job security is equally important at every age.

Other vestiges of generational changes explored in this Special Issue are found in new ways in which young people are coping with (new) media and the body. Changing practices related with media/internet use and preferences (Vieira) and modes of attention to the body (Ferreira) are discussed using an approach in which neither generational buzzwords and labels, nor fast generational changes, are taken for granted. The authors instead adopt a careful perspective with regard to generational change, in which a nuanced vision of these practices goes beyond homogenising and mutually exclusive generational categorisations—a vision that is attentive to social contexts and circumstances of use, and non-use and abuse of technological and body modification practices.

Political participation and engagement is another focus that offers insight into generational change in the current Special Issue, in which a number of papers provide empirical data that contradict the myth of youth indifference towards politics, suggesting that the relationship between contemporary youth and formal politics is complex and far from apathetic. The authors rely on a considerable body of evidence as to how young people are suspicious of the relevance of formal politics to their lives, dissatisfied with the functioning of the democratic system, reluctant to engage with formal election-oriented politics—such as voting or membership of political parties—and have low levels of trust and interest in politicians and conventional political institutions.

Challenging the thesis that contemporary young people are apathetic, indifferent, or distant in relation to politics, a range of articles emphasise just how, why, and among whom their dissatisfaction with the current political system and their representatives is being politicised. The "politicisation of discontent" or the "resentment" of and by young people has intensified under the socioeconomic conditions that have grown out of the implementation of austerity policies since 2008 in several European countries, such as Spain (Benedicto and Ramos), the United Kingdom (Hart and Henn), and Portugal (Pontes, Henn, and Griffiths). Reflecting the global spread and deepening of neoliberalism, these measures have contributed to the economic marginalisation of young people in the labour and housing markets, driving scepticism towards formal politics and encouraging more individualistic approaches to political participation or engagement, such as volunteering at NGOs (Jardim and Marques da Silva) or boycotting consumerism (Kyroglou and Henn), for example.

The participatory culture of young people is changing. Political meanings are being given to new spheres of life and particular issues they care about, to which they are emotionally

attached, or for which they value as a result of self-oriented motivations related with self-fulfilment, self-development, self-gratification, and personal autonomy. They are preferring alternative forms of political action (on- and offline) that best suit their interests, needs, and lifestyles, in an expression of a desire to do something by and for themselves, even when that implies collaborative and collective action.

Many of these trends can be found at a global scale, which is why some authors in the youth studies area argue for the existence of a "global generation" [5,6]—a claim that is not taken for granted in this Special Issue. Roberts, Kovacheva, and Kabaivanov identify the same feelings of distrust of elected politicians and political institutions among young people in Tunisia, where corruption among politicians is seen as a serious problem. Among other factors, the recent youth protests in North Africa have also unfolded against the background of the globalisation of neoliberalism. The neoliberal policies promoted there by international financial institutions have blocked Tunisia's economy and labour markets and, consequently, young people's pathways towards autonomy. However, the authors are cautious about interpreting the 2011 protests as either a symptom of a long-term generational swing or merely events designed to restore Tunisia's earlier democratic normality. On the other hand, they also dispute some discourses that are frequently linked to the "global generation" thesis, arguing that the trend towards globalised neoliberalism does not imply the existence of a modernising path along the lines of the so-called Western world, inasmuch as their data show how young Tunisians clearly prefer a modernising path that leads to a distinctly Arabic and Islamic modernity.

Following the same critical vision of the concept of "global generation", Philipps goes a step further and questions the supposed universalism of the theoretical and methodological apparatus employed in the youth studies field. His position is that the latter has been mostly grounded in data produced in the Global North (Europe, North America, and Australia), thereby excluding the experiences of young people from other globalised contexts—namely those of postcolonial African, Oriental, and Latin American contexts. He thus questions the "global generation" concept, as developed to date, namely, when applied to explain the youth-driven social change in postcolonial nation states whose borders were created by colonial powers and where the cohabitation of heterogeneous populations and systems of meanings are intertwined in much of the transnational dynamics. Recognising the transnational heritage of today's young people within an increasingly interconnected world, Philipps notes that many of the cultural resources shared across the globe are locally interpreted, used, and experienced in many ways. He therefore takes a more inclusive and nuanced approach towards youth as drivers of social change in a global and postcolonial society—an approach whose theoretical basis is sensitive to the differences in meanings of youth and generational relations within single countries and contexts, even when those meanings appear to be similar upon first glance. Analysing the role of young men in urban protests in Guinea and Uganda, Philipps notes how seemingly analogous events had different local meanings because of different age categories ("youth" and "generation"), and their respective roles and power relations vary substantially between countries.

The final article also highlights the importance of looking at age categories, such as "generation" or "youth", not as objective social realities but as discursive and symbolic ones. This perspective is tuned with the generationalist approach in youth studies [25,13,26], a recent perspective which moves away from the traditional generational approaches in the sense that, in the former, the discursive realities do not need to have any objective correspondence with generations as social

realities anchored to events endowed with potential for historical change. As seen from the generationalist perspective, generational labels are discursive realities in the sense that they are symbolic constructions underpinned by cultural narratives which integrate codes and terminologies intended to express differences in preferences, values, representations, and life ethics based on age principles. From this perspective, generations are seen as symbolic categories used in the public space and social interaction, in diverse configurations, and with differentiated contents and social interests. Individuals and institutions can mobilise those generational categories in their daily discursive practices as principles for organising and interpreting the world and social change within their power relations and processes of social identification and categorisation.

This Special Issue allows readers to better understand the key issues regarding the use of generation as a theoretical concept and/or as a social category in the field of youth studies, shedding light on the controversies, trends, and cautions that go through it.

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Article

The Generational Dimension in Transitions: A Theoretical Review

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to question the notions of 'generation' and 'transitions' from a theoretical perspective by making a brief historical incursion into the sociology of generations. This review will explore the latest ideas on youth transitions to establish theoretical bridges between the different authors, and between the classic and modern approaches. It also takes a deeper look at an emerging theoretical model that seeks to connect these two important issues, transitions and the notion of generation. The debate focuses on how youth transitions are conceptualised from a micro perspective as individual and individualised processes, underlining the idea that they are based on specific macro concepts of 'youth' in generational terms. The concept of social generation allows the micro aspects of transitions to be associated with the historical situation in which they occur. This theoretical approach proposes that young people's transitional behaviours are subject to the mechanisms of intergenerational change, but also notes that transitions can be differentiated according to the position they occupy in the social structure. In summary, this article supports the idea that youth transitions are different in their manifestations, although they may have a similar generational basis. The aim is therefore to introduce a broader theoretical view that includes the predecessors and successors of the classics, and serves as a point of departure for an approach designed to understand the formats of the new 'youth status', and hence, offer a more accurate scientific explanation for examining the overworked notions of *generation* and *transition*.

Keywords: generation; transitions; youth; social class

1. The Concept of *Generation* in the Classics: Limits and Opportunities for the Study of Transitions

The concept of *generation* has been used recurrently in sociology. The fundamental premise of Mannheim's approach to the generational issue is the idea that the shared experience (which goes beyond mere contemporary experience) of historical events of sufficient importance, lived collectively by a large group of individuals, inevitably produces in young people a *shift* from previous generations, which takes the form of a 'first impression' on their, as yet, unfixed and not *closed* consciousness [1] (p. 216). This initial variation can, in the long term, produce a change in the way these individuals perceive and react to the world, thus becoming transformed by this common and shared experience into a potential new generation, whose actual formation will depend on different factors. Changes in the world, to which they react, serve as the key trigger that causes the emergence of the generation.

Mannheim's work can be directly linked to Dilthey, whose work marked a watershed in the study of the generational issue. Mannheim himself acknowledges this connection in his programmatic text, when he says that Dilthey represents a paradigm shift in the reflection on the problem of generations, insofar as he abandons positivism and its linear and quantifiable conception of time and places them—from a historical-romantic perspective—in an inner time' that can only be understood as something qualitative. Dilthey therefore raised the impossibility of determining the duration of

generations a priori, a matter that has long obsessed numerous authors throughout the history of the concept (see, in this regard, the almost cabalistic exercises of Ortega [2,3] and Marías [4], for example). According to Mannheim, the temporal extension of a generation (always irregular and impossible to determine) is less important than its *spiritual* content. He highlights the irregularity and incalculability of the duration of generations, in a similar line to the position taken both by Wechssler [5–7] and Abrams [8].

In Dilthey, the idea of generation rests on the fact of contemporaneity; however, although he uses this term, he is in fact referring to coetaneity, a distinction clearly made by Marías [4] following Ortega; individuals who not only coexist at the same time, but are also the same age. Here, it is worth introducing the refinement, highlighted by Wechssler (cited in Laín [9] (p. 258)), in delimiting the reference to age, as it is not the date of birth that is important, but the moment the individuals emerge on the social scene; "Much more than a team of coetaneous individuals, a generation is a group of men born simultaneously to historical life". Similarly, it is worth introducing the distinction between 'biological age', 'emotional age' and 'social age' [10]; this last concept refers to the date an individual appears in the public sphere.

This approach presents generation, understood as a set of contemporary (coetaneous) individuals, as a community of influences, and is composed of individuals who "in their impressionable years have experienced the same guiding influences" ([11] (p. 37) Cited in Marías [4] (p. 64))[1]. A closer look at this approach, which bases the definition of generation on a *community* of experiences lived by certain individuals who share a date of birth, takes us to the works of other German authors, such as Kummer, who in 1909 defined generation as a set of individuals "comprising all men living approximately coetaneously, born in the same economic, political, and social situation, and therefore equipped with a similar worldview, education, set of morals, and artistic sensitivity" (cited in Laín [9] (p. 240)). According to Wechssler [5–7], a new generation always expresses a clash between the youthful spirit and the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the time. Each generation is thus a proposal for the renewal of that prior historical life, so the inevitable influence of the past establishes a common element for all of the members of a cohort, and enables them to become an authentic generation. On this point, according to Laín [9] (p. 257), Wechssler draws from the work of Ranke, who describes the variation in the 'human spirit' in each period as the germ of the movement, which causes the flourishing of new generations that serve as a counterpoint to the previous configurations. For Laín, this orientation was also present in the work of Petersen [12,13], where the possibility of a new generation emerging is contingent on the possible contrast between the 'spiritual disposition' of the young people and the conditions established by their education (in other words, their socialisation).

Still within this same approach, but now moving away from Germany to France, Mentré [14] (p. 304) states that generation has to do with sensitivity, an attitude to life, "a generation is therefore a *way of feeling and understanding life, which is opposed to the previous way, or at least different from it*" (Cited in Marías [4] (p. 115)). This issue, under another formulation, is also recurrent in Ortega, when he speaks of generation as the variation in the sensitivity to life (in the "radical sensation while contending with life") of men in a certain period [2,3]. Indeed, for Ortega, the temporal and spatial community (sharing space and time, period and place) are the basis of his own definition of 'generation', which places particular emphasis on the fact that the members of this generation share space and time, and period and place, but do so in conditions of proximity of birth dates, or—in the terminology of Ortega—belonging to the same "date range". They are not only contemporaneous, but above all, coetaneous, in view of the fact that at each historical moment—according to Ortega—there are always simultaneously three "todays" within each specific "now": three ages, corresponding to the classic division (youth, maturity, and old age). The ebb and flow of human history is the result of tensions and the dynamic relation between generations.

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[1]   For a slightly different Spanish translation of Dilthey's text, see Laín [9] (pp. 222–223).

For Ortega, the world of ideas in a period ("convictions are common to all men who coexist in their era: the spirit of the time" [3] (p. 43)), what is known as the 'current world', is imposed on individuals as a fundamental element of their *circumstance*. Although these pre-existing ideas may not be accepted by the individual, he or she must inevitably take them into account to be able to oppose them; they existed prior to the subject, who must react to the world of convictions that is now the social reality. The past is always there, overlapping and interweaving its constituent elements with the supposedly new elements introduced by successive generations, in their process of substituting and modifying (social change) the bases of society. This idea of the validity of elements from the past, the fundamental weight of history on the way societies function, was already present in Comte (frequently identified as the pioneer of the scientific study of generations) and in Stuart Mill (see Marías [4] (p. 34)).

This vision of *tradition* as an element that agglutinates a generation's collective consciousness, and hence, a resource that is mobilised to respond to the challenges of the current historical moment, is also found in Mannheim's thinking and, in general, in all the authors who conceptualise history as a sequence—sometimes peaceful, sometimes conflictive—of generations that produce a constant and never-ending process (or *dynamic*) of social change. This approach can be seen in both Jansen [15], and—from a recreation based on Marxist theory—in Afanasieva [16]. In what was almost his first incursion into the issue of generations, Ortega [2] (p. 10) noted that, based on the degree to which the new generations accept or reject what they have received (the 'inheritance', cited by so many authors after the unrest of 1968—see for example Mendel [17]), we see either 'cumulative periods' or 'eliminatory and polemical periods'. Thus, stasis and social change can be seen as a succession of adaptations to recurring and unavoidable problems, and this is how we can conceive the integration of young individuals into adult life, through their transitional biographic processes.

In short, accepting that it is difficult to define the concept of generation, cultural generations cannot be reduced to cohorts or age-groups in the terms of Eyerman and Turner [18]. On the contrary, it is necessary to explore the new perspectives that combine agency and the discursive character of generational practices, beyond the traditional concept of Mannheim's social generation [19]. This paper is presented as an integrative theoretical discussion of developmental and generational perspectives, which are often depicted as a dichotomy.

2. The Concept of Generation in the Current Debate on Youth Transitions

The debate on transitions and generations has taken place in parallel, as two independent threads, with no unified reflection on the significance of the new youth condition. The transition to adult life includes various steps, such as finishing education, joining the workforce, leaving the parental home, forming a couple, and having children. Our question is to what extent are transitional processes due to the effect of age, generation, or both.

Empirical evidence shows that transitions, according to the literature, have tended to become delayed, more complex, and more individualised [20–22]. Several models have set out to explain youth transitions from a range of theoretical approaches, and numerous studies from the fields of sociology, economics, and demographics have analysed the transitional processes of young people from a comparative perspective [23–25]. These comparative analyses point to individualisation, destandardisation, and the second demographic transition as suitable theoretical contexts for interpreting today's youth transitions, emphasising the existence of a common—although not convergent—pattern in the demographic and social events that define these transitions, which are typified by these researchers as complex, delayed, and prolonged over time [26–28]. In contrast, the theories that are more critical with these interpretations of youth transitions underline the importance and reproductive effects of the structural factors that conform the youth condition and identities, such as social class or gender [29,30].

Another line of research on transitions adopts the life-course theory as a context for interpreting generation and for analysing the different life courses. This theory suggests that the significance of transitions for young people differs depending on the moment at which they occur in the young

person's life (*timing*); how they occur, in terms of the intervals and durations of these transitions (*range*); and how they vary within a group or collective. The life-course theory allows us to incorporate into the debate reflections on how the generation itself can affect young people's expectations and their correlated life courses. In this interpretive context, Baltes [31] introduces a theory of life course with the premise that development is influenced by historical, evolutionary, and socio-cultural factors, which adds the dimensions of cohort-age, developmental approach, and a generational perspective.

The concept of generation is not an easy instrument to use in social research, because of its complex and multidimensional nature, as we described briefly in the previous section. However, Mannheim's minimalist concept of generation (in which, as we saw briefly in the previous section, generation is much more than an age group and represents a belonging to a *common destiny* in cultural and historical terms) allows us to explore the possible connection between the effects of individuality and structure on young people's life courses.

Thus, based on this integrated perspective, the interpretation of the socio-historical circumstances in people's lives depends on their position in social time and space, which leads to the configuration of similar expectations and motivations of socialisation. This idea connects with Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* [32,33]. In spite of Bourdieu's emphasis on the concept of generation as an explanatory factor of cultural change, this notion is relatively unexplored in his work, because of the importance of social class in his approach. According to Bourdieu, the members of a same generation not only share the same formative and life experience in their transition to adult life, which differentiates them from the older generation, but they also share the same and distinctive generational *habitus* [34]. In this interpretation, Glenn Elder's life-course theory overcomes these theoretical limitations by including the interactions and interdependencies between psychological characteristics, biological determinants, and socio-historical contexts within the life cycle, and focuses on the differentiated lifestyles of the different generations.

Generation is therefore understood as the set of people who belong to an age cohort and share a subjective narrative, and is determined by the political and socio-economic context in which their personal and social circumstances take place; this is the context that differentiates one generation from another. In the scenario of these changes, the inequalities originating in the transitional processes must be analysed and interpreted, with reference to the generation and the events that characterise this cohort. This definition is somewhat removed from the standard classifications of generations offered by the communications media and the market. A rereading of the classics, as recommended in the previous section of this article, provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for the study of generations, which contemplates the differential positions occupied by young people in these generations when undertaking their transitional processes [1,2]. Mannheim indeed reflects deeply on the concept of generation through three dimensions (position, connection, and generational unit), which he uses to explain how young people are bound together by a shared socio-historical space and time because of their being born in the same cohort. However, this does not guarantee that they will belong to the same generational context, as people belong to different social classes, cultures, and differentiated identities that depend on socio-structural determinants, such as gender adscription, which accompany us from childhood. The classifications of generations made in recent decades are therefore somewhat reductive, as they homogenise the lifestyles of all of the young people belonging to a supposed same generation. It should be noted that there are differentiated subjectivities in how the world is interpreted, depending on the actual lived experience and the impact of the interpretations of historical facts. This, in turn, depends on the social, economic, and cultural space from which they are lived, implying that we cannot speak precisely of a 'uniform generational thought' [35]. This is directly connected with the debate on meaning and change in youth transitions in different European countries. Through the generation effect, individuals interiorise a series of expectations and values that are manifested in transitional behaviours towards work, residential independence, or forming a family. In short, generations are the cultural product of characteristic historical moments in each country, which would explain the different transitional tendencies in the different national contexts.

The research on transitions to adult life in young people reveals their complexity and the difficulty of designing an interpretative framework capable of integrating the determinants underpinning the transformation and diversity of these transitions. The most recent research highlights the importance of economic context in the different transitional events, as this is the background that shapes the young people's expectations and plans in terms of independence, forming a family, and their entry in the workplace [36]. The increasing divergence of young people's transitional patterns is more evident in less favourable economic periods, suggesting that the effect of historical, cultural, and institutional events assumes greater importance in these circumstances. This finding links with theories of individualisation, which demonstrate how the uncertainty that characterises individuals' life courses in times of crisis leads to more individualised behaviours [37,38]. This interpretation also connects with the possible *generational effect*, a concept that includes both the transitional event by population cohorts (life course), and the historical and contextual dimension in which the events occur (economic situation, social policies, etc.). In summary, this underlines the importance of incorporating the concept of generation into the study, as well as an analysis of youth transitions, in order to account for the complexity and multidimensionality of the transitional process.

3. Intergenerational Relations in Transitions: The Need to Introduce Social Class

To this debate on transitions and generations must be added the question of intergenerational relations and the unequal position occupied by young people when embarking on their transitional challenges, beyond the standardised principles of the traditional definitions that tend to consider all individuals of the same age as belonging to the same generation. According to Murdoc and McCrom [39], sociological theory has paid limited attention to social class as a structuring factor of each generation. However, the emergence of youth subcultures in certain historical contexts has been associated with social class in times of institutional rupture, economic crisis, or social disorganization as a generational expression. Parsons [40] refers to the 'youth culture' as a culture of the generation that consumes without producing. In the same line of interpretation, Laufer and Bengtson [41] consider that a key aspect of generational analysis is class grouping. These researchers highlight the need to examine how class groups mediate the historic experience of age-cohort membership.

It is precisely from this critical approach that Martín Criado sustains the idea that it is not generational but class differences that really drive history ([42–45]). According to Urraco [46], who takes the same approach, it is not age or generation, but belonging to one or another social class that marks the distance between the different social positions and thus conditions the individual's possibilities of action. This calls into question the assumed *liberation* of the subjects' actions from their structural determinants, as defined by methodological individualism. According to Martín Criado [43] (p. 15), young people do not form a social group, as this label (regardless of whether this is the 'youth' or 'generation' label)[1] groups subjects and situations that only share the accidental fact of their date of birth. The key question is how to interpret the transition from an identity based on biological age to an identity based on the formation of 'opinions', 'attitudes', and 'situations', an identity of 'subjects'. This theoretical problem links to Bourdieu's analysis of how social groups, and in this case young people, respond to discursive and behavioural groupings that are differentiated by age, gender, ethnicity, social position, or 'social generation' [33] (p. 14).

Age, "the perfect variable", according to Martín Criado, as an aproblematic notion (as also emphasised by Bauman [47]), is an element that establishes a natural (inevitable) division between young and old people, quite apart from any other less *natural* underlying conflicts. Of course, the roots of this focus by the Spanish sociologist can be found in the Marxist theory of conflict, which denounced the fact that the class struggle had been supplanted by a generational struggle. Moskvichov [48] (p. 19), from the standpoint of Soviet sociology, criticised the various "bourgeois theorists" including Ortega,

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[1]   For a slightly different Spanish translation of Dilthey's text, see Laín [9] (pp. 222–223).

Dilthey, and Mannheim, who sought to demonstrate from this Marxist approach, that the history of social development is, above all, the history of the generational struggle and not the history of the class struggle.

From our own particular perspective, we believe it is necessary to reiterate the importance of the differences in the class position in the general context of differences in *generational position*, in Mannheimian terms. We recognise the validity of the generational approach, in its hypotheses of presenting a generation of young people whose characteristics are different from the preceding generation as a result of a process of adaptation to the inevitably changing conditions of the present, and we propose the need to introduce the component of social class. The empirical evidence appears to confirm that social challenges are not experienced in the same way by individuals in society, but that their *degree of exposure* to a certain experience depends on the position they occupy in the unequal social structure. This position will condition the resources, possibilities, and margin of action for responding to the various crises that trigger generational responses.

Our reflection on this point is similar to that described by Abrams [8], based on a relatively standard definition of generation (in this case influenced by Heberle [49])[1], but has affinities with Mannheim, in stating that within each society, certain groups or categories of people are more exposed to experiences that are liable to generate new 'sensitivities' and new 'identities', therefore leading to differences not only between one generation and another, but also within each generation. These discrepancies within each generation (attributed by many other theorists to the division between elites and masses—see Jansen [15], following Ortega [2]), are very sharply defined by Mannheim when he establishes the differentiation between 'generational unit' and 'generational connection', highlighting the fact that each 'spirit of the time' is based on a permanent tension between different currents. It is frequently overlooked that Mannheim sensibly counsels caution in the use of the terminology, and distinguishes between the potential (the possible, the uncertain) and the effective (the real, what is definitely put into action), by distinguishing between 'generational position', 'generational connection', and 'generational unit' [1] (p. 221 and following). Ortega was also conscious of this dialectic, and suggested that the same generation may incorporate opposing elements, which, because they share the same 'typical character', are the children of a same time. In fact, "the reactionary and the revolutionary of the 19th century are much more similar to each other that to any of us" [2] (p. 8). This interpretation recalls Mannheim's conception of a 'generational unit' [1] as a group that uses the contents of the "life span" (p. 218), of the "accumulated cultural heritage" (p. 211), the inherited tradition in a different way to *respond* unequally to the same set of historical conditions (which are what places them all at the core of a 'generational connection'). These theoretical considerations on the unequal social position of young people in the same generation may explain the different transitional trajectories followed by young people in very similar social, economic, and cultural circumstances.

4. Towards a Plural Theoretical Model That Integrates Generation in Studies on Transitions

There has been increasing interest in recent years in the study of transitions in young people and the adaptation of their normative expectations to the structural determinants of the socio-economic environment [50]. Numerous frameworks for interpretation have sought to analyse the youth condition through the lens of the concept of transition. Transitions have traditionally been defined as the stages in which young people acquire the status of adults, by living independently, entering the workplace, forming a couple, and having children [51]. Authors like Arnett [52] have applied the concept of *emerging adulthood* to refer to transitions as a process that is prolonged over time, in which the young person experiences and defines their identity based on their individuality. Other researchers describe transitions as a delayed process, in which young people must adapt to the determinants of the social structures by testing a series of reversible itineraries [53,54]. There is a very interesting debate under

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1   For a slightly different Spanish translation of Dilthey's text, see Laín [9] (pp. 222–223).

way on the pertinence of considering the transitions from the generational perspective, as a theoretical and analytical model to explain the current changes in the youth condition, and as a contextual framework to develop and apply youth policies that favour the social inclusion of young people. The position of Woodman and Wyn [55] (p. 82) is key in this recent debate, which holds that the new transition to adult life cannot be interpreted solely as the result of changing trajectories and events, but as a path marked out by a generation with its new discourses and meanings. Indeed, this approach considers that the current conceptualisations of young people in merely transitional terms, fails to offer an adequate interpretive framework to explain how young people respond to the risks generated by social processes, as the analyses of the transitions are limited to identifying successful or failed events in terms of events and trajectories [56,57]. In short, they note that the conceptual orthodoxy on youth transitions defines generational rather than as a symptom of failed transitions.

There have been criticisms of this interpretation, which holds that the transitional approach is not necessarily linear, as to analyse the youth condition, there is no need to choose between the analytical categories of generation and transition, which are presented as being mutually exclusive [58]. According to Roberts [58], researchers should continue using the transitional approach to make comparisons between generations that provide indications of the interdependencies between biogeographical and historical changes. The generational typologies developed from Mannheim's pioneering work [1] are not supported by sufficient empirical evidence on the generational changes from a subjective interpretation, due to the scarcity of sources and the very few qualitative analyses available. In view of this lack of empirical evidence, the question that arises is whether the generations are really so different in their normative expectations, with regard to basic transitional events, such as their entry in the workplace, independence, and forming a couple or a family.

Key to this debate is the theory of the *structure of opportunities* (interrelation between family capital, education received, and employment opportunities), according to which the opportunities available to young people have changed over time, as there has been greater emphasis on their ability to act based on reflection and on individualisation in defining their life paths [59]. According to this theory, employment, and educational and family transitions, both failed and successful, are not homogeneous, as the structures of opportunity and the expectations of those opportunities can be explained based on the group to which the young people belong, their social class, and the opportunities open to each group. This in turn conditions the capacity for individual and reflexive action in response to these opportunity structures that determine the possible choices and actions in young people [59]. This interpretation is associated with the theory of generations, which places young people in a specific historical and symbolic context, in which they build their choices based on the structuring opportunities available in their environment, depending on their membership of a certain group and on their social position.

In this interpretative approach, a priority area of research in recent years is the analysis of the interaction between the structural determinants and young people's individual capacity for action, in what has been called agency and biographical choices, within the framework of the *life course* theory [60,61]. This interpretative model is based on the fact that the different changes in people's life experience, such as finishing education, joining the labour market, leaving the family home, forming a couple, and having their first child, all form part of broader trajectories that determine and impart meaning to the transitional sequence at the historical time and in the specific place in which they occur [62,63]. This interpretation links with the concept of *life course* [24,54]. According to Sepúlveda [64], young people's life courses are connected to the time and place in which they live, and condition their specific experiences, and actions.

In the same line of interpretation, Longo [65] considers that the notion of life course highlights the multiplicity of factors involved in the young person's biography, and incorporates the time dimension, which is inexorably linked to the generation to which they belong, and to factors such as gender. This implies considering the geographic, socio-economic, and cultural context in which the young people live, as the subject's personal biography, is a reflection of the social determinants that transcend their

own individuality [62]. The analysis of these life experiences in terms of the moment at which they occur and the way each individual deals with them has been linked to belonging to a generation that shares a common socio-historical time and space. Here, it should be noted that the life-course perspective introduces the concept of agency through what Elder calls 'flexible coupling', according to which individuals are active subjects of their own biographies within the context of the structural conditions of their environment. This means that individuals of the same age live in very different structural contexts, and therefore do not transition in the same way in the different statuses. Significant differences can be seen in the time of transition and in the causes that drive every transitional decision, based on variables such as sex, economic situation, and nationality.

In the last decade a fruitful debate has arisen around how different generations of young people respond to the challenges of each historical moment. Numerous models have been developed to explain their consumption patterns, their political and social identity, their social participation, or their different forms of expression based on their belonging to different generations. However, very few analyses have incorporated the generational viewpoint into the transitional processes. The theoretical framework of generation not only contributes content to the structural changes that mark the transitions, but also provides models for explaining the cultural significance of transitions beyond the linear, psychologistic, economicist, and evolutionary perspective of human development, which permeates the debate on these transitional issues [66]. We start with the idea that the significance of generation goes far beyond the mere definition of a succession of birth cohorts or their conception as an evolutionary or psychological stage [58,67]. In spite of these limitations, researchers have defined different interpretative models to refer to generational types, considering generational cohort, lifestyles, socio-structural determinants, and cultural socialisation processes [68–72].

However, this generational typing does not look at transitional processes in a sufficiently differentiated way, nor does it consider how young people understand, relate to, experience, and develop these transitional processes from their personal and life determinants. Therefore, although these theoretical models serve to examine the diversity of lifestyles, expectations, and general tendencies in young people's behaviour, they tell us very little about the possible observable differences in the transitional processes of the different generations. To be able to respond adequately to this question, we need to distinguish between *transition* and *life course* [64]. Although all young people must undergo the process of transition to adult life, and this will be influenced by the generation to which they belong, not all young people in the same generation have the same transitional paths, as these depend on socio-structural factors such as gender, social position, and nationality. In other words, all young people transition through a common generational socio-historical context, but they do so with different life courses, depending on their position in the social structure and on the differential processes of socialisation in which have developed their biographies [46]. Here, it is interesting to note the proposal of Bidart et al. [73] to incorporate integrated process analysis modelling, according to which the researcher must identify the most important contextual elements that characterise the events in the process and combine them in a consistent interpretative framework with an explanatory capacity. In our case, these events are the young people's transitional milestones, defined according to their individual circumstances, linked by the historical-economic context of the generation that binds them together, relating them to each other and to the social determinants in the same time, same place, and same *period*.

5. Conclusions

This theoretical reflection has examined the emerging theoretical models according to which youth transitions can be linked to the generational effect, beyond the category of age. We have also sought to recover the role of class differences to reinforce the generational approach, in order to dispel the notion of the linearity of the transitions and the idea of a smooth succession of generations, which appears to contrast with the reality of *transitional blockage* experienced by so many young people today. The aim has therefore been to question and reflect on the concepts of transitions and generations by

taking a theoretical journey from the classics to the most recent interpretations; to take a closer look at interpretative models and categories of analysis for transitions that have yet to be explored; and to integrate the contributions of classic authors into the most recent developments on these issues. This exercise of theoretical review serves to pinpoint concepts that can provide keys to understanding transitional processes today, linked both to the 'class situation' and to the 'generational situation', both of which are elements that limit young people's possibilities of action and cause them to manifest different experiences and behaviours, despite their shared 'generational connection'. In short, the reflection we present here derives from classic interpretations of the concept of generation and takes an in-depth look at the analysis of the current youth transitions from the generational perspective, seeking to transcend the traditional view of transitional events. In conclusion, our aim has been to incorporate transitions and historical generational contexts in a single theoretical model, in order to interpret how far young people's differentiated transitional processes respond to the age effect, institutional contexts, individual determinants, or generation. Only interpretative frameworks that can accommodate a convergence of several approaches and theoretical concepts can provide an approximate response to the complex reality of the factors that explain transitions in young people today.

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Article

In Transition . . . Where to? Rethinking Life Stages and Intergenerational Relations of Italian Youth

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Abstract: This article wants to contribute to the ongoing debate within youth studies about the frameworks and concepts that inform research on the meanings of and transitions into adulthood. It aims to contribute to debates about the changing nature of life stages and the need for new conceptual categories and definitions of adulthood and of intergenerational relations. Thus, the first question that drives our reflections is: How do the radical transformations implied in the transition to adulthood pathway change the metaphors used to describe it, the ways of defining adulthood itself, and the scope for mutual recognition amongst different generations? Indeed, intergenerational relationships acquire more complexity in a framework in which a) structural factors like the precarisation of the labour market and the aging population heighten reciprocal interdependence and b) changes in the life-course patterns distance the different generations, especially in terms of biographical sense-making. These theoretical reflections arise from empirical work done in Northern Italy, with thirty-something people who are struggling with a prolonged and de-standardised transition process, negotiating "new adult roles", particularly in the field of parenthood). This complex transition is significant and widespread in Italian context that, as part of the group of Southern welfare states, has low levels of welfare provision and high reliance on the family as a form of support.

Keywords: transition to adulthood; adulthood; generations; Italy

1. Introduction

This article seeks to contribute to the ongoing debates within youth studies about the frameworks and concepts that inform research on meanings of and transitions to adulthood. It reflects on the redefinition of life stages, 'new' patterns of adulthood transitions, and the resignification of intergenerational relations.

The first part of the article is focused on the de-standardisation [1,2] of life courses (the loosening of rules codified and protected by legal mechanisms, or on the weakening of norms of normality applied to behaviours ruled by institutions) and on the consequent transformation of transitions to adulthood. Moreover, it presents the necessity of reflection about the changes on the arrival point of these transitions, namely, the adulthood itself.

The social structures and individual agency involved in the delicate period of transition to adulthood are under evident changes. The regular timing of human events due to stable social structures slowly begins to be more tenuous. Life courses become less predictable, and a growing number of autonomous biographical perspectives [3,4] appear on the public stage. Further, the relevance of the so-called "age norms" [5] in shaping biographies is loosening and modifying the sequence, as well as the cultural meanings, of the various life stages, particularly in regard to the traditional social markers of transitions to adulthood. The optimal age norms refer to the

cultural prescriptions through which the "ideal" moments for different transitions are settled in the common sense (see, for instance, the transitions towards sexuality or parenthood). Traditionally, they represented a crucial element of the discourse on life courses, also because of its strong moral component, that affect the subjective perception of the supposed adequacy of one's own biography [6,7].

Following a reflection about the cultural meanings of adulthood, the article proposes the development of the metaphor used to describe how young men and women become adults in Italy. This new metaphor also accounts for the growing inequalities related to the intergenerational relationship, which the article addresses as both a crucial element for supporting transitions and a context where the changing meanings of adulthood are negotiated.

The research has drawn on empirical work, which shares a focus on the analysis of biographical narratives of so-called "young adults" in northern Italy, namely 'thirty-something' men and women who, at the moment of the interview, were committed to managing the various aspects of their transitions. The first group of 20 biographical interviews was gathered in 2010 with (mostly) middle-class 27 to 39-year-old women and men who were dealing with different and often combined, forms of precarity (from professional to housing). Moreover, to maximise the potential reversibility of life choices, they were selected for not having children. In the analysis of these interviews, particular attention was given to the narrative strategies applied to legitimate and negotiate (both in reflexive and relational terms) the non-standard characteristics of life trajectories, which often overlapped with the struggle for a definition of "new" interpretations about the so-called "adult roles".

Complementary to this, our reflection is also informed by the second group of researchers aimed to understand the meaning that 'new parents' give to motherhood and fatherhood. This focus has been the guideline of two different research projects. The first one, based on 40 narrative interviews conducted in 2008 with fathers and mothers aged between 20 and 37 years, with at least one child under the age of three. The second one carried out between 2015 and 2018, which implied the collection of 10 focus groups with a variety of 'new parents' with identical socio-biographical characteristics, living in the same northern Italian area. All the respondents were selected to guarantee heterogeneity concerning social and economic backgrounds, differentiating mainly for educational levels and types of employment.

2. Transformation of Transition Paths to Adulthood

What is happening to the transitional pathways toward adulthood in Italy? The time span of this transition is very important and delicate, as it is the first time that young boys and girls begin to take on new roles, to move in new contexts, and in very different life domains [8]. The whole transition to adulthood implies a growing opportunity to learn the exercise of choice regarding the type of attachment one wants or manages to build within social institutions.

More than 40 years ago, the relationship between individuals and institutions in the pathway to adulthood was more linear and unambiguous. Modell and colleagues (1976) wrote a pivotal article for the study of the transition to adulthood in which they pinpoint five thresholds that a young person must go through to become an adult. The "critical life events" [9] that mark this passage imply a transition along two main axes: The first refers to the public sphere and separates the period of education from the working one. The second concerns the private sphere and separates life in the family of origin from the constitution of one's own family [10–12]. The transition from one stage to another implied a definitive abandonment of the first and complete entry into the second [13]; in fact, one came out of education to quickly enter the labour market and left the family of origin to form one's own family. The temporal scanning of these steps is suggested in every society and historical period by norms that determine the most appropriate ages to pass through these five thresholds, as well as the sequence to cross them [14,15].

Therefore, in the past, it was possible to focus on the structural factors of transitions from youth to adult life and to generalise these patterns to whole generations. Nowadays, we have to

favour the meaning that individuals attribute to their transitional paths in light of the constraints and resources they have at their disposal (as framed by the concept of institutionalised individualism by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim [16]). In fact, toward the end of the 90s, the transitions were read as "Bastelbiographie" [17], as biographical projects [18], marked by the loss of centrality of structural factors in favour of biographical factors and choices: the choice biographies as put by Manuela Du Bois Reymond [19].

More recent research speaks about the transition as an "ongoing project" [20] marked by "personal markers of adulthood that are in fact culturally patterned and dependent on social recognition for validation" [21] (p. 519). Some scholars have coined the metaphor of "yoyo transitions" to describe the growing disorder of life course paths [22]. The 'yoyo-isation' of biographies expresses the loss of linearity of the trajectory toward adulthood, also stressing the trait of increasing reversibility of the (previously more definitive) markers of adulthood. Consequently, it seems we are moving from a "transition to" in the direction of a "transition as", setting aside the focus on the "vector" from a departure to arrival to better explore the manifold meanings attached to reversible transitions.

This reconstruction of the main turning points of the debate makes clear which change direction is. We go from structured and linear transitions shaped by institutions (Modell [9]) to a variety of different combinations of structural and subjective-biographical factors. Biographies become projects, made through choices. Like "yoyos" [22], we move from one marker to another, often back and forth. We even begin to signify new episodes as turning points in our pathway. Biographies become reversible; we do not transition to a secure point (adulthood), but we stay in transition, as the attained stages in life are no longer necessarily permanent.

2.1. Transitions in Italy, between Intergenerational Distance and Dependence

Data about Italian transitions to adulthood are very clear: in 2011, 62.3% of Italians aged 18 to 34 were cohabiting with parents [23]. If compared to other EU countries, Italy scores the highest in this life domain [24]. Moreover, the inclination toward marriage is declining, and this event is postponed: in 2016, the average age at the first wedding is 35 years old among men and 32 years old among women [25]. More generally, the postponement regards all traditional "markers of adulthood", which are also more reversible than in the past. For example, to those belonging to the generations born after World War II, by one's 25th birthday, only two out of 10 young men and women had not yet entered into the labour market. However, among those born at the end of the 1980s, this same condition affects three out of 10 young people. At the end of 2018, the employment rate for under 25 people was 58.7%, and the unemployment rate rose to 10.6%, with the youth rate is still increasing, and reaching 32.5% (data available online at: https://www.istat.it/en/archivio/224523).

In 2015, the average age at the birth of the first child was 32.3 for Italian women, and childbearing postponement is significant: the proportion of births to Italian women aged 40 and over exceeded the ones of those aged under 25, namely, 9.3% versus 8.2% [25]. Birth rate decline, which began in 2010, is still underway. In 2017, the average number of children per woman fell to 1.34, compared with 1.46 in 2010. The so-called "traditional family", a formally married couple with at least one child, is no longer the prevailing model since it represents less than one-third of Italian families [26]. New familiar models are spreading, both in terms of singles and non-marital partnerships, as well as intergenerational relationships. The uninterrupted shrinking of birth rates, in addition to the extension of life expectancy (in 2016, it was 80.6 years for men and 85.1 years for women) have changed the "generational weight", with less than 25% of the Italian population under 24 years, while more than 22% is over 65 [26].

In our previous research done on the biographical trajectories of a group of young men and women in northern Italy [27,28], we have argued that today's young adults belong to the first generation in Italy who experience a "crisis of biographical meaning" [29] since their very first steps in socialization. Similar to Bauman's "wanderer" [30], and drawing on Berger and Luckmann, contemporary youth experiences a sense of estrangement resulting from widening options to construct a general meaning

for their biographies. The multiplicity of narrative choices applied to make sense of biographies finds a form of consistency among the choices made in the past and the present, as well as looking to the future, entailing "new" issues in terms of social acknowledgement. This emerges particularly when people try to connect their experiences to a wider framework of meaning through which they can recognise themselves and, above all, be recognised by others. Specimens in this sense are the narratives about the non-linear "anti-careers" of precarious workers.

People often find it difficult to reconstruct their professional trajectories by applying "traditional" criteria of coherence and continuity, such as the correspondence between their educational choices and their forms of employment. This difficulty is further enhanced by the lack of "official" mainstream narratives that would facilitate the social recognition of de-standardised educational and professional life courses. This emerged particularly when the narratives focus on their relationships with people of an older generation, as they struggle to find ways to make their biographies more understandable That is why, to stress the character of the "unspeakableness" of these topics due to the intergenerational distance in terms of cultural representation of the life course, in previous work [31] we have used as the title a catchphrase usually applied to introduce other forms of public coming-out: *How to explain it to my parents*?

Some authors [32,33] contextualise these dynamics in the crisis of the 'Grand Narratives' formerly produced by institutions. Indeed, in the past, institutions (state, family, work, educational system, religion, and so on) had a stronger "grip" on individual trajectories, which was potentially limiting in terms of individual choices, yet it provided easily accessible meanings to individual biographies. In other words, the higher institutional power in terms of structuring biographies was, at least partially, mitigated by the ability to provide mainstream narratives that were easily understood and made sense. It is precisely in the cultural vacuum created by the loss of mainstream narratives to the actual features of the individual biographies that has increased the spread of micro self-narratives– on social media and in the press, by professional CVs, as well as through less "traditional" languages, such as, for instance, tattoos. Concerning this latter point, some specific tattoos styles (e.g., the so-called "nerd tattoos") seem to respond to the cultural "push" toward self-representation through micro-narratives, for their themes and shapes are chosen for their meaning of "connotative signs of the biography, as if the tattooed skin . . . would allow to glimpse something more about the story of those bodies" [34] (p. 105) (see also [35] for a reflection about tattoos as biographical device).

This manifest production of subjective narratives seems to resonate with the individual's increased need for self-reflexivity and, at the same time, for culturally defined phrases by which to communicate their experiences. In other words, being exposed to the "crisis of meaning" prompts young men and women in transition to critically analyse the turning points in their life course to identify a general coherence which, due to the de-standardisation of biographies, is unavailable and, therefore, must be built through the deployment of individual resources. Consequently, a peculiarity shared by many young Italians seems to be the ability/necessity of defining adaptive strategies in coping with the crisis of meaning that hits the society as a whole, but primarily affecting the experiences of those who are developing their social trajectory and whose biographical narratives are still "open". Indeed, the very issue of biographical reversibility and permanent openness crosses, although with different extents, most of the narratives gathered in the research.

This study has observed a range of various biographical experiences (and related narrative "justifications"), from the chaotic coexistence of a 34-year-old woman who declared her inability/impossibility to find coherence among her past, present and future as, "*many different, incoherent little me who sometimes grow-up and sometimes die*", to the story of a 29-year-old PhD student who depicted herself as "*totally soaked in precarity*" because of the necessity to support herself by means of a variety of temporary and disconnected jobs while studying, yet finding in the completion of her PhD, a sound "meaning source" to draw on to construct a general sense of her trajectory.

Looking at Portugal as a "neighbour context" in terms of transition schemes [36], due to common structural and cultural conditions in terms of limited welfare measures, a fragmented labour market

and a "fuzzy" cultural conceptualisation of youth, we can build further insights. Ferreira finds that the current structural conditions are a generational marker that characterises young adults' life courses "so that they are experienced, viewed, and planned in structurally diverse and unequal forms of life when compared to their parents' lives" [37] (p. 137). In supporting this idea, we don't mean to underestimate the persistence of some relevant "normative clocks", which still affect the perception of being (or not) "on time" for the individual biographies. Depending on different cultural contexts and institutional constraints, expectations about the "normal" timing of life paths might be very pervasive, producing a strong pressure on individual choices. Nevertheless, in this paper we give particular attention to the individual agency in coping with the effects of de-standardisation, thus, in managing new biographical patterns, which also include the cultural work of negotiation of the forms of de-synchronisation which attempts to resist the conditioning produced by the predominant "normative clocks". In this view, the extreme labour precariousness is read as the core of a generational conscience, as the consequences of high labour flexibilisation are connected to a wider uncertainty, which connotes the Portuguese young adults' actions, visions, and timescapes.

Assuming the similar situation of concurrent cultural distance and mutual interdependence in the intergenerational dimension, it is particularly interesting to observe in the Italian context, the dynamics which stem from its frame. Specifically, the relation between the so-called 'Baby Boomer' generation and their offspring deserve further analysis, since currently, Italian young men and women in transition often still rely on familial support and, therefore, are not fully acknowledged as "proper" (namely, economically autonomous and culturally self-defining) adults, as the widespread use of the stereotyping labels, such as "bamboccioni" ("mummy's boys") clearly reveals. In 2007, the former Minister of Economy Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa coined this term, which immediately gained large success in the mainstream discourse about over 25 youths cohabiting with their parents. The reference to their strong, almost unbreakable, bond with their mothers explicitly resonates with the representation of their choosiness and laziness, which are deemed as the main reasons for their lack of autonomy.,. However, in exploring this intergenerational relationship, we should favour perspectives that allow us to better grasp its processual and relational characteristics. If not, we risk reproducing a discourse informed by "generationalism" [38], which could enhance the rhetorical emphasis on the asymmetries and power relations involved in a moral language that often tries to identify economic, social, and political injustices and inequalities within the relations between generations [37,39] (p. 142). Moreover, from an empirical standpoint, as well as the cultural representation of the changes in the transition to adulthood claim the necessity of exploring the contexts where the relationships among generations are actually constructed. Moreover, as Furlong, Woodman, and Wyn state, today's young people are equipped differently than their parent's generation, and have

> ... a growing awareness that their parents' experiences cannot be used as a road map, they renegotiate core values in ways that promote reflexive life management and the framing of life as an ongoing project largely devoid of explicit markers. [20] (p. 362)

"Traditional" ways of organising life courses, and, in particular, the transition to adulthood, while remaining predominant at a numeric level, lose ground and seem to have become obsolete and less desirable. Young people in transition and today's adults seem to be trapped between the rigidity of transitional meanings and transition rituals on one side, and the flexibility required by the present on the other, with new inequalities emerging in relation to the different resources to which individuals can apply to self-manage their biographies.

3. Meanings of Adulthood

In trying to make sense of these real "shapeshifting" transformations, social scientists have increasingly focused on the changes in meanings and in practices of "becoming adults" [40], favouring the point of view of young people in transition. Until 10 years ago, social sciences introduced some

additional steps between youth and adulthood. These new stages were the solutions that Youth Studies defined to face structural contemporary dilemmas and to avoid calling into question adulthood itself.

By the end of the 1980s, when the possibility of this new life stage started to take form, Pierpaolo Donati e Eugenia Scabini [41] declared that the term, "young adults" is an oxymoron that effectively enlightens the ambivalence of such an "intermediate" condition. A position that is socially ambiguous, oscillating between being dependence and independence, a situation that tends to be extended for a long time and that implies an extension of the condition of youth.

James Côté employs the term, "psychological adulthood", to refer to the pressure to self-establish that young individuals learn in the more and more difficult transition toward adulthood [42] (p. 29). This is a new stage of life, during which, through personal endeavours, it is possible to achieve "psychological adulthood". Jeffrey Arnett [3,43,44] speaks of "emerging adulthood", characterised by a relative degree of independence, a high level of experimentation of social roles, and by a first, yet meaningful, involvement in a sentimental relationship that implies organisational duties. In the context of emerging adulthood, young people show individualistic indications of maturity (such as, the ability to make independent decisions). All these "intermediate ages" are characterised by the predominance of individual endeavours, a high level of experimentation of the social roles, and by a first, yet meaningful, involvement in sentimental relationships.

The problem is that, in this way, adulthood has been "protected". Since the last definition of a new phase between youth and adulthood was coined, more than 10 years have elapsed. Currently, the kinds of behaviours that have pushed social sciences to invent a new life stage have been divulged and "normalised", becoming a life stage organised and extended, changing one's self-perception. According to this research, however, we should re-conceptualise adulthood completely, rather than invent another "slightly less adult" phase.

The few types of research dealing with the reconceptualisation of adulthood tell us that confronting the traditional markers of transition makes many "young people feeling in constant transition", inadequate as adults, as traditional markers seem unattainable or even undesirable to them [21] (p. 511). The traditional definitions of adulthood [45], full of demands for progress and stability, have become unsustainable, and have put young people in transition and adults themselves in a state of confusion and identity uncertainty [46]. Stability and commitment, if not adapted to the contemporary social horizon, risk becoming nostalgic, rather than realistic goals.

3.1. What Does it Mean to Be an Adult Today?

This is a question that social sciences have begun to answer. The narration of adulthood that prevails in recent research stresses the many characteristics. Derived from therapeutic culture, some authors stress the prevalence of "self-identified transitions" [21,47], which allow the reconstruction of an authentic narration of oneself starting with failures, from discontinuities of the past, such as an addiction (alcohol, drugs, gambling or pornography), depression, or an anxiety or anger crisis. Having healed from these traumas becomes a marker that defines adulthood.

Furthermore, adulthood is described as increasingly fluid: it brings with it tensions and anxieties, as well as uncertainty for the future. At the same time, fluidity is a strategy to protect oneself, a skill that allows you to "navigate at sight". Life projects are made up of micro-goals that can be attained step-by-step, since the long-term "life project" is inevitably compromised. The social acceleration and the climate of uncertainty that characterise the "second modernity" has also changed the temporal structure of identity and has influenced the processes of self-construction. In 2005, this was true for young people, as has been demonstrated by Italian research [48]. Now, it is also true for adulthood.

The clear dichotomy between youth and adulthood is more and more eroded [27,28,49]. The characteristic traits of young age become necessary strategies even in adulthood. The boundaries between the different ages of life become more porous. For example, the institution that guaranteed the possibility of autonomy and design typical of adulthood and permanent work, today is unable to provide the same stability. Adulthood becomes an "interactional milestone" [21,47], and as a

consequence, today's adults need "a witness" to validate their own adulthood, precisely because they no longer have solid markers to cling to. Measuring "progress" through the achievement of external markers is dangerous, and to measure one's movement, we need privileged trusted witnesses. Centring one's sense of self, one's adult being, on the acquisition of traditional markers would leave many young people in transition and adults in a state of "perpetual research".

From this first attempt to collect various research on adulthood, it seems that the link between institutional forces and individual results is not well highlighted, and that the role that structural forces have in creating the condition of some vulnerable young people [8] needs further investigation. In a neoliberal horizon, the individualisation of responsibility must be scrutinised, and social structure and intergenerational bonds must be made part of the picture. Indeed, comparative research on the transition pathway clearly shows how various structural conditions significantly impact how young men and women become adult [5,50]. Once again, this shows how important it is to heed social structure and inequalities. As Lee stresses,

> [W]hile individual factors play an important role in shaping the transition to adulthood, focusing on institutions can help highlight structural mechanisms that may be operating to constrain or encourage individual development during the transition period. [8] (p. 714)

4. Intergenerational Ties

Intergenerational relationships have become even more crucial than in the past, both for economic and cultural reasons. The limited economic power of younger generations, especially in Mediterranean countries, entails an increased relevance of the "hidden economy of kinship" [51] or, more generally, of intergenerational solidarity [52] as a precondition of sustainable transitions to adulthood. Concerning the latter, the intergenerational dimension is one of the main fields where the new social statuses related to adulthood are negotiated. Moreover, as Woodman suggests, "tools from the sociology of generations help attune scholars to the dynamic refiguring of key social divisions over time [. . .] through the intersection of structural change and the reworking of culture" [53] (p. 2).

Indeed, the development of new biographical patterns also entails the need for their legitimation, both in the public and private sphere, involving different generations and their different cultural understandings of adulthood in the process of change.

Evocatively, this happens during an era of a potentially increased intergenerational distance in terms of biographicity [54,55], as the "process through which individuals repeatedly shape and reshape their lives to meet their own needs and desires in response to the conditions of life in late modernity" [54] (p. 7). Specifically, we focus on the strong diversity of life transitions experienced by different generations of current Italian young men and women and their parents. Drawing on Mannheim's perspective about generations [56], diverse scholars have questioned the possibility to find "generational markers" through which to highlight the cultural distance between these generations.

First, the issue of generational order [57,58] might help. Indeed, since its introduction within the frame of childhood studies, the concept of generational order has allowed researchers to observe agency in children's behaviours, thus, overcoming the traditional reading of children as passive actors who are simply adapting to the adults' social order. Likewise, we should consider a generational order perspective in relation to other life ages, as it allows us to further stress how life ages are not "discrete-states" within linear biographical trajectories. Rather, they are culturally defined categories, also resulting from an intergenerational negotiation.

Second, as already mentioned, the mainstream narratives about intergenerational inequalities in Italian society tend to merely emphasise the leading role of the Baby Boomers to the detriment of younger generations. Certainly, the Italian Baby Boomers' generation was able to exploit the neoliberal wave and the economic boom to acquire economic, political, and cultural power, while the younger generations struggle with very limited social protection and opportunities for upward mobility. This situation finds empirical evidence at the macro level.

High youth unemployment rates and the high average age of the Italian ruling class, clearly demonstrates such an intergenerational gap. However, on the one hand, these data are more often referred to as age cohorts, rather than social generations (as defined by Mannheim [56]), and on the other, when scholars try to analyse them, they tend to blur the multidirectional and relational micro-dimension of the practices and relationships [59], which are produced within the process of generationing, namely, the result of the interaction between contextual and fixed traits (such as historical, cultural and social events and experiences) and a cultural process of identity formation developed over time (including narratives, performances and rituals) [60] (Available online: https://cyberpsychology.eu/article/view/4269/3308).

At a micro level, there have been research studies deepening the complexity of intergenerational relationships, from which we can take a cue from fostering "new" approaches to the analysis of the intergenerational issues in Italy. For example, in recent research in North American, McDaniel, et al. [59] showed how the 2008 financial market crisis has affected future representations and planning perspectives of 'late' adults. This refers to the already retired Baby Boomers, who were not directly undermined by the crisis, while they still experienced a mirrored uncertainty due to the precariousness lived by their adult sons. As a consequence, both the generations appear stuck in a condition of permanent transition, as they both feel the cultural pressure toward traditional age statuses that are no longer achievable.

Moreover, the data resulting from this research resonates with the ones described by Facchini and Rampazi [61] in their pre-crisis analysis of Italian late adults' perceptions of the future. As the authors write, the age at which those in late adulthood will have to deal with their children leaving the parental home and becoming independent of the family of origin is coming later. This makes some events that are important for the parents' personal choices unpredictable. [. . .] It is of course true that the fact of feeling they are the parents of children who are eternally 'young' contributes to delaying the moment in which individuals start to mature a sense of their own ageing. In this way, a sort of suspension comes about within the flow of time [61] (p. 357).

One may assume how this condition has become more and more serious in the past five years.

There have also been studies [62] that explain how parents apply specific discursive tactics to pretend that the permanent economic support they provide to their adult children is in fact, a random gift or a loan. This explains how an actual private welfare measure is defined by narratives, showing how the issue of dependency is hardly accepted by either parent or their adult offspring, even at a symbolical level.

Moreover, as a very relevant scope of generationing practice and intergenerational relationships, the phenomenon of the prolonged cohabitation of Italian young adults with their parents is worth analysing. Indeed, this widespread condition is constantly recalled by the mainstream representations focusing on the supposed laziness of an "unfulfilled" generation, as the definition of "choosy" shows (in 2012, the former Labour Minister, Elsa Fornero, told students "*not to be too choosy*" when looking for a job. This label completely ignores the high youth unemployment rates that characterise Italy). Aside from the fact that these representations tend not to consider the structural conditions which may force young adults to stay in their childhood bedrooms. Such readings reproduce the stereotypical view of a static duality between the never-ending adulthood of the parents and the unsolved transition of their sons/daughters. Conversely, cohabitation is a context where we can also observe the interdependence between generations and the unfolding of generationing practices or, in other words, the relational practices by which generations are done (and undone). In fact, it represents a crucial environment where both parents and sons/daughters negotiate their statuses through their daily interactions [63,64], potentially changing the generational order and, more specifically, defining new ways of being adult.

Overcoming a normative/moralistic approach to the analysis of intergenerational relationships, which, as pointed out by Barabaschi [65], has polarised the readings between the positive pole of "solidarity" and the negative effect of "conflict", we should thus, also consider the ambivalence and mutuality in the intergenerational dimension.

For example, for new parents interviewed in our research, intergenerational support is crucial and, at the same time, troublesome. They need strong intergenerational practical and economical support to deal with the leaks of the welfare state and to juggle between tight time schedules that both caring and working demand. However, at the same time, to make informed parenting choices, they need to distance themselves from the educational models of the previous generation and defend a personal autonomy that they need to negotiate new family borders. As a new father, a 35-year-old stressed that

> *Grandparents have been helpful, even if there is that inevitable risk of affectionate expansion that grandparents have. [...] You need to keep an eye on it, it's a big risk for the couple [...] more than anything else they tend to carry on their conception of child education, but really things have changed a bit.*

It is therefore important to explore the ways in which legitimation of the new life ages are negotiated among generations, otherwise, "car sharing" threatens to remain a hardly understandable practice for the parents, and a barely sustainable tactic for their adult sons. Taking into consideration these debates about transition trajectories, how would a new metaphor to describe the changes in the transition to adulthood look like?

5. Time for a New Spatial Metaphor?

Metaphors in youth sociology have been widely used and play a central role in shaping our theoretical imaginary. They are dynamic tools "which are capable of informing our knowledge of new or unfamiliar circumstances" [66] (p. 2). The two main types of metaphors concerning the transition to adulthood draw on the spatial dimension (the transitioning from one age to the other) or on the relational dimension (the belonging or not belonging).

Indeed, the most famous elaboration on the spatial metaphor (for an overview of the evolution of spatial metaphors see Furlong [66]) is the one proposed in 1997 to explain the changes that the transition pathway was undergoing [67], that is, young people use cars and not trains to move along the transitional pathway. In the past, when finishing school, young people would jump on a train, and the destination would depend on their social class, gender, and/or ethnicity. The chances to influence these paths were limited to choosing the station where to get off or to moving from second to first class. However, by the end of the 20th century, young people travelled by car, driving it personally. This meant increasing the possibility to choose one's own routes and speed, and, at the same time, increasing the risk of going in the wrong direction [67]. Young individuals were always obliged to construct their own itinerary, but the characteristics and the power of the car are now determined by structural factors.

Belonging is a relational metaphor, and has been proposed by Cuervo and Wyn in 2014 [68], and more generally has taken shape in the longitudinal studies on youth. A young men or woman can belong to three dimensions: place, people and times. The first dimension, belonging to a place, can open up the sense of rootedness, of home, of attachment, of the ongoing project that entails a sense of future and that one needs to develop in order to belong to a place [69]; the second dimension, the belonging to people that matter, gives space to the ties with family, friends, neighbours and other members of a community, enabling us to give importance to the complex inter- and infra-generational relationships; the third dimension, the belonging to a generation enables us to analyse the belonging to social, economic, political, cultural and ecological currents of a specific generation, so to include the macro level that shapes the space in which young people negotiate their lives.

This approach puts at the forefront the "understanding of the ways in which relationships with others, with institutions and with places are implicated in the processes understood as transitions" [68] (p. 906). We feel it's time to extend further the spatial metaphor, but in doing so trying also to give visibility to the relational dimension and trying a) not to leave out of the picture "the overlapping structures and sets of relationships which create meaning for young people and that play a crucial role

in their decision-making about education and work" [68] (p. 905) and family; b) to use the concept of bounded agency [70], so to put at the centre the situatedness of the subjects.

At the beginning of the 21st century, one could state that structural factors (first of all social class) do not only determine the destinations and the type of car available, but also the kind of means of transportation one could have to travel. Today, besides people who travel using their own private car, there are people who must use public transport (those who are marginalised and do not possess [class] resources to transform risks into opportunities) and others who use car sharing – an innovative minority rich in resources. Indeed, our researches show how, on the one hand, the educational inflation and the general precarisation of the labour market are increasingly shrinking the possibility to afford a private car, even among higher educated people. On the other hand, though, these latter are the ones who seem more able to find innovative coping solutions like car sharing, by drawing on their cultural and social capitals.

Car sharing is a spatial metaphor that focuses primarily on the relational dimension and that exemplifies the characteristics of the transitions to adulthood of a growing minority of young men and women, as it illustrates the innovative strategies that young people design in negotiating constraints and opportunities. The access is limited by class and place of residence, as it is available mainly in large urban centres, and only to those who have connections to access the sharing system, skills, adequate technological instruments and money to recharge the cars.

This mobility depends a great deal on other people and, at the same time, connects you to other people, so the strategic importance of relational interdependence is growing, although, from an individualistic perspective. This resonates with the concept of collaborative individualisation [71], which helps us in recognising young people's experiences, "the frequent overlap or intersection of . . . (experimental) pathways or lifestyles [. . .]" [71] (p. 140), also taking into consideration "the transience of these intersections, which may only last for as long as all parties involved benefit from the alliance". Furthermore, this concept also emphasises the necessity of commitment to innovative, sometimes unorthodox, solutions to the socio-economic crisis and its impacts, as well as trust among those producing, delivering and benefitting from those solutions [ibid em].

The skills that enable young men and women to be active in the transition path are flexibility of thought and ductility, as greater mobility is granted to those who are able to rapidly shift to a plan B in order to react to unexpected events and to those who are able to use other means of transport. The men and women we have interviewed often speak about unpredicted episodes and turning points when they needed to revise their choices and plans (in occasion, for instance, of a structural reform which changes the educational requirements for accessing specific employments, as well as in relation to the instability of the cohabitation solutions applied in order to afford a flat, but the list of unforeseen factors could be extended much further).

To react to these events and to manage reversibility entails, in most of the cases, expensive efforts in terms of applied resources, and still the personal resources were often not enough. In fact, we have found a form of substantial inequality between those who could also rely on their networks while revising their plans, and those who, on the contrary, had limited networks and thus were forced to more passively adapt to the changes, often by renouncing to something they aimed to instead of finding an alternative path to reach it.

Thus, returning to the metaphor, the possibility to use a bike, public transport, or even a privately-owned car depends on the social and economic contingencies of their present, unbounded agency. In a society where change is very quick, ductility and adaptability are skills to be developed; it is the rigidity of thought, more than the absence of means, that keeps you standing still, with no means of transportation (and thus, with no possibility to move between markers). The competences registered almost fifteen years ago in a research on young people now also defines adult agency:

the skill to accept fragmentation and the uncertainty of the environment as a non- removable datum, to be transformed into a resource thanks to a constant practice of awareness and reflexivity. [72] (p. 57)

This is a very stressful condition, as "standing still inevitably becomes a form of falling down" [73] (p. 155). Being in constant movement is stressful, and precarity is consuming and exhausting [74].

The shift from property to practices of exchange and sharing implies huge changes. Not being able to count on a permanent job meant to get used to moments of unemployment or, on the contrary, of multiple employment. So, one does not possess a means of transportation but there are many other ones available, and being on foot is therefore not surprising, being without a car has become quite normal, a condition that people try to actively dominate through the development of specific competences, through being on the net, through a new mapping of the city and through supportive inter and infra-generational relationships.

The transition is individualised and yet shared, as during trips people are faced with strangers with whom they share the travel route and destination; they share the burden and the expenses. In addition to the economic advantage, there is also an important interpersonal exchange, as people mutually witness their efforts and strategies. Sharing allows us to be in the world in a more ecological and sustainable way, and to increase support networks, even if it obliges you, at the same time, to be highly organised and never able to fully relax.

Before this, with a privately-owned car, one could choose the place and time of departure and foresee the time of arrival. One had the feeling to be able to stick to the plan of the trip, to have more control over it. Now, every setback could turn into a misadventure. Expectations have now changed, the duration and transition routes are by definition unforeseeable, impossible to be completely planned, they do not depend on one's will, but on one's skill to adapt, on one's travel mates and on the availability of the means of transportation.

For longer transitions or for emergencies, you have to know that your parents are more than happy to lend you their car. Intergenerational support becomes crucial. As already shown by previous research, having some control over time depends on the resources that one can access, and the intergenerational support is paramount for the transition toward autonomy [75]. Thus, in the context of the Italian welfare, families often work as a "parachute", which supports young people in handling their de-standardised transitions. Most of our interviewees declared to rely on different and pivotal forms of material support from their parents (specimen in this sense is the recurrent necessity to use the parents' resources as a formal guarantee in order to get a mortgage). Although the pivotal role of families as (almost) unique form of private welfare in supporting youths' transition is increasingly taken for granted, it is important to question its long-term sustainability, especially against the background of the further reduction of the social protection system faced nowadays.

Hence, the relevance of the generational interdependency and, more generally, the changes in life transitions, also increase the need for mutual understanding and recognition. Relating to this latter point, the experiences observed through our research show a constant friction between the process of legitimation of the "experimental" interpretations of adult roles, and the cultural pushes toward traditional patterns, which, at least at a cultural level, seem to affect the visions and the expectations of older generations.

6. Conclusions

We are witnessing a prolongation and a de-standardisation of the transition to adulthood, a shift toward a mosaic of reversible transitions, often characterised by the simultaneous presence of characteristic features of adulthood and youth. The transition milestones are more and more independent one from the other, while in the past they were almost synonyms (finishing school meant finding a job and marrying meant becoming parents). Today, as never before, to be in transition forces young people to develop unusual skills and at the same time offers them the possibility to reshape also the "place of arrival" (adulthood), re-defining their self-projections as adults.

This article suggests a new metaphor that may help us visualise these transformations, and urges a redefinition of the point of arrival, namely adulthood itself. This new spatial metaphor focuses on the relational dimension of social actors, and stresses how transition pathways tend to become

increasingly individualised and yet shared. Looking at practices we can find several examples of this new patterns of sharing.

For example, we can understand how co-working spaces mean more than sharing workrooms, as they become contexts where commune projects involving different expertise take shape. Another example comes from the forms of house sharing, which seems to change in a similar way, including the cohabitation of single/divorced parents and their children with friends, which changes the patterns of household intimacy construction. Going back to the central metaphor of this article, car sharing practices are often more than a mere common use of a means of transportation, but they also resonate with a shared attention for eco-sustainability and ethical consumption, being more a relevant component of particular lifestyles. Again, we find continuity with Cuzzocrea and Collins's insights about the will of youths to be "full agents" of their own destiny, while sharing their paths with "like-minded others in order to ensure support and motivation are close at hand" [71] (p. 148).

Furthermore, the article has focused on the intergenerational dimension, with particular regard to family relationship, due to their economic and cultural relevance in the Italian context. Aiming to propose a metaphor able to represent the changes in transitions and, above all, the cultural understanding of "new" adulthood, we have inevitably tackled the issue of its negotiation among different generations. In this context we have found a certain lack of literature, both at Italian and international level. Concerning this latter point, Wyn et al. have highlighted a general under-investigation of the "lived nature of relationships between young people and families" [76] (p. 4), accounting for it as a consequence of the dominance of the individualisation paradigm in youth studies, in addition to the tendency to look at the intergenerational family relationships mostly in terms of transmission of cultural capital, as in Bourdieu [77]. Instead, as the authors suggest, it is also in relation to the individualisation process that the transition to adulthood has been changing, making the individual bond with institutions such as the family more complex, extended and unpredictable.

It appears significant to look beyond the understanding of "youth-as-becoming-adult" [75] and focus on the transition toward the achievement of independence, since becoming independent is seldom a definitive condition in the contemporary socio-economical frame of the Italian society. Thus, we suggest further empirical work and reflection about the intergenerational relationships as "places where young people already enact and perform citizenship" [76] (p. 10), as "family is a critical site for both social connection and civic engagement" [ibid em]. In our view, this also requires for further analysis of the negotiation of the changed nature and representations of adulthood, as forms of framing of the "new" citizenships and as a context of potential reduction (or on the contrary reproduction) of inequalities.

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Transitions to Adulthood and Generational Change in Portugal

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Abstract: Much of the research on contemporary youth in Western societies has shown that transitions to adulthood are being postponed, protracted, and becoming more complex (i.e., less likely to follow a predictable and "orderly" sequence as in earlier generations). Extended schooling periods, changes in the labor market and challenges to obtaining autonomous housing are some of the top drivers for such change. Demographers interpret such developments as a sign of a second demographic transition, whereas sociologists stress that they are a consequence of the broader process of social individualization, by which individuals are assuming an increasingly central role in the organization of their lives. While in younger cohorts the evidence base is strong concerning transitions to adulthood, in some national contexts comparisons with the past rely on impressionistic accounts or to easily assume that some social, economic, and cultural factors were present. Drawing on data from the "Family Trajectories and Social Networks: The life course in an intergenerational perspective" research project, this paper re-examines the transitions to adulthood of three Portuguese cohorts (born in 1935–1940, 1950–1955 and 1970–1975), namely in what concerns their timing, duration, and sequence. This is achieved by looking at their life-calendars across different domains (namely family and intimate relations, school, and work). Analysis of the results allows us to discuss critically to what extent current transitions to adulthood are different and to assess cohort heterogeneity according to class and gender. Additionally, it enables us to frame discussions on generational and structural change more adequately in Portugal.

Keywords: transitions; adulthood; generations; Portugal; life course

1. Introduction

Over recent decades, the *transition to adulthood* has become a thriving area of research in sociology and other social sciences [1,2]. While its popularity in Europe is mostly related to the recent evolution and heterogeneity within this geopolitical context, American scholars have long been paying attention to factors influencing the timing and order of transitional events [3–8].

The transition to adulthood is perceived as a critical period in life. It is an eventful life stage during which many transitions occur and overlap. In an era when formal rites of passage have all but been abolished, at least from western societies, this is a rather intense period, as most individuals experience new roles and take greater responsibilities [9]. Lay assertions tell us that transitions to adulthood are being postponed and that transitional periods are being extended for younger cohorts. While this is confirmed by empirical data from demographic or cross-sectional surveys, such data is often lacking when it comes to asserting the heterogeneity within age cohorts.

In this paper, we analyze how transitions to adulthood have evolved in Portugal over the last decades. Our key research questions are: what are the main differences, in terms of class and gender, in the timing, calendar, sequence and duration of transitions? Have these differences increased or decreased in recent cohorts? To answer these questions, we establish a comparison between cohorts,

aiming to find (dis) similarities and tendencies, which we relate to generational constraints and opportunity structures. Additionally, we discuss how gender and class frame different transitional models within each cohort. Our discussion is embedded in theoretical debates about whether (and to what extent) transitions are being postponed, protracted and becoming less predictable.

1.1. Towards a Critique Reading of Calendars, Norms and Social Roles

The timing and order of events in the transition to adulthood are key research issues for life course sociologists and other researchers [10,11]. For some time, the literature mostly addressed the occurrence of events and aimed to identify typical calendars. Later, more attention was geared to the order of events [3,6,12]. Some researchers assumed that transitions typically follow a specific sequence (namely: school-work-marriage) and discussed their findings classifying them as normative vs. non-normative [3] or consistent vs. inconsistent [6]. From this point of view, the transition to adulthood is a process that is over when individuals have completed a given number of events, with the transition to parenthood being the conclusive event [2]. A major limitation of this approach is that it takes a schematic look at the transition to adulthood, often reducing it to a checklist. Critics have rightfully pointed out that such approaches reverberate with media and academic discourses that have been bullying a new generation of youths who have not completed the checklist, tagging them with derogatory monikers [13].

Furthermore, approaches relying on the analysis of chronologies are often lacking in what concerns how "norms" are constructed, apprehended, and maintained, and how they vary according to class, gender, or ethnicity [7,14]. In fact, on the theoretical level, the linkage between norms and social regularities remains controversial. American researchers commonly stress the significance of informal age norms, while European researchers tend to emphasize institutional (and State) regulation over age norms [15,16]. Consequently, authors coming from the American tradition are usually more attentive to norm disruption, either in the sequence or in the timing of transitions, because they assume it can lead to negative consequences later in life [3,17], which entails a strict reading of the principle of lifelong development within life course sociology. Some even argue that "successful" transitions depend from adhering to the socially and institutionally imposed calendar because the very structure of institutions is designed according to these standards, thus rewarding normative compliance while penalizing deviation [18]. These claims have been criticized on theoretical and methodological grounds. Often, what is credited to social norms is, to a large extent, an outcome of structural and institutional processes that lead to a high degree of population homogeneity [16,19]. Other authors criticize the claim that normative linearity relates with positive outcomes, while others question the assertion that disorder in the transition to adulthood is something new [6,13,20,21].

By adopting a life course perspective, we need to consider that the linkage between age and social roles is a socially and culturally regulated process, which is historically contingent. The transition to adulthood is regulated by several institutions (school, the labor market, family, etc.) and by sociocultural expectations concerning the roles individuals should adopt. These expectations are even made clear by the list of transitions (and their very order) that researchers usually account for: leaving school; start of working life; residential autonomy; family formation; parenthood [2]. This is because, in western societies, adulthood has been synonymous with economic independence and the ability to set up a procreative nuclear family. Therefore, this choice of events conveys a deep symbolic interweaving between expectations of family (biological, generational) reproduction and social reproduction (institutional, economic, and cultural).

The organization of transitions to adult life according to a school-work-family model, as observed in western countries during the third quarter of the twentieth century, resulted from several processes unleashed in the first modernity. As economic rationality expanded to the way human lives are organized, they became more predictable and secure [22]. In fact, age stratification systems, such as those imposing a minimum legal age to marry, to enter and leave school, to perform military duty, or to start working, made transitions to adulthood more predictable, orderly, and linear. In fact, comparisons

between different periods and geographical contexts have shown that the school-work-family model is historically and culturally variable. Still, some authors have stressed the need to investigate the coexistence of different models within a society or generation [23]. Such is necessary to develop a more nuanced view on social generations, which is not pinned on a specific model of biographical trajectory or pattern of transition to adulthood.

1.2. Recent Trends and the Portuguese Case

To frame the Portuguese case, we now take stock of recent research on the transition to adulthood in Europe. At the height of organized modernity (roughly defined as the period between 1950 and 1970), demographic transitions were early, contracted, and simple [1]. Family transitions (residential autonomy, conjugality, and parenthood) were strongly associated with specific ages and occurred sequentially [24]. Since the mid-1970s a new pattern of late, protracted, and complex transitions to adulthood emerged, under the combined effect of transformations in the labor market, longer schooling periods and significant cultural change [1].

Transitions are also becoming increasingly reversible [25], namely because the labor market is more unstable with the proliferation of flexible employment modalities, underemployment and unemployment, circumstances that pave the way for the so-called "yo-yo" trajectories [9]. In any case, a detailed look at transitions to adulthood that took place during the 1960s, using some of the theoretical-methodological devices of contemporary sociology, showed that they were not as straightforward as anticipated; in fact, complexity existed in similar doses to those found for contemporary generations of youths [20,21].

Research on transitions to adulthood in contemporary Europe has found consistent trends, namely a general postponement of events that suggests that the transitional period between adolescence and adulthood are being extended [26,27]. However, despite this convergent trend, substantial heterogeneity persists [1,28], especially between the ages of 20 and 35 years old [2]. Moreover, even though postponement occurs both among men and women, a strong gender bias continues, with women generally completing most transitions earlier than men [2,28]. Postponement of transitions is generally credited to the extension of education [2], while heterogeneity within Europe is usually related to cultural, institutional, and economic differences.

Culturalist explanations pin differences within Europe on contrasting values on individual autonomy, conjugality, and parenting [29,30]. Others stress the role of institutional designs and specifically welfare state typologies [31]. Furthermore, other authors point out that social inequalities are also a shaping factor, namely asymmetries in access to the labor market [30,32]. To be sure, the link between school and labor market receives a sizeable share of the literature focusing transitions to adulthood [32–35]. On top of being a highly regulated transition (e.g., formal norms concerning compulsory education, legal working age, etc.), young adults' financial independence and residential autonomation depends on achieving on it to a large extent [36]. Entering the labor market is defined as a fundamental step for all the transformations involved in the transition to adult life [37]. Recent research shows that this transition has long-lasting effects on the life course, also emphasized that vocational systems facilitate labor market integration and that action welfare states can attenuate or exacerbate generational differences [33].

In international comparisons, Portugal is usually framed within the cluster of Southern European countries. These societies are describes as having: high levels of social inequality; frail and underdeveloped welfare states; and strong familial values rooted in their Catholic or orthodox heritage [38]. In this context, transitions to adulthood are especially unstable in the school-to-work node, as youths experience long periods of inactivity, unemployment, and job precariousness [32,34]. Since welfare state policies for housing are fragile or even absent, residential autonomy is highly reliant on employment status and income level [13,39]. Later residential autonomy results in later family formation patterns [40]. Despite being described as a novelty, such patterns resonate with strategies

observed in peasant societies for coping with resource shortage or inheritance, through celibacy or multifamily co-residence [41].

Regardless, research also shows that changes to the transitions to adulthood "do not entail (. . .) a change in the chronology of (. . .) the main thresholds: (. . .) actually, the same sequence still prevails in Europe [1]" [36]. A peculiar feature of transitions in Portugal is the linear sequence between residential autonomy from parental home, the start of a conjugal relationship and having a child; in other words, the time to "experiment" after leaving the parental home is for most a short period [36]. Other researchers point out that a highly standardized life cycle, close to an archetypal view of a linear and predictable life course, is still idealized both in the Portuguese and European contexts [36,42,43].

Qualitative accounts have stressed the plurality of transitional patterns in contemporary Portugal [37]. *Precarious transitions* are prominent among disadvantaged social groups where unstable links with the labor market prevail, a situation worsened under the conditions of post-Fordist capitalism. In other cases, a combination of lower expectations concerning education, early entrances in the labor market, and a high level of social and familial control, compel young people to *early transitions* [44]. For highly qualified youths, delayed or double-phased transitions (work first, family later) are a common outcome of the combination of safer labor market integration and high levels of career investment. *Gradual transitions* are typical of individuals that constantly adapt their personal projects, striking some type of balance between family and work. Although they follow the same linear sequence, transitions are longer, because of labor market precariousness. *Experimental* or *ludic* transitions are experience by a few more leisure-oriented and hedonistic individuals.

Economic cycles and unique historical events also interfere with life calendars, shape individuals' perspectives on the life course and frame social representations [7,17]. In Portugal, the Revolution of 25 April 1974 and the social transformations that followed significantly impacted transitions to adulthood. Likewise, the authoritarian *Estado Novo regime* and its brand of conservatism, which held power for half a century, created an enduring effect. However, the effects of major social events are not equally felt by all members of a given society; they depend on age, as well as on personal, social, and familial circumstances at the time. If we hastily link age cohorts to specific patterns of transition to adulthood, we inadvertently conceal their heterogeneity, which makes it difficult to understand the relationship between social inequality and historical time. Studying the variability of transitions to adulthood within cohorts enables us to simultaneousness consider the interplay between social stratification, social structure, and demography [7]. However, the interrelatedness between changes to the structure of the life course and social inequalities has of yet not been subjected to detailed empirical analysis, rendering the issue ripe for further enquiry [18].

Over the last four decades, Portugal went through an intense process of social, political, and institutional change that unquestionably transformed transitions to adulthood; that is easily attested just by checking data on university enrolment, average age at marriage or first child [45]. Our main hypothesis points to a general postponement of transitions stemming from our theoretical framework and from the available empirical data. Another hypothesis is of a (moderate) extension of the transitional period among younger cohorts, in comparison with cohorts that faced limited to schooling and that were brought up in a context that consented child labor. More broadly, we hypothesize that social inequalities, namely those relating to gender and class, are on full display during the transition to adulthood.

While conveying a strong message to both lay assertions and sociological accounts, demographic or cross-sectional survey data do not properly account for the heterogeneity within a given age group. During adolescence and young adulthood, individuals negotiate their way through school and the labor market, institutions themselves pervaded by social inequality. Therefore, we are likely to find differences in the timing, calendar, and sequence of transitions according to class and gender [1,13,46].

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[1] Translated from Portuguese by the author.

Nonetheless, since women have a high level of participation in the labor market and equal or surpass men in academic achievement, we anticipate an attenuation of gender differences on the timing of school to work transitions.

2. Materials and Methods

Data

Our analysis relies on data collected during 2010 for the Portuguese "Family Trajectories and Social Networks: The life course from an intergenerational perspective". This research project included a survey to a representative sample of 1500 male and female individuals belonging to three different cohorts (born between 1935–1940, 1950–1955 and 1970–1975)[2]. The research project aimed to relate biographical time with historical and social time, by comparing the life trajectories of men and women born in three age cohorts. An additional aim was to test the hypotheses of pluralization and de-standardization of the life course. Therefore, cohorts were selected by their specific social, historical, and institutional frameworks. The cohort of those born between 1935 and 1940 had their formative experiences in the dictatorial, politically repressive, and socially conservative context of the Estado Novo. The cohort of those born between 1950 and 1955 was still brought up during the Estado Novo experienced the enormous social and political transformations that followed the Revolution of April of 1974 in their early adulthood. The cohort of 1970–1975 incorporates individuals who already were brought up under democracy and that entered adulthood around the time Portugal's joined the EEC/EU.

Key Dimensions and Concepts

Since the mid-1970s, quantitative research on the transition to adulthood has relied on a given number of age markers, such as leaving school, starting work, achieving residential autonomy, starting a cohabiting relationship, and becoming a parent [2,7,24,47]. Their timing, prevalence, and sequence are some of the indicators most often used in research on transitions. While the timing of each transition allows us to create an approximation to the chronology of events, its prevalence is important to determine how often a transition occurs in a given population. Sequences are important because they allow us to infer on the normative order of events and its changing face [2].

Even though most analyses of the timing of events depend on measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode), relying exclusively on them is theoretically insufficient, as they dilute the diversity within a group and do not consider non-events [13]. In fact, non-occurrences are a common problem that skews down data and equalizes individuals. As an alternative, some researchers propose looking at dispersion statistics (standard deviation and interquartile range) to overcome this issue [48].

As intra-cohort diversity relates to processes of accumulation of advantages/disadvantages, life course analysis benefits from going beyond central tendency measures. Additionally, the prevalence of events is best understood if measured at different stages (25, 30 and 35 years of age), a strategy that enables us to identify changes to the cadence of transitions.

Concerning the order of events (and non-events), the number of possible permutations is massive[3]. A holistic approach would entail resorting to *Sequence Analysis* [49,50]. However, since the main objective of this paper is to address cohort (dis)similarities in what concerns the timing and transitional order of events, we opted for a parsimonious and tested approach that resorts to a set of pertinent indexes (Table 1) [51].

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[2] Fieldwork was completed by a subcontracted field agency (GFK/Metris).
[3] Since each of five events may or may not have occurred, the number of potential combinations is $((5*2)!/((5*2 - 5)!*5) = 252$.

Table 1. Indexes of change to normative transitional order *.

Index	Meaning
Left parental home before starting work	Residential autonomy without financial autonomy
Became a parent before starting work	Financial dependency from parent(s)/partner(s) with a child
Left parental home before starting a cohabiting relationship	Residential autonomy without cohabitation
Started a cohabiting relationship before starting work	Financial dependency from partner
Became a parent before starting a cohabiting relationship	Dissociation of conjugality and parenthood

* Calculated for individuals who experienced both events.

3. Results

3.1. Transition Calendars: Converging and Diverging Trends

The mean age at the five transitional markers suggests that a sequential model persists (Table 2). When comparing cohorts, results show that data public transitions (leaving school and starting work) occur later in recent cohorts, while private transitions (entering a cohabiting relationship and becoming a parental) have a V-shaped evolution (contracting from first to the second cohort, increasing from the second to the third cohort). The mean age at leaving the parental home occurs at roughly the same age, regardless of the cohort. However, if we consider dispersion measures, a more nuanced picture emerges. Additionally, that also enables us to clearly show how institutional regulation, on the long run, shapes the timing of transitions. A clear example concerns the extension of mandatory schooling, which drives up the mean age when leaving school. Furthermore, the widening interquartile range for those born in the early 1970s clearly highlights a pluralization of school trajectories. Also, the evolution of the when individuals started working is exemplary of institutional change, namely regulation of the minimum age to work[4].

Table 2. Mean age at transitions and dispersion measures per cohort.

Markers	Cohort	25%	Median	75%	Mean	Standard Deviation	Inter Quartile Range	Mean S.E.
Finished/ left school	1935–1940	11.0	11.0	13.0	13.2	5.4	2.0	0.28
	1950–1955	11.0	12.0	16.0	14.1	4.9	5.0	0.22
	1970–1975	14.0	18.0	24.0	19.8	7.5	10.0	0.33
Started working *	1935–1940	8.0	12.0	14.0	12.5	5.6	6.0	0.27
	1950–1955	11.0	13.0	17.0	14.7	5.6	6.0	0.25
	1970–1975	14.0	18.0	21.0	17.7	4.6	7.0	0.20
Left parental home	1935–1940	18.0	22.0	25.0	22.2	9.5	7.0	0.45
	1950–1955	18.0	21.0	24.0	21.8	7.8	6.0	0.35
	1970–1975	19.0	22.0	26.0	21.8	6.2	7.0	0.28
Started cohabitation	1935–1940	21.0	23.0	26.0	23.6	4.4	5.0	0.21
	1950–1955	20.0	22.0	25.0	22.7	4.1	5.0	0.18
	1970–1975	21.0	24.0	27.0	24.0	4.2	6.0	0.20
Became a parent	1935–1940	22.0	25.0	28.0	25.5	4.7	6.0	0.23
	1950–1955	22.0	24.0	27.0	24.7	4.5	5.0	0.21
	1970–1975	23.0	26.0	29.0	26.2	4.5	6.0	0.22

* Includes studying and working simultaneously.

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[4]   Only in 1971 work for those under 14 years was outlawed [52]. In 1991, in the face of a worrying persistence of child labor, the minimum age to work was raised to 15 years of age and further extended to 16 in 1997 (Diário da República, I Série-A, n.° 238/91, Decreto-Lei n.° 396/91). Only in 1998, Portugal adhered to the ILO Convention (138), which establishes the minimum age for admission to general employment at 16 years of age, and 18 years for those in public functions (Diário da República, I Série-A, n.° 66/98).

Concerning the age when individuals left their parental home, dispersion measures show a high level of heterogeneity in all cohorts. In the 1950–1955 cohort ages at first cohabitation and at first child are closer to the mean, which supports the hypothesis that these individuals experienced a stronger normative institutional setting. This is true both for both genders. In addition, in fact, there are relevant developments between cohorts relating to gender (Table 3). From cohort to cohort, the age when individuals left school and started to work increase regardless of gender and the gap between men and women is tapered. On the other hand, the difference between men and women in the age at leaving parental home remains stable (roughly 1.5 years earlier for men).

Table 3. Mean age at transitions per gender *.

	Cohort 1935–1940			**Cohort 1950–1955**			**Cohort 1970–1975**		
	Total	**M**	**F**	**Total**	**M**	**F**	**Total**	**M**	**F**
Finished/left school	13.2	14.3	12.4	14.1	14.8	13.6	19.8	20.1	19.6
Started working **	12.5	12.3	12.5	14.7	14.3	15.1	17.7	17.3	18.0
Left parental home	22.2	23.0	21.6	21.8	22.7	21.2	21.8	22.8	21.1
Started cohabitation	23.6	25.2	22.5	22.7	24.4	21.5	24.0	25.5	23.0
Became a parent	25.5	26.9	24.5	24.7	26.6	23.4	26.2	27.7	25.3

* Excluding those who didn't experience these transitions; ** Includes studying and working simultaneously.

The interval between the age when individuals started to work and left their parental home contracted between these cohorts, which enables us to dispute the much-heralded notion that, in the past, achieving residential autonomy soon followed starting to work [36]. Data shows that these events were, for the most part, unlikely to be synchronized. Such a model is more likely to have existed in central/northern European societies that had robust educational systems, which worked in coordination with regulated labor markets. Nevertheless, such assertions have also been disputed in those contexts, as recent readings of data from the 1960s show a high level of complexity and uncertainty in transitions to the labor market [21].

Due to the acute lack of resources, infrastructures, and institutional incentives to go beyond basic education, most individuals born in the late 1930s and early 1950s started working at a very young age and only left their parental home much later. Only for those who were born during the early 1970s did the gap between work and residential autonomy narrowed. For those born in the early 1950s, the mean age at leaving their parental home and at the start of the first cohabitation are close, suggesting that, for many, these transitions occurred in quick succession. In the older cohort, the interval between these two events was larger, especially for men, while in younger cohort the gap widens for both genders, which suggest a higher desynchronization between leaving parental home and starting cohabitation. According to Nico (2011), in younger Portuguese cohorts, individuals that leave their parental home at a later age are precisely those who do not do it to start cohabiting. It is worth mentioning that the interval between the age at the start of the first cohabitation and the age when individuals became parents widens. While among men, this gap increased from cohort to cohort, for women it diminished for those born in the second cohort and increased for those born in the third cohort.

Class origins have a structuring effect over transitional calendars (social classes were operationalized according to the ACM class typology [53,54]) For example, among those born during the late 1930s, class differences were very sharp concerning the age when they left school and the age when they started working. Although school careers were, as a rule, short and work started at a rather young age, there was a sharp contrast between individuals whose parents were Professionals and Managers and those from a working-class background (Industrial Workers or Routine Employees). That was still the case for those born in the early 1950s. Only among those that entered school after the 1974 Revolution can we say that class differences are somewhat attenuated, which is an effect of the democratization. Still, class origin differentials remained substantial.

Overall, the combined evolution of events shows a convergent trend from the first to the second cohort and a divergent trend from the second to the third cohort (Table 4). For example, there is a

high level of normative uniformity regardless of class origins among those born in the early 1950s, especially in what concerns "private/familial transitions" (starting cohabitation and becoming a parent). Conversely, the trend is reversed for those born in the early 1970s, namely as familial transitions occur at increasingly different ages for those whose class origins are among Professionals and Managers and Industrial Workers (a gap of roughly 3 years).

Table 4. Transitions—means per class origin *.

Markers	Cohort	Total	Class Origin (Household)					Mean Diff. **
			EE	PM	SE	RE	IW	
Finished/left school	1935–1940	**13.2**	18.3	18.1	12.8	13.4	13.7	2.5
	1950–1955	**14.1**	18.0	19.2	14.3	14.9	13.8	2.5
	1970–1975	**19.8**	21.8	24.3	19.3	20.0	17.7	1.9
Started working *	1935–1940	**12.5**	18.1	17.9	12.1	12.7	11.9	2.4
	1950–1955	**14.7**	18.3	19.9	14.7	15.1	13.5	2.1
	1970–1975	**17.8**	19.2	20.6	17.9	17.7	16.3	1.2
Left parental home	1935–1940	**22.2**	23.5	23.7	22.9	20.5	21.9	1.1
	1950–1955	**22.0**	23.1	20.8	21.7	22.4	22.0	0.6
	1970–1975	**21.8**	22.8	23.5	20.4	21.7	21.9	0.9
Started cohabitation	1935–1940	**23.6**	26.5	24.8	23.6	23.9	23.2	1.0
	1950–1955	**22.8**	23.6	23.2	22.5	22.4	23.0	0.4
	1970–1975	**24.0**	25.2	26.1	23.6	23.8	23.3	0.9
Became a parent	1935–1940	**25.5**	27.3	27.0	25.5	25.3	25.3	0.7
	1950–1955	**24.7**	25.1	26.7	24.4	24.4	24.8	0.6
	1970–1975	**26.2**	27.2	28.8	26.2	25.7	25.6	0.9

* Includes studying and working simultaneously; ** Mean difference in relation to overall mean.

3.2. The Duration of Transitional Calendars

If we look at the range between the mean age at the first and at the last of the aforementioned five transitional events, data suggests a shorter transition calendar among younger cohorts. However, while tempting, considering the duration of transitional calendars as merely the range between mean ages at the first and last transition incurs in a "sequencing fallacy" [55]. In fact, such an approach compares different subsets of individuals who have gone through an uneven number of transitions. As shown in the following subsection, in all cohorts a proportion of individuals did not experience one or more transitions. Therefore, an effective measurement of the duration of transitional calendars entails comparing the aggregated individual duration of transitional periods among those who experienced most transitions (we consider the duration of those we completed 4 or 5 out of 5). Only by doing so can we test if the assertion that the transitional period is being protracted holds.

There are noticeable differences in the duration of transitional periods according to cohort, gender, and class origin (Figures 1 and 2). On the other hand, in more recent cohorts, transitional periods are in fact shorter, something that clearly contradicts some commonly held views on contemporary life courses. The duration of transitional periods remains gendered, with women experiencing transitional events at a faster pace than men.
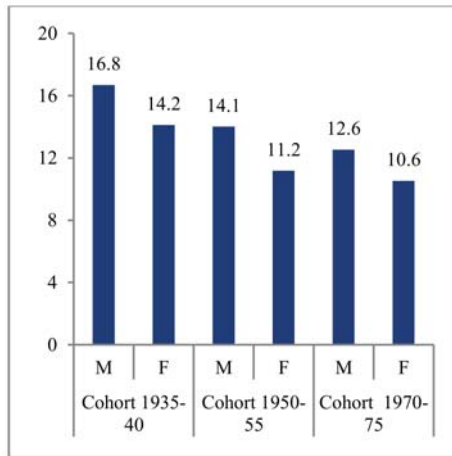
Figure 1. Range between first and last transition for those who experienced at least 4 transitions up to 35 years of age, by cohort and gender.
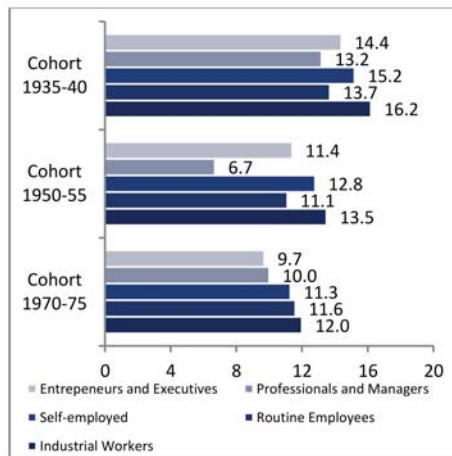
Figure 2. Range between first and last transition for those who experienced at least 4 transitions up to 35 years of age, by cohort and class origin.

Concerning social class origins, for those born during the late 1930s, the duration of transitional periods was longer for those whose parents were Industrial Workers, Independent Workers and Entrepreneurs and Executives. In the second cohort, the ranges between the first and last transition are overall significantly shorter, especially for those from Professional and Managerial origins. Among those born during the early 1970s, durations are lengthier, especially for individuals from a working-class background (Industrial Workers and Routine Employees).

3.3. Prevalence of Transitions: from Anticipation to Postponement

In this section, we look at the proportion of individuals that completed each transition at three age thresholds (25, 30 and 35 years of age) (Table 5)[5]. As expected, we find greater variability according to gender and cohort concerning the proportion of individuals who completed secondary education. Against the backdrop of the *Estado Novo regime* and its distrustful and elitist outlook on education [56,57], it is hardly surprising to find such a low proportion of men and women who completed secondary education in both the 1935–1940 cohort (8.5% and 4.6%) and the 1950–1955 cohort (22.1% and 17.2%). Among those born in the early 1970s there is a remarkable increase and the gender imbalance is reversed.

Table 5. Percentage of individuals that completed a transition at three age thresholds.

		Cohort 1935–1940			Cohort 1950–1955			Cohort 1970–1975		
		25 Years	30 Years	35 Years	25 Years	30 Years	35 Years	25 Years	30 Years	35 Years
Total	Finished/left school	-	-	6.4	-	-	19.1	-	-	48.1
	Started working **	93.9	94.6	95.5	94.6	96.9	97.1	94.2	99.1	99.3
	Left parental home	76.9	91.7	93.7	78.4	90.5	92.5	68.8	88.2	94.2
	Started cohabitation	71.3	92.4	94.8	78.6	93.4	95.0	55.2	79.3	89.6
	Became a parent	50.4	79.8	88.6	59.7	83.2	89.4	33.8	62.3	82.8
M	Finished/left school	-	-	8.7	-	-	22.2	-	-	46.1
	Started working **	97.9	98.9	99.5	96.2	98.6	98.6	94.2	99.5	99.5
	Left parental home	69.9	92.3	94.5	75.5	92.9	94.8	60.7	85.4	93.2
	Started cohabitation	59.0	91.3	95.1	64.9	93.9	95.8	42.2	74.8	88.8
	Became a parent	37.2	79.7	90.7	41.5	76.4	87.7	18.4	53.9	78.6
F	Finished/left school	-	-	4.6	17.0	-	17.0	-	-	49.4
	Started working **	91.3	91.6	92.8	93.5	95.8	96.1	94.2	98.8	99.1
	Left parental home	81.7	91.3	93.2	80.4	88.9	90.8	73.9	90.0	94.8
	Started cohabitation	79.8	93.2	94.7	85.9	93.1	94.4	63.3	82.1	90.0
	Became a parent	59.7	80.6	87.1	72.2	87.9	90.5	43.3	67.6	85.5

** Includes studying and working simultaneously.

In Portugal, the formal labor market has been highly feminized since the 1960s [58]. That distinctive feature within Europe is clearly shown in our data. In all cohorts, a high proportion of women had already engaged in work at 25 years of age. Nevertheless, for women born during the late 1930s and early 1950s, a number of issues, namely employment precariousness, unemployment, staring a conjugal relationship or becoming a parent, would lead to employment trajectories often very different from men [59].

If we consider the 25-year threshold, achieving residential autonomy was a highly gendered endeavor, especially for the first and third cohort. Although differences are narrower for those born in early 1950, overall men tended to leave their parental homes later and at a slower pace than women. Among those born in the early 1970s, the gender gap widens with women more likely to be autonomous alt the 30 and 35-year thresholds.

Data on the age of first of cohabitation is somewhat similar, as we also found a higher proportion of individuals with residential autonomy when they were 25 years old. However, there is a significant decrease in the proportion of individuals, namely men, who started cohabitating by their thirtieth or their thirty-fifth year. This should, however, not be merely regarded as a postponement of statutory transitions; it is also a clear indicator that contemporary models of solo living during early adulthood are increasingly common in Portugal [60,61].

While most individuals born in the late 1930s entered parenthood during their life course, becoming a parent before 25 years of age was more common for women than for men (59.7% vs. 37.2%). Both trends intensified for those born in the early 1950s (gender imbalance and becoming a parent before their 25th birthday). Conversely, both trends are reversed among those born in the younger cohort; becoming a parent before 25 years of age was rare for men (18.4% vs. 43.3%). At 30 years of

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5   As a marker for leaving school, we considered the proportion of individuals that completed secondary education.

age, this transition was completed by nearly half of the men and two-thirds of women. More than one-fifth of men born in the early 1970s were childless at the 35-year threshold, a substantially higher proportion than in the other two cohorts.

The prevalence of transitions according to social class origins provides important elements to understand how transitions to adulthood have evolved in Portugal (Table 6)[6]. While overall very low, the proportions of completion of secondary education in the first and second cohorts reflect almost exclusively the logic of social class reproduction, among the more qualified strata of the population. Conversely, among those born the early 1970s, there is a degree of educational mobility for those from subaltern positions in the class structure.

Table 6. Percentage of individuals that completed a transition at 30 years of age by social class origin.

Markers	Cohort	Total	Class Origin (Household)					Standard Deviation **
			EE	PM	SE	RE	IW	
Finished/left school	1935–1940	**6.2**	25.0	42.9	5,4	8.3	2.1	15.3
	1950–1955	**18.4**	51.6	78.9	16.0	24.0	8.0	24.5
	1970–1975	**44.4**	69.8	66.1	44.7	39.0	31.4	10.6
Started working *	1935–1940	**95.0**	100	85.7	93.4	100	95.3	3.5
	1950–1955	**97.0**	93.5	100	96.3	98.7	97.2	1.4
	1970–1975	**99.0**	98.4	100	100	98.4	98.9	0.4
Left parental home	1935–1940	**92.0**	87.5	85.7	91.6	95.8	92.1	2.7
	1950–1955	**90.4**	87.1	89.5	94.5	89.3	88.2	1.4
	1970–1975	**88.9**	81.0	89.8	92.2	88.6	89.7	3.2
Started cohabitation	1935–1940	**92.4**	81.2	85.7	93.4	89.6	93.7	4.3
	1950–1955	**93.2**	93.5	100	96.3	93.3	90.1	2.7
	1970–1975	**79.3**	69.8	67.8	75.7	82.9	86.3	3.5
Became a parent	1935–1940	**80.0**	75.0	64.3	80.2	75.0	82.7	5.9
	1950–1955	**83.2**	80.6	73.7	88.3	84.0	80.2	3.3
	1970–1975	**62.3**	49.2	39.0	57.3	66.7	74.9	7.7

* Includes studying and working simultaneously; ** Standard deviation (overall mean).

Data on residential autonomy is very homogenous for the first and second cohorts and less so for the third cohort, with offspring of Entrepreneurs and Executives tending to stay longer in their parental home. Data show that while there is a general decrease in proportion of those who on start a cohabitation and becoming a parent before 30 years of age, the trend is much stronger among those from Entrepreneurial and Professional social class backgrounds.

3.4. Changes to the "Normative" Transitional Order

In order to find changes to the "expected" (or normative) order of events, we look at four indices (Figure 3). When comparing cohorts, leaving the parental home without entering the labor market is the change that most significantly increased (12.6%, 14.9% and 19.2%). This is always more common among women than men, but the proportion of men increased in more recent cohorts. As for residential autonomy before conjugality, data show similar values for the first two cohorts (around 30%), with a slight increase in the younger cohort (34.1%). Leaving parents' home before starting cohabiting is more common for men than women, although differences subsided for those born in the early 1970s.

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6 For the sake of parsimony, we only consider the 30-year-old threshold, which is the most commonly used in research on transitions to adulthood.
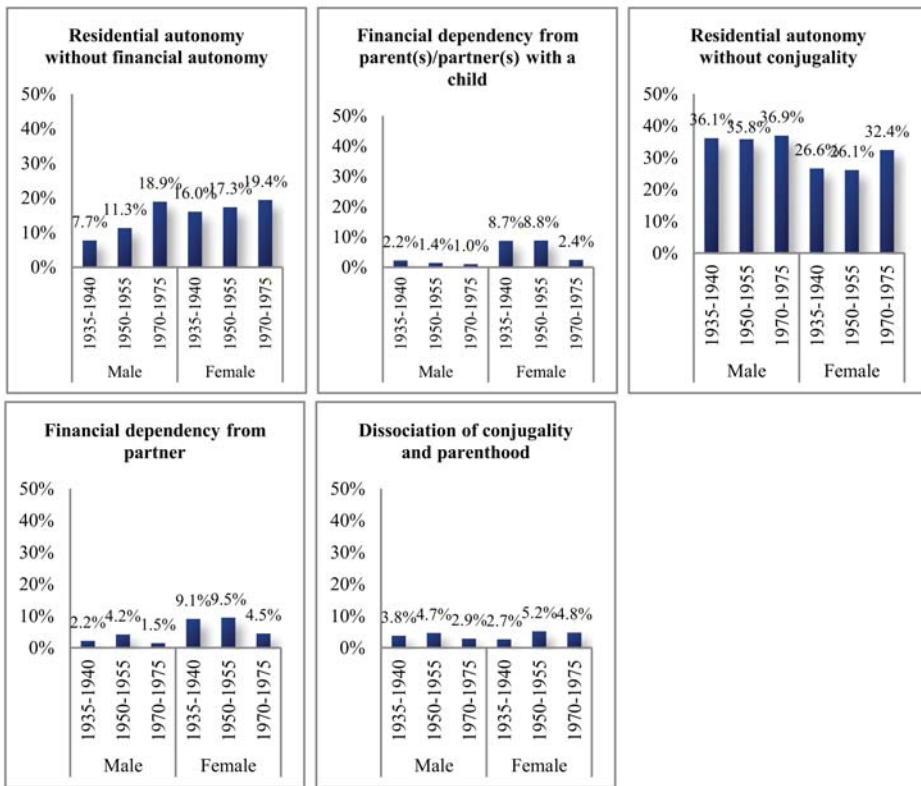
Figure 3. Changes to the normative order of transitions by sex and cohort.

Overall, these trends might suggest a pattern of family formation patterns and gender roles along the lines of a "male breadwinner-female homemaker model"; however, the gender-convergent tendency is mostly related to enrolment in higher education, which has increased substantially since the 1990s. For many Portuguese students, entering university often involves moving away [62].

Additionally, data reveals that starting cohabitation is unlikely to precede entering the labor market, regardless of cohort. That sequence of events, which entails financial dependence from a partner, existed for a minority of women from the first two cohorts, but is residual in the 1970–1975 cohort. Becoming a parent before entering the labor market evolves along the same lines, as having children and being dependent of a partner was a condition that some women born in the late 1930s and early 1950s faced but that was unlikely for those born in the early 1970s. However, we must keep in mind that joining the labor market is a highly reversible transition, either by choice or due to external factors, such as unemployment. Finally, we find that becoming a parent prior to starting a cohabiting relationship is a rare event, for both men and women from the three cohorts.

Looking at these indexes according to social class backgrounds provides additional elements to our understanding of how transitional normativity relates to the social structure in Portugal (Figure 4). While financial dependency from a partner was common for some born during the late 1930s and early 1950s, this was highly dependent on social class: it was uncommon among those whose parents where Self-employed, Routine Employees and Industrial Workers. An almost identical case can be made concerning becoming a parent prior to start working, which was only common between those from an

Entrepreneurial and Executive background. Class differences concerning these two changes to the normative order are not relevant for those born during the early 1970s.
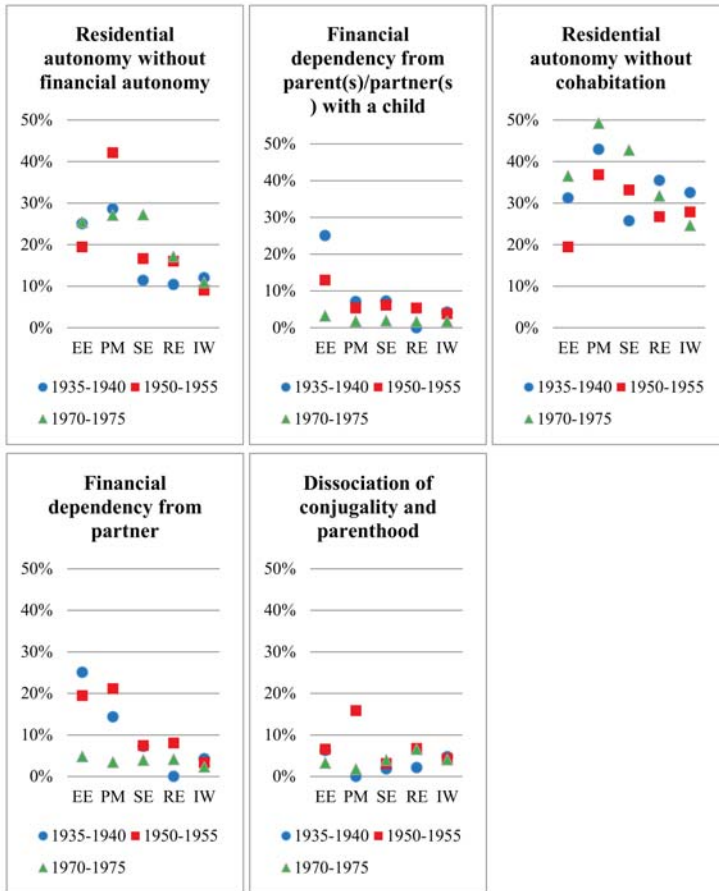
Figure 4. Changes to the normative order of transitions by sex and cohort.

Conversely, attaining residential autonomy without financial autonomy is highly dependent on individual's social class background; when parental economic and cultural resources are higher it is more likely that individuals leave their parental home before finding a job. Since this change to the normative sequence is often related to long educational trajectories, in the younger it is one of the aspects the most contrasting experiences between individuals from different class backgrounds.

While leaving parental home prior to starting cohabiting is overall a more common event, its incidence varies according to a similar social class gradient. It is more likely to have been experienced by individuals from Professional and Managerial backgrounds, regardless of the cohort. Among those born in the early 1970s, this index increases for individuals from all social origins except for descendants of Industrial Workers, rendering it one of the most differentiating differences in terms of social background.

4. Discussion

In this paper, we analyzed how transitions to adulthood in Portugal evolved over the last decades. Our aim was twofold: firstly, to identify differences, in terms of class and gender, in the timing, calendar, sequence and duration of transitions; secondly, to assert if these differences have increased or decreased in recent cohorts. Drawing on the literature, we tested a number of hypotheses, namely that transitions are overall being postponed, taking longer and less likely to follow a predetermined sequence than they did in central European societies after the Second World War. Additionally, we suggested that this transitional period is likely to remain highly differentiated along gender and social class lines.

A first conclusion is that most events associated with the transition to adulthood are in fact being postponed, i.e., they occur at a later age in more recent cohorts. However, we should carefully read the different evolution of the timing of public transitions (leaving/finishing school, entering the labor market) and private or familial transitions (starting cohabitation, becoming a parent). Cohort comparisons showed that a two-stroke transition prevailed for those born during the late 1930s, i.e., a long interval between two sets of events. Data suggests that, for older cohorts, transitions into adulthood anchored more on entering cohabitation/conjugality than starting to work, which for most happened at a very young age. Only after a fairly long period of work, during which economic resources and conditions were accumulated, could individuals afford to achieve other transitions. Even though this *two-stroke pattern of* transition into adulthood persisted for those born during the 1950s intervals were shorter, as schooling periods were slightly extended, and private transitions tended to occur earlier. Conversely, many of those born during the early 1970s did in fact postpone their private/family transitions and a few men left their procreative trajectories open-ended [63,64]. With the overall extension of schooling periods and later entries into the labor market, most individuals in the younger cohort experienced all the major transitional events within a shorter time span.

Therefore, our research strategy, which relied on both between-cohort and intra-cohort comparisons, allow us to simultaneously conclude that events tend to occur later in more recent cohorts, while transitional periods are being compressed and not necessarily protracted. In fact, the compression of the transitional period, an idea that is counterintuitive and that goes against lay assertions of contemporary youth, was observed across Europe [13,46]. Furthermore, analyses of contemporary transitions often overlook the structural and institutional conditions that pinned transitions to adulthood of more distant generations. A certain "fetishism of the present" [20,21], which is overly attentive to the present-day minutiae, and the tendency to paint the past with too broad a brush leads to oversimplifications such as those that posit that youth is being extended in recent cohorts in comparison with the past [13]. In fact, what is distinctive of recent cohorts is the sheer density of events during the third decade of life.

A second conclusion highlights how institutional change impacts transitions to adulthood. The authoritarian and conservative ideology of the *Estado Novo regime* was ingrained in all institutions that framed everyday life [65]. The pillars of this model of society were: work (promoted from an early age); nuclear procreative family; and traditional gender roles. Education beyond the basic skills of reading, writing, and counting was not fostered, at least for the masses. The effects of this model in transitions were strongly felt by those born in the early 1950s. Additionally, for older cohorts, institutional regulations strongly permeated intimate life and fostered private transitions to follow hegemonic mores more rigidly, namely in what concern family formation.

The Revolution of April 1974 has a transformative effect on many fields of social life. Education radically changed, through the extension of mandatory schooling, expansion of school infrastructure and by the subsequent expansion of higher education. This allowed for a widespread, and unparalleled in the past, access to education for younger cohorts. Enrolment in education was also reinforced by legal changes that set the minimum age to work at a later age, which explains for a greater degree of homogeneity in the calendars of public transitions in the younger cohort. Individuals born in the early 1970s where the first to benefit from these changes: in fact, the mean age at the end of school is close to 20 years of age. A higher premium on education and qualification also meant a later entry

into the labor market. Additionally, the new institutional setting enabled intimacy to be more freely experienced, even if "experimentation" periods remain short, in comparison with another context within Europe [36].

A third conclusion is that departures from the normative sequence of events in the transition to adulthood have not changed radically. These departures occurred in more distant cohorts as well as in more recent cohorts. However, achieving residential autonomy before starting work became increasingly more common. Also, starting work almost always precedes cohabitation and parenthood. In fact, detailed analysis showed a high level of heterogeneity within cohorts, depending on gender and class origin. Moreover, departures from the "normative sequence" were clearly differentiated by gender and/or class origins. One key assumption in research on the life course is that, despite the persistence of highly gendered socialization processes, trajectories and transitions are being *de-gendered,* i.e., they are less likely to frame a double standard for men and women [18,66]. In addition, in fact, recent research has shown a blurring of gender differences in family and employment trajectories in recent age cohorts [13,67,68]. However, in the Portuguese context the period corresponding to the transition to adulthood remains gendered. Despite converging trends, for those born during the early 1970s, transitional periods are still longer for men than women. However, we should stress that in recent cohorts, gender differences are not substantial in what concerns *public transitions (*leaving school and entering the labor market), but mostly relate to *private transitions* (cohabitation and parenthood), which occur much later for men than for women. Additionally, the timing of men's actual (later) transitions is in sharp contrast with their preferred calendar [42].

Finally, class origins continue to shape transitions to adulthood. However, cohort comparisons also indicate that classed transitions models have changed. While transitional periods were longer for all born in the early 1930s and for most born during the 1950s, there were sharp class differences concerning the timing of *public transitions*. Differences in the mean age of most transitional events are attenuated for those born during the early 1970s. However, if we consider the contemporary premium on academic achievement (namely on university diplomas), the disparity between those whose parents are Professionals and Managers or Industrial Workers remains highly meaningful in terms of life-chances. On the other hand, those we are able to extend schooling careers also tend to postpone or leave open-ended their *private transitions*, and that is more likely to happen for those from a bourgeois/petit bourgeois milieu. As shown by Guerreiro and Abrantes [37,44], structural conditions are a key element to understand why we are more likely to find *early, gradual* or *precarious* transitions among youths from a working-class background, where economic and cultural capital is scarcer, while *experimental* or *ludic* transitions are more likely to be experienced by individuals with a more affluent background. It is thus clear that class origins remain a factor for distinct biographical patterns, as clearly shown by the timing and pacing of transitions to adulthood.

Limitations

Our research has a number of limitations. Researchers have pointed out that transitions are increasingly reversible [25]. However, reversibility was not addressed due to the nature of the research instrument. On the other hand, even individuals from the most recent cohort were at least 35 years old. The challenges faced by current-day youths are very different. While we are aware that in the past few years change has accelerated significantly, our conclusions concern generations that are already in their mid-life. Another limitation concerns the time unit used to register transitions. Respondents were asked to recall events that happened a long time ago (for the oldest cohort up to 60 years ago). A number of individuals had doubts concerning the order of events or the precise date on which they occurred. While the usage of a life-calendar proved helpful, it would be unrealistic to ask individuals for more detail than a year in such a retrospective exercise. A possible consequence of this is a more "streamlined" account of their trajectories, not only as a result of selective memory but also because of the simplification and rationalization of an already distant past. Additionally, this research also does not address questions of subjectivity and meaning, which individuals attribute to their own trajectories.

These are indispensable elements for a better understanding of the modalities of individual agency, in terms of intentionality, motivations, expectations, and choices. These issues should be addressed in future qualitative research.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Age, Period, and Cohort Differences in Work Centrality and Work Values

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Abstract: In this paper, we analyze whether work values differ between three dimensions of time (age, birth cohort, period). Using data of five waves of the World Values Survey and the European Values Study from more than forty countries and hierarchical age-period-cohort regression models, we did not find relevant gaps between birth cohorts with respect to the relative importance of work or with respect to work values. Thus, we claim that, in European and Euro-Atlantic countries, birth cohorts, on average, do not differ significantly with regard to their work values. Our results suggest, however, that the relative importance of work is significantly higher in the middle-age groups than among the younger or older groups. Regarding work values, we found that the importance of having an interesting job, good pay, and good hours decreases with age, and that job security is equally important at every age, whereas the importance of having a useful job increases with age.

1. Introduction

Political speeches and everyday intellectual discourses paint the younger generations as less and less work-oriented. Specifically, they are thought to be increasingly less ready to perceive work as the center of their identity. The explanation usually goes as follows: in younger generations, the fact that it seems impossible to achieve what previous generations obtained in terms of their careers (stability with attractive benefits and pension) generates attempts to reduce cognitive dissonance by rejecting the value of these achievements. It is thought that these attitudinal trends are likely to be exacerbated by the growing obstacles to labor market entry, lengthening spells of unemployment or underemployment, and/or the spread of precarious work.

In this paper[1], our aim is to add to the literature on generational and cohort differences in work values. Using data from cross-national surveys we analyze to what extent—if at all—do variously operationalized work values differ between three dimensions of time. More specifically, we analyze whether the centrality (or importance) of work and intrinsic and extrinsic values vary by birth cohorts, age groups, and time periods, using data of five waves of the World Values Survey and the European Values Study from more than forty countries (most of the European countries and some OECD countries from the Euro-Atlantic area)[2]. The contribution of our paper is primarily empirical. Most of

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1   This paper draws on work [1] conducted for the STYLE project (Strategic Transitions for Youth Labour on Europe) that received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement No. 613256 (http://www.style-research.eu).
2   In a separate paper, we raise the same questions with regard to another work value (employment commitment) using ISSP data between 1981 and 2014 from thirty-four countries [2].

the previous papers on work-related values use research design and/or data that make it difficult to detect age, period, and cohort differences at a population (or national) level. We use hierarchical age-period-cohort (HAPC) models [3,4] that are a suitable solution for the analysis of individual level data of repeated cross-sectional surveys [5]. We are not aware of previous research applying HAPC models to work values. Thus, our analysis contributes an important new perspective on this topic by using a rarely used method in the analysis of work values.

The paper is structured as follows: in Sections 2 and 3, we briefly summarize the theoretical and methodological background for the analysis of generational differences in work values. In the next two sections we present our results, and in Section 6, our conclusions.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Generational Differences in Work Values

It is not our intention to reopen the decade-long debates on the meaning and types of work values. In this paper, we rely on a simple but straightforward definition of work values: "work values are evaluative standards relating to work or the work environment by which individuals discern what is 'right' or assess the importance of preferences" [6] (p. 227).

Work values form a subset of the general value system [7]. The reason for separating this subset is that: "[. . .] work plays a fundamental role in human life by providing opportunities to satisfy different needs and goals, work values have been argued to be 'salient, basic, and influential', occupy a central position in the overall pattern of values, and share significant relationship with other personal values[3]" [8] (p. 326).

In our analysis, we use two types of work values already widespread in the existing literature. (1) Work centrality as a proxy for the respondents' attitude toward work in general—in other words, how important work is for a respondent as part of their everyday life and identity. (2) Extrinsic/intrinsic work values that are much debated and variously operationalized in the organization, business, and management literature. An extrinsic work value is "dependent on a source external to the immediate task-person situation" (such as status, respect, power, influence, high salary), while an intrinsic value is "derived from the task per se; that is, from outcomes which are not mediated by a source external to the task-person situation. Such a state of motivation can be characterized as a self-fulfilling experience" [9] (pp. 497–498). Elizur [10] uses a categorization based on work outcomes and argues that intrinsic values represent cognitive, whereas extrinsic values represent either instrumental or affective outcomes[4].

The most widely accepted hypothesis regarding the trend of work values (and particularly the centrality of work) holds that there is a decline in the relevance of work as an important part of an individual's life: "Generation X for instance, has been labelled the 'slacker' generation, and employers complain that younger workers are uncommitted to their jobs and work only the required hours and little more. Conversely, Boomers may be workaholics [. . .] while Traditionals have been characterized as the most hardworking generation" [14] (p. 5).

However, according to the review of Parry and Urwin [15] (p. 88) "the empirical evidence for generational differences [. . .] is at best mixed. [. . .] Those differences that are found are not consistent". On the other hand, according to Lyons and Kuron [16] (p. S146) "there is rather modest evidence of generational differences in work attitudes". They also review several studies on work values that used different measures, different samples, and yielded mixed results. Moreover, even when the studies were comparable, "the direction of observed differences sometimes varied" (p. S145).

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[3]   The bibliographical references of the quotation were omitted.
[4]   Twenge [11] and Parboteeah et al. [12] emphasize that intrinsic and extrinsic work values do not form the two poles of a continuum; they may compete with each other or may constitute a peacefully coexisting complex system. For example, the same people can follow extrinsically motivated behavior when the task is boring and monotonous but intrinsic motivation becomes dominant during the interesting phases of a task [13].

Kowske et al. [17] comparing various generations in the United States (with a special focus on the so-called millennial generation) found that work attitudes differed across generations, although effect sizes were relatively small and the role of generation was significantly weaker than other labor-market sensitive factors such as gender, industry, and occupation. Regarding the impact of different generations, they found curvilinear trends (i.e., U-shaped curves). This means that the least satisfied with the various aspects of work were the baby boomers, while the "G.I." (born around the time of World War II) and millennial generations were the most satisfied (the latter especially with recognition and career).

Jurkiewicz [18] comparing Generation X and Baby Boomers found that the latter ranked some intrinsic values ("chance to learn new things" and "freedom from pressures") higher than the former, whereas Generation Xers ranked another intrinsic value ("freedom from supervision") higher. Lyons et al. [19] found that the importance of altruistic work values has decreased over time, the Silent Generation assigning the most importance to altruism and Generation Y the least.

To conclude, we quote from a paper in which the authors convincingly summarize the theoretical and methodological state of the art on the topic of generations: "Considering the extent to which generational stereotypes are commonly accepted, it is surprising that empirical evidence of generational differences is relatively sparse, and the research that exists is somewhat contradictory. One stream of research supports the general stereotypes [. . .]. Another stream of research has found few, if any, generational differences in a variety of employee characteristics [. . .]. Considering these inconsistent findings, there exists a great deal of controversy about whether or not generational differences exist at all [. . .]. Scholars have also noted that observed generational differences may be explained, at least in part, by age, life stage, or career stage effects instead of generation[5]" [20] (pp. 175–176).

2.2. Birth Cohort versus Generation

We decided to use the concept of birth cohort as opposed to generation because the latter is rife with ambiguities and the attempts to analyze it empirically are often debatable.

The term "generation" refers to individuals born around the same time who experience more or less similar life events during their early years. The underlying assumption is that since in their most sensitive years[6] they are exposed to identical political/economic/social events (e.g., wars, social or economic booms and crises, natural disasters, technological innovation, policy and political changes, etc.), their values will be rather similar to each other's and different from other generations [15]. Such generation-specific values may become the basis of generation-specific identities [22]—i.e., the impetus of these values may be strong enough to mobilize a group of opinion leaders who influence their fellows from the same cohort to identify themselves as an "imagined generational community", If such a feeling of generational identity takes hold, then the shared set of values and goals becomes the common denominator of a generation—i.e., one type of subculture [23] (p. 210).

Unfortunately, there are several problems with the generation concept. Firstly, it is plausible that there are no global generations, i.e., a generation cannot be assumed to have identical features all over the planet. Thus, when using cross-national data, the global generation concept will be controversial. To illustrate our point: while usually in the literature the political/economic/technological periodization of generations follows the dominant trends in the United States[7], Diepstraten, Ester, and Vinken [22] identify "prewar", "silent", "protest", "lost" and "pragmatic" generations for the Netherlands on the basis of an entirely different national "story".

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[5] The bibliographical references of the quotation were omitted.

[6] It is assumed that the level of sensitivity towards such events is the highest during childhood and adolescence and that their impact remains relatively stable from then on [21].

[7] For example Twenge et al. [24] refer to baby boomers ("created" by the civil rights and women's movements, the Vietnam War, and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King); to GenX (AIDS epidemic, economic uncertainty, and the fall of the Soviet Union); to GenY (being "wired" and "tech savvy", liking "informality", learning quickly, and embracing "diversity").

Secondly, the width of a generation is often much too loosely defined timewise to assume that the members of a generation indeed have similar experiences.

Thirdly, the empirical analysis of the generation is often based on anecdotal evidence or on invalid and unreliable survey data. For example:

- The surveys often use research designs that are unable to decompose age or career stage differences, let alone generational differences (e.g., [25]).
- The data are often restricted to only one or two generations, and to one or a few countries [15], and/or cover only special subgroups such as high school and college students (e.g., [24,26]).
- Those (often huge) datasets that cover the entire economically active population are not representative due to selection bias (e.g., Kowske et al. [17] use self-administered questionnaires by volunteers who responded to an advertisement) or focusing only on a special segment of the labor force (usually a large firm or an occupation).

Unlike generation, "birth cohort" is defined narrowly and equally, usually as a five-year-wide "mini-generation", and has a neutral meaning—i.e., it does not assume any a priori "significant event". According to Parry and Urwin [15] (p. 83), a cohort is an "atheoretical construct". Consequently, when applied in a comparative analysis since the content of the same birth cohort can be different country by country, the analysis can be more specific and dynamic (e.g., the same five-year cohort can be war-ridden in one country and the beneficiary of an economic miracle in another, or the same generation-creating innovation, such as the TV or the World Wide Web, can define birth cohorts differently, depending on the level of penetration of electricity and internet). Finally, being glocal and non-ideological, the birth cohort can be a better unit of analysis to incorporate within-generational differences by social strata, region, and ethnicity in the same country.

3. Methodological Background

The basic problem in analyzing the role of generation is that the effects of the three aspects of time—age, time period, and birth cohort—are closely intertwined. Any change over time can be determined by any of these three effects, as illustrated by the following fictional dialogue, based on Suzuki [27] (p. 452):

Endre: I'm very tired, I must be getting old. (*Age effect*)

Gábor: You're no spring chicken indeed, but maybe you're going to bed so early every evening because life is so stressful nowadays. (*Period effect*)

Endre: Could be, but you seem to be tired, too. The truth is, you young people are not as fit as we used to be at your age. (*Cohort effect*)

Since age, period (year of the survey), and birth cohort (year of birth) are linearly interdependent, their effects cannot be simultaneously estimated using standard regression models [3,4,28]. This perfect linear dependency is clear if we take the example of a forty-five-year-old individual who is interviewed in 1995. If we know these two pieces of data, we also know that her/his birth cohort (birth year) must be 1950.

As a possible solution to this identification problem for individual level data of repeated cross-sectional surveys, Yang and Land [3,4] propose cross-classified hierarchical (or multilevel) models to represent clustering effects in individual survey responses by period and birth cohorts when using repeated cross-sectional data[8]. They note that using hierarchical regression models is necessary

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[8] Hierarchical age-period-cohort regression models have been used to analyze the role of generation (using repeated cross-sectional data) on verbal test scores [3,4], on the changing association between higher education and non-religious affiliation in the United States [29], on support for the European Union [30], and on satisfaction with various job characteristics [17].

since individuals are nested within birth cohorts and survey year. They use single years of age, time periods (the year when the survey was conducted), and birth cohorts defined by five-year intervals. In this way, the exact age of the respondents cannot be calculated from the year of the survey and the birth cohort group—i.e., there is no linear dependence between the three variables. In addition, they use a quadratic age variable.

Others, however, for example, Bell and Jones [31,32], argue that there is no statistically and mathematically correct solution to the age-period-cohort identification problem. They propose therefore that the research should be based on a priori assumptions. If the research can either deductively claim and/or empirically prove that one of the three time dimensions has no significant effect on the phenomenon proper, then the problem of multicollinearity is reduced. They use simulations to show how HAPC models could be misleading: the effects of the three time-related variables might be assigned to each other or be combined by the effects of the other two variables. However, they also show that the model works if there are no linear (or nonlinear) trends in periods or cohorts.

Answering these critics, Reither, Masters, et al. [33] argue that data generated by Bell and Jones are "theoretical improbable and empirically rare". They also show empirically that the HAPC model works in "real-life situations" where the researchers do not suppose perfectly linear cohort and period effects. In another paper, Reither, Land, et al. [5]—demonstrating the consensus among APC scholars with an expanded list of coauthors—conclude that APC models fail only in the presence of exact algebraic effects of temporal variables, but in other specifications, APC models (including HAPC) are appropriate.

Since we have data from large cross-national surveys, the HAPC modeling framework is suitable for our analysis. To minimize the effect of multicollinearity between age, birth cohort, and period, we define fixed and equal time period (year of the survey) clusters. We use the year of fieldwork country by country, and these years are grouped together into five-year intervals, which can be considered the most "natural" (i.e., "theory-blind") grouping principle. These five-year intervals almost exactly cover the original waves of the WVS. In these grouped data, period (with five-year intervals), age, and birth cohort (year of birth) are not perfectly dependent, in other words, we are no longer able to directly calculate the year of birth from age and period clusters; nonetheless, remarkable multicollinearity still remains. Moreover, we accept the reasoning of Yang and Land [4] that whereas the age variable is related to the biological process of individual aging, period and cohort effects reflect the influences of external (political, technological, economic, etc.) forces, thus the latter two variables can be treated as macro-level variables[9]. This means that we work with a multilevel data structure [34,35] assuming that the attitudes of individuals in the same birth cohort or interviewed in the same year will be more similar than those of individuals interviewed in different years or born in different birth cohorts.

Thus, we use HAPC models where it is assumed that individuals are nested simultaneously within the two second-level variables (period and cohort). In our case, since we use cross-national surveys, they are also nested within countries.

The level-1 model is the following:

$$Y_{ijkc} = \beta_{0jkc} + \beta_1 AGE_{ijkc} + \beta_2 AGE_{ijkc}^2 + \beta_3 X_{ijkc} + e_{ijkc}, \tag{1}$$

the level-2 model is

$$\beta_{0jkc} = \gamma_0 + u_{0j} + v_{0k} + w_{0c}, \tag{2}$$

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[9] Suzuki [27] shows a data structure where individuals are nested simultaneously within periods and birth cohorts, whereas age is an attribute of individuals rather than a random sample of age categories from a population of age groupings.

and the combined model is

$$Y_{ijkc} = \gamma_0 + \beta_1 AGE_{ijkc} + \beta_2 AGE_{ijkc}^2 + \beta_3 X_{ijkc} + u_{0j} + v_{0k} + w_{0c} + e_{ijkc}, \qquad (3)$$

where, within each cohort j and period k, and country c, respondents' work attitude is a function of their age, squared age, and other individual characteristics (vector of X). The control variables are the following: gender, education, marital status, labor force status, type of settlement. This model allows level-1 intercepts to vary randomly by cohorts, periods, and countries. β_{0jkc} is the mean of the work attitude variable of individuals in cohort j, period k, and country c (cell mean); β_1, β_2, and β_3 are the level-1 fixed effects; e_{ijkc} is the random individual variation, which is assumed normally distributed with mean 0 and within-cell variance σ^2; γ_0 is the grand mean (across all cohorts, periods, and countries) or the model intercept, u_{0j} is the residual random effect of cohort j, v_{0k} is the residual random effect of period k, w_{0c} is the residual random effect of country c. u_{0j}, v_{0k}, and w_{0c} are assumed normally distributed with mean 0 and variance τ_u, τ_v, and τ_w, respectively[10]. We estimate the models using the mixed command of Stata [37].

4. Work Centrality

4.1. Data

Given that our strategy of analyzing the changing (or unchanging) attitudes of generations toward work is based on secondary analysis of large, cross-sectional, cross-national data, we first have to select those questions that could be used as proxies of work values. Unlike other researchers who used these variables to create latent variables based on complex scaling techniques (e.g., [38–40]), we want to keep our variables simple. When analyzing unidimensional or global constructs like work centrality, single-item measures reduce the common method variance and have better face-validity and according to empirical analyses they are appropriate and provide useful information [41–44].

In the first analysis, our main dependent variable is work centrality (or the importance of work). We use data of the World Values Survey/European Values Study (WVS/EVS)[11]. Respondents were asked to answer the following question: "How important is [life aspect] in your life?" on a four-point scale. The coding was as follows: 1 = very important, 2 = quite important, 3 = not important, 4 = not important at all. Life aspects were, among others, work, family, friends, leisure time, and religion. We calculate the relative importance of work by using reverse-coded variables and by dividing the importance of work and the average importance of all other life aspects that were asked in the questionnaires[12]. Thus, the variable has values over 1 if work is more important in the respondent's life than other life aspects, whereas it has a lower value than 1 if work plays a relatively small role in the respondent's life. In this analysis, we also use the variables of relative importance of the other four life aspects (family, friends, leisure time, religion) that we calculate with an identical method to relative importance of work.

Questions about the importance of life aspects were asked in the second to sixth waves of the WVS/EVS. However, since the number of countries between 2000 and 2004 is low (ten countries) we exclude this period from the analysis. Thus, we have data from four periods: 1990–1994, 1995–1999, 2005–2009, 2010–2014. Our analysis covers most of the European countries and some countries from

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[10] For more details see Chapters 7 and 8 of Yang and Lang [36].

[11] All the surveys included in the database of WVS/EVS are nationally representative surveys using standardized and properly pre-tested questionnaires developed by experts of survey analysis and data management. WVS (2015). World Values Survey 1981–2015 official aggregate v.20150418, 2015. World Values Survey Association (www.worldvaluessurvey.org). Aggregate File Producer: JDSystems, Madrid, and EVS (2011). European Values Study 1981–2008, Longitudinal Data File. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne, Germany, ZA4804 Data File Version 2.0.0 (2011-12-30) doi:10.4232/1.11005.

[12] The five life aspects described above and politics. This way we can correct for scale use differences among the respondents. In the analysis, we do not present the results for importance of politics since—compared to the other life aspects—we think that it is not a core element of everyday life.

the Euro-Atlantic area. We restrict the sample for respondents between age 18 and 79 to have enough number of observations in every year of age. We exclude respondents with missing data on importance of life aspects. Our final sample size is 209,851. The number of observations and the means of the importance of life aspects by period are shown in Table 1[13].

Table 1. Number of observations and the average of relative importance of life aspects by period.

		Work	Family	Friends	Leisure Time	Religion
1990–1994	Mean	1.137	1.257	1.064	1.032	0.793
	SD	0.232	0.19	0.203	0.228	0.31
	N	40,114	40,114	40,114	40,114	40,114
1995–1999	Mean	1.129	1.263	1.079	1.013	0.810
	SD	0.237	0.186	0.202	0.225	0.308
	N	68,428	68,428	68,428	68,428	68,428
2005–2009	Mean	1.095	1.251	1.088	1.042	0.818
	SD	0.236	0.180	0.194	0.209	0.303
	N	82,138	82,138	82,138	82,138	82,138
2010–2014	Mean	1.056	1.275	1.104	1.063	0.779
	SD	0.257	0.187	0.207	0.215	0.318
	N	19,171	19,171	19,171	19,171	19,171
Total	Mean	1.111	1.258	1.082	1.033	0.807
	SD	0.239	0.185	0.200	0.219	0.308
	N	209,851	209,851	209,851	209,851	209,851

4.2. Results

As an introduction, Figure 1 displays descriptive results: the mean relative importance of work by age group and period (uncontrolled by cohort). The general pattern is rather similar in the four periods: the relative centrality of work increases slightly until age 43–47 and decreases sharply thereafter. People seem to slowly "learn" the importance of work, but this holds only as long as they are in their active years.

For every age group, the importance of work is lowest in the last period (2010–2014). Among those aged over 53, work becomes less important in every subsequent period, whereas among the younger age groups, there is no difference between the first two periods and the decrease in the third and in the fourth period is much smaller. This means that the relative importance of work seems to be more or less stable among the young, but falls sharply among the old between 1990–1994 and 2010–2014.

Tables A7 and A8 in the Appendix A contain the results of the HAPC models without and with socio-demographic control variables, respectively. Since our main goal is to show how age, cohort, and period correlate with the importance of life aspects, Figure 2 visualizes the results of the HAPC models regarding the three time-related variables from models that control for the socio-demographic background of the individual and for time-invariant country effects.

Comparing the five models, family is the most important in the respondents' life, work is the second most important life aspect followed by friends and leisure time, and religion is the least important one. This pattern is similar in every period.

First, we focus on the relative importance of work. We can get information about the relevance of age effects by comparing the residual variance of the empty model with a model including only age variables[14]. Inclusion of age reduces the residual variance by 4.4%, which means that about 4% of the variation of this variable is due to age differences.

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[13] Table A1 in the Appendix A contains the number of observations by country and period, whereas Table A2 shows mean of the relative importance of work by country and period. Tables A3–A6 show the means of the other four variables.

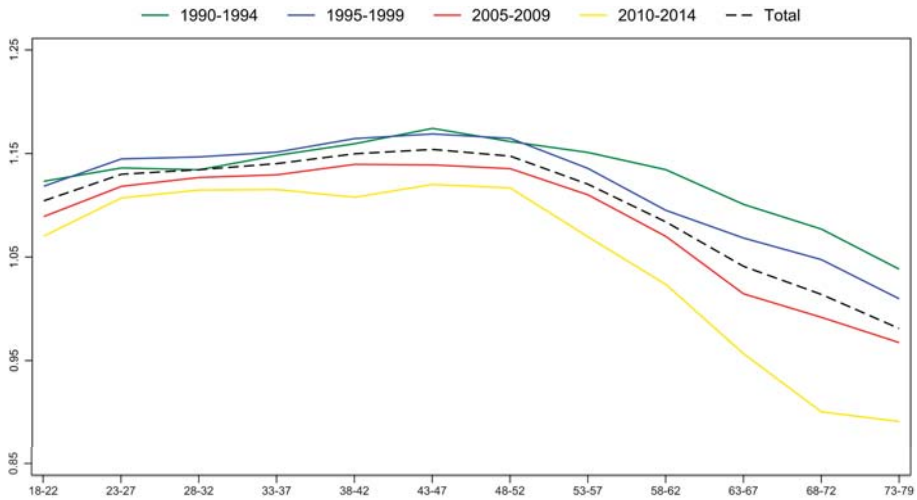[14] These results are available from authors on request.

Figure 1. Means of relative importance of work (*y*-axis) by age groups (*x*-axis) in the four periods.

Figure 2a displays the age effect from the HAPC model. Basically, it replicates the main pattern regarding importance of work that we have seen in Figure 1 above. The relative centrality of work increases from age 18, reaching a peak around age 45, and decreases thereafter. This result is in accordance with a life-course concept of economic activity: since younger people are not yet and older people are no longer involved in income generating activities, it makes sense that their attitude toward the importance of work should be lower compared to those, for whom work plays a central role in forming their identity, (i.e., career-oriented, human-capital-investing, etc., individuals in [early] middle age), and for people in their active household and labor-market cycles (i.e., individuals entering the labor market, becoming adults, establishing a family, having children, etc.).

Focusing on the role of the other two time variables, we find that although they have a statistically significant impact on the relative importance of work, this is small compared to the impact of age and the country differences. The results of Figure 2b show that controlling for age, cohort, and country differences, the relative importance of work is decreasing constantly. However, period accounts for only 1.04% of the variance (see Table A7), that is, the effect size is rather small.

Finally, work is slightly less important for birth cohorts born in the middle of the twentieth century compared to the cohorts born earlier and later (Figure 2c). This result may be interpreted as a weak cohort effect: for those who entered the labor market around 1968, the centrality of work has temporarily decreased, but the effect size is very small (cohort accounts for only 0.45% of the variance in the centrality of work).

Socio-demographic control variables act according to what we would expect (Table A8). For example, work is less important for those who are retired, for part-time workers, and for others not in the labor market, whereas it is more important for those married or living with a partner, and for men.

Regarding the importance of other life aspects, it seems that the centrality of friends changes together (but in the opposite direction) with the centrality of work throughout one's life course (Figure 2a). Friends are very important during the younger ages, they are the least important around age 50, and become more important again after retirement. Family is equally important in every age group, there are only small differences between the young and the old. Leisure time becomes less important with age. This finding is compatible with the change in the importance of work. If we assume that leisure time is defined as the lack of work, it is reasonable that without work as the "point of reference" the importance of leisure time also loses its significance. Simultaneously, when compared with leisure time, religion shows an opposite and stronger trend—i.e., it becomes more and more

important with age. We can hypothesise that faith serves as a replacement for leisure, i.e., it fills in the "identity void" left by the decreasing importance of both work and leisure.

While the centrality of friends and leisure time, and the importance of family increases between the early 1990s and mid-2010s, the centrality of work and religion (especially in the past decade) decreases (Figure 2b).

Cohort differences in the importance of family, friends, and leisure time are even smaller than those of work. Only regarding the importance of religion can we detect very small differences. Religion is less important for respondents born in the late 1940s and in the first half of the 1950s, and it is more important for those born later or earlier (Figure 2c), but again cohort accounts for only 0.33% of the variance in the importance of religion.
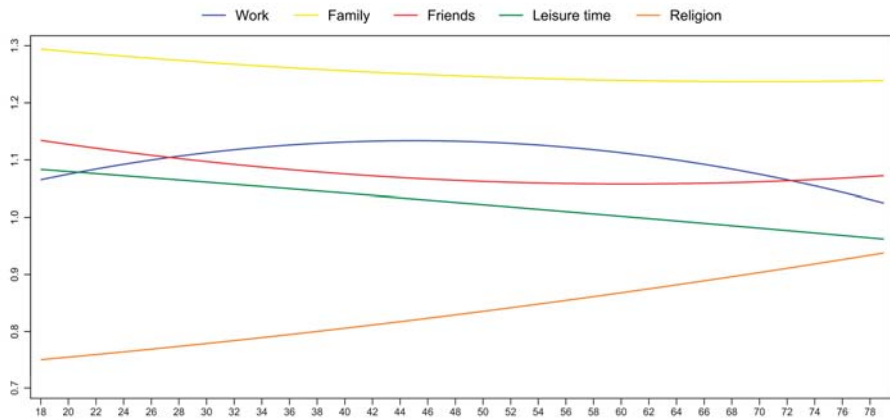
(**a**)
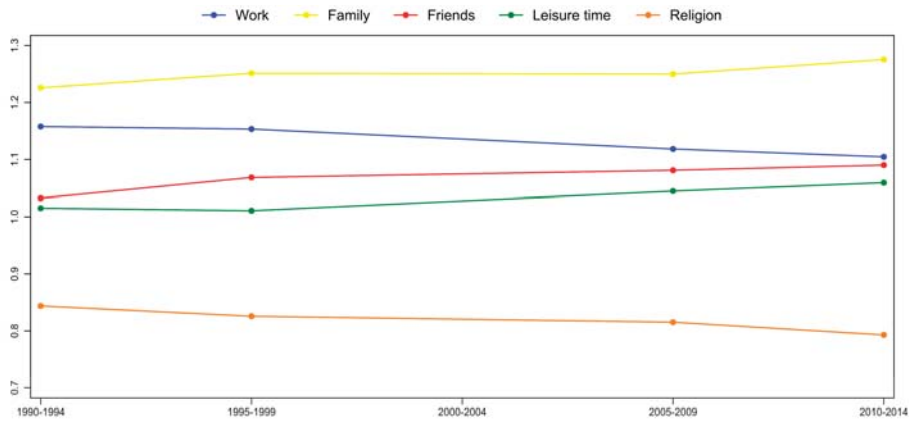
(**b**)

Figure 2. *Cont.*
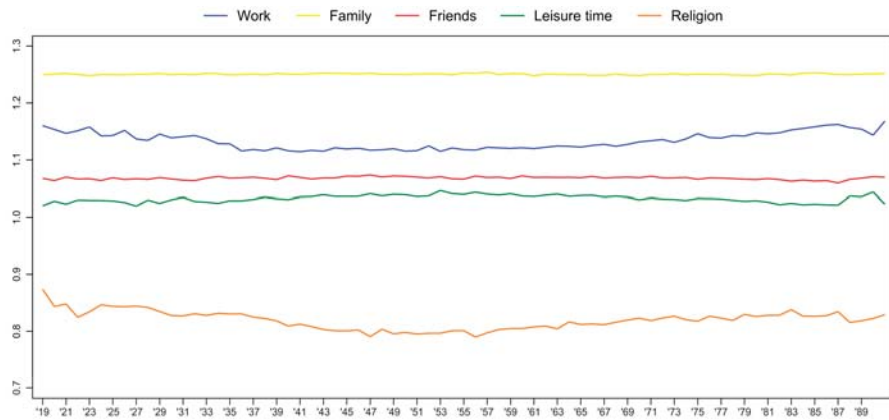
(**c**)

Figure 2. (**a**) Age, (**b**) period, and (**c**) birth-cohort effects on relative importance of work and other life aspects (hierarchical age-period-cohort regression models). The *y*-axis shows the predicted value of the dependent variable (for an average respondent).

4.3. Robustness

To test the robustness of the results regarding the relative importance of work, in Figure 3 we visualize the results of (a) various specifications of the HAPC model, and (b) of HAPC models on some selected sub-samples.

First, we specify the effect of time period and country as fixed instead of random (red line, Figure 3). Next, we allow only a "global financial crisis effect" instead of the random period effect of the main model. That is, we create a dummy variable for the two periods that cover the global financial crisis of 2007–2008 and we include it in the fixed part of the model (blue line, Figure 3). We also use a categorical age variable instead of the quadratic specification by including age group dummies with 5-year brackets. With this model we allow the relationship between age and work centrality to be non-linear, and further reduce collinearity between age and cohort (yellow line, Figure 3). The overall conclusion of this exercise is that the original results are not altered by any of the alternative specifications of the HAPC model.

Secondly, we relax the possible concern that stems from the fact that the WVS/EVS is not based on the same set of countries across all waves. These differences in the composition of the countries across the waves might bias the results of the HAPC models. In the robustness test, we restrict the sample to the eleven countries that participated in all four waves of the WVS/EVS. The green lines in Figure 3 show that the results are identical to those of the original model. Lastly, restricting our sample to respondents in their active ages (age 24–60) did not cause any deviation from the original model either (orange line, Figure 3).
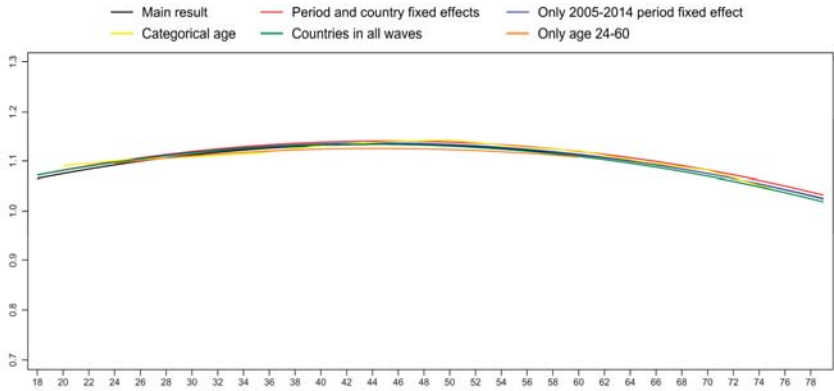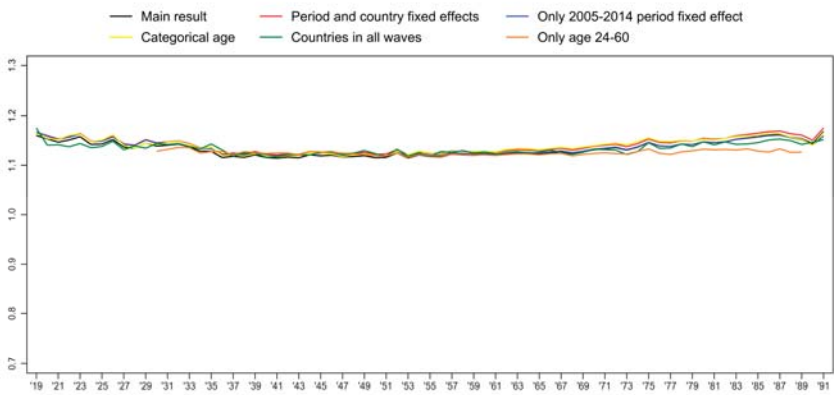
Figure 3. Robustness of the results: (**a**) Age, (**b**) period, and (**c**) birth-cohort effects on relative importance of work (hierarchical age-period-cohort regression models). The *y*-axis shows the predicted value of the dependent variable (for an average respondent).
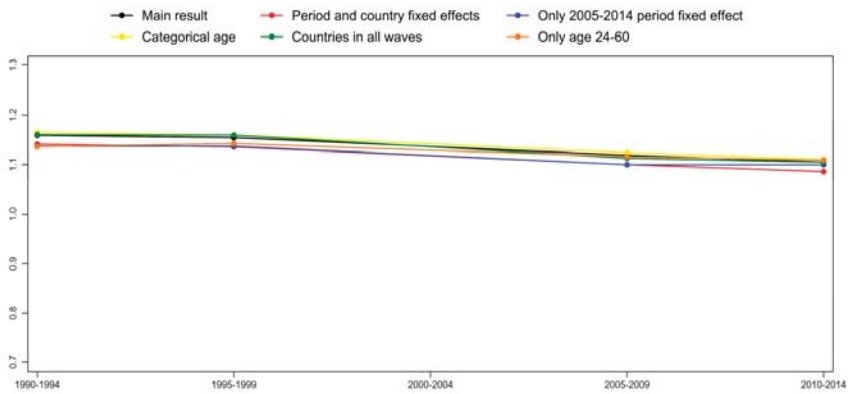
5. Work Values

5.1. Data

In the second analysis (based again on WVS/EVS data), we use another set of work values as dependent variables, i.e., which aspects do respondents consider to be important in a job? The exact wording of the question was the following: "Here are some more aspects of a job that people say are important. Please look at them and tell me which ones you personally think are important in a job." The respondent was offered fourteen items from which we select the following items as work values motivating an employee: good pay, good job security, good hours, an interesting job, and a job useful to society. The coding of the variables is the following: 1 = selected, 0 = not selected.

We are aware that there is much debate about the number and the types of work value and motivation dimensions [45,46], but since our aim is limited to testing the effects of the three aspects of time on work values, we decided not to enter into this debate and only use the simplest solution available. We assume that of the three extrinsic work values "good income" can be considered typical, since in modern societies income is the ultimate "external" motivation for work. "Security" is also an extrinsic value since it expresses the respondent's attachment to the labor market in general and to a concrete job in particular (i.e., the respondent wants to hold the job proper). "Good hours", however, is not purely extrinsic since it indicates the need of at least a limited level of freedom for the employee—i.e., some control over working time—and implicitly expresses the importance of life beyond the labor market (family, leisure, etc.). As for the two intrinsic work values, having an "interesting job" can be considered as the classic form of individualistic motivation on a post-industrial labor market, a shift upward on the Maslowian scale. The same is the case for having a job which is "useful to society". In this case, however, the intrinsic value is derived not from the hedonistic self-satisfaction of the individual but from a more general humanistic-holistic or altruistic motivation.

We selected these five items since they represent not only intrinsic and extrinsic values [47], but they can also be categorized as entrepreneurial values and bureaucratic values [45]; as instrumental, cognitive, social/altruistic values; as growth-focused and context-focused values; or as individual-level, job/organization-level, and societal-level values [46]. These five values are diverse enough with respect to different categorizations of work values, but the relatively low number of dependent variables makes the results simple and easily understandable.

Questions about work values were asked in the first to fifth waves of the WVS/EVS. However, since the number of countries between 2000 and 2004 is low, we exclude this period from the analysis[15]. Thus, we have data from four periods: 1980–1984, 1990–1994, 1995–1999, and 2005–2009. This sample covers most of the European countries and some countries from the Euro-Atlantic area, similar to Illustration I. We restrict the sample for respondents between age 18 and 70 since they are either active on the labor market or just recently retired, thus their perceptions about a job relate to their actual (or recent) activities. The number of observations and means of the five variables are shown in Table 2[16].

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[15] The question about the importance of having a job that is useful to society was not asked in 2004–2004, and the other four questions were asked only in nine countries.

[16] The number of observations regarding the importance of having a useful job is somewhat smaller than sample sizes of the other four variables, since questions about the importance of having a job that is useful to society were not asked in some countries in the third wave of the WVS/EVS. Table A9 in the Appendix A contains the number of observations of the importance of good pay by country and period (as reference information regarding the other three variables), whereas Table A10 shows the same information for the importance of having a useful job.

Table 2. Number of observations and the average of work values by period.

		Good Pay	Job Security	Good Hours	Interesting Job	Useful for Society
1980–1984	Mean	0.674	0.604	0.455	0.601	0.371
	SD	0.469	0.489	0.498	0.490	0.483
	N	18,976	18,976	18,976	18,976	17,878
1990–1994	Mean	0.749	0.574	0.451	0.616	0.415
	SD	0.434	0.494	0.498	0.486	0.493
	N	39,912	39,912	39,912	39,912	39,912
1995–1999	Mean	0.826	0.701	0.499	0.688	0.421
	SD	0.379	0.458	0.500	0.463	0.494
	N	66,590	66,595	66,521	66,564	34,034
2005–2009	Mean	0.838	0.687	0.558	0.693	0.410
	SD	0.368	0.464	0.497	0.461	0.492
	N	50,605	50,229	50,114	50,179	49,771
Total	Mean	0.796	0.658	0.500	0.664	0.409
	SD	0.403	0.474	0.500	0.472	0.492
	N	176,083	175,712	175,523	175,631	141,595

5.2. Results

Table A11 in the Appendix A contains the results of the HAPC models for work values without socio-demographic control variables, and Table A12 contains the results of the models with control variables. Figure 3 visualizes the results of the HAPC models with control variables since, just as in Section 4, our main goal is to show the correlation between age, cohort, period and work values.

While the probability of having an interesting job, good pay and good hours being selected as important (after controlling for period and cohort) decreases with age (Figure 3a), the probability of usefulness being selected increases with age. The probability that job security is selected as important is similar for every age: although there is a slight increase with age (between 18 and 50), the trend is much weaker compared to the other four work values. These results suggest that work values, controlled for socio-economic variables, period and cohort effects, significantly change with age.

Previous research showed a decline in the importance of extrinsic values and a (non-significant) decline in the importance of intrinsic values for young adults in the United States [48]. Lechner et al. [49] found that work values are fairly stable in young adulthood. In a meta-analysis, Jin and Rounds [8] found stable intrinsic values and a decrease in the adolescence years in extrinsic values. Our results slightly differ from these results. The most important explanation might be that our sample covers the entire population rather than only young people, thus we are able to use information from the whole life span. For example, Loscocco and Kalleberg [50], using samples from the whole population, found a negative correlation between age and importance of good pay for American men and Japanese men and women. Second, age effects in our analysis are controlled for period, birth cohort and the most important life-transition variables (marital status, labor force status), whereas previous results were uncontrolled for some of these effects. The latter variables are especially important in the explanation of importance of extrinsic values [49]. It is possible that the decrease in the probability of having an interesting job, good pay and good hours being selected as important can be explained by a downgrading process that occurs when there is a discrepancy between work values and the reality [49]. Johnson [51] (p. 338) argues that young people are encouraged to hold high occupational expectations [52] that might "cool out" with the "increasing knowledge of the potential job rewards available and what can realistically be attained". The positive association between age and the importance of usefulness is consistent with a more general psychological result that generativity striving (e.g., being concerned with creating something or being purposive interaction with the younger generation) is related positively to age [53].

The middle block shows that the probability of having an interesting job, good pay, and flexible hours being selected as important increases constantly between 1980–1984 and 2005–2009. The probability of having a job that is useful for society being selected as important is the highest in the

1990s and the lowest in 2005–2009. Regarding job security, we can see a significant increase between 1990–1994 and 1995–1999, and the probability of job security being selected is the highest in 1995–1999 and decreases slightly thereafter[17]. The third block indicates the complete lack of birth cohort effect on five types of work values.

The sign and size of coefficients of the control variables correspond to our expectations (Table A12). For example, for the educated having an interesting and a useful job is more important, whereas good pay, job security, and good hours are less important than for respondents with a low level of education. Compared to those working full-time, self-employed respondents consider job security and good working hours less important. For those married or living with a partner and for those divorced, separated, or widowed, good pay, job security, and good working hours are more important than for singles. Female respondents think that good pay is less important, whereas good hours are more important, which might reflect the distribution of household tasks and breadwinning roles within the family. These findings are in line with previous papers that found that education is related to higher importance of intrinsic and altruistic values [49,51,54], intrinsic and altruistic work values are more important, whereas extrinsic values are less important for women than for men [49,51,55,56], and being married is associated with higher extrinsic values [49,50] (Figure 4).
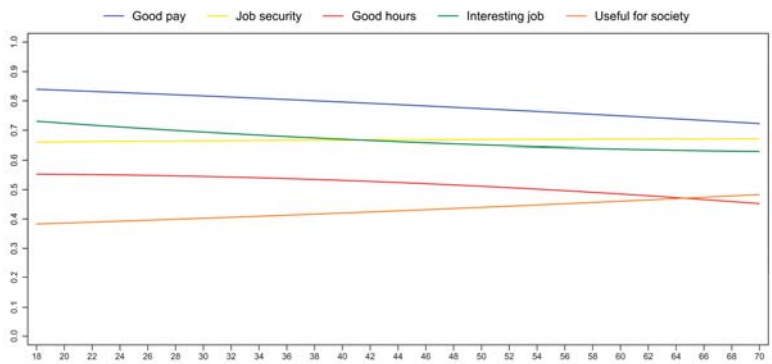
(**a**)
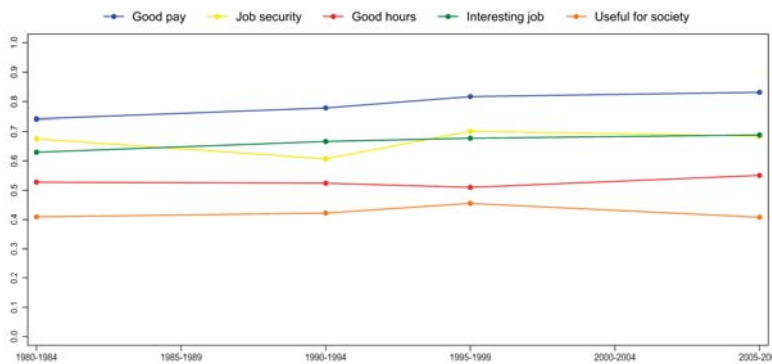
(**b**)

Figure 4. *Cont.*

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[17] This might reflect the Eastern-European transitions after 1989–1990, when the risk of unemployment was an everyday experience, thus the threat of unemployment made job security more important. When we analyzed the trend of work values on a sample that was split into a post-communist and a non-post-communist segment, our results confirm that the relatively large increase in the importance of security is driven by the post-communist countries [1].

(**c**)
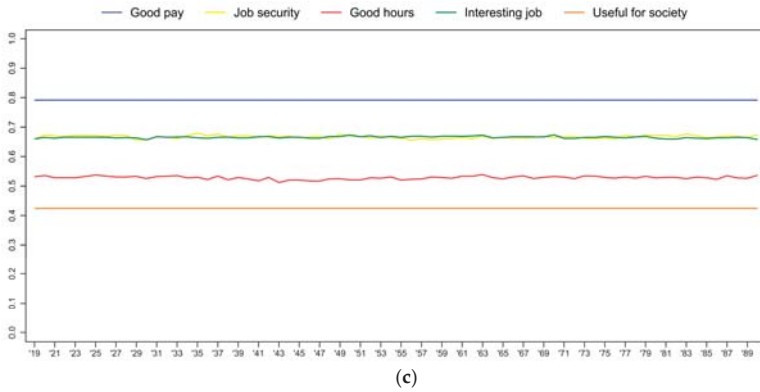
Figure 4. (**a**) Age, (**b**) period, and (**c**) birth-cohort effects on importance of work values (hierarchical age-period-cohort regression model). The *y*-axis shows the predicted value of the dependent variable (for an average respondent).

5.3. Robustness

To test the robustness of the results, first, we use the relative importance of job-related work values as the dependent variable instead of the original variables. We calculate the relative importance of the work value by subtracting the mean importance of all work values in the WVS/EVS questionnaires (fourteen variables) from the importance of the work value. The value of the new variables is between −1 and 1. The relative importance of the work value is close to −1 if the respondent did not select the work value as important but selected most of the other work values as important, and it is close to 1 if the respondent selected the work value as important but did not select most of the other work values as important. In this way, we also control for scale use or response style differences among the respondents. The results are shown in Figure 5 and are very similar to our main results in Figure 4.

Figure 6 visualizes the results of further robustness tests where we change the specifications of the HAPC model and also use different samples. To keep the results clear-cut and to transfer the information efficiently, we show the results for one of the five work values (importance of good hours). The results for the other four work values are basically identical to this.

(**a**)
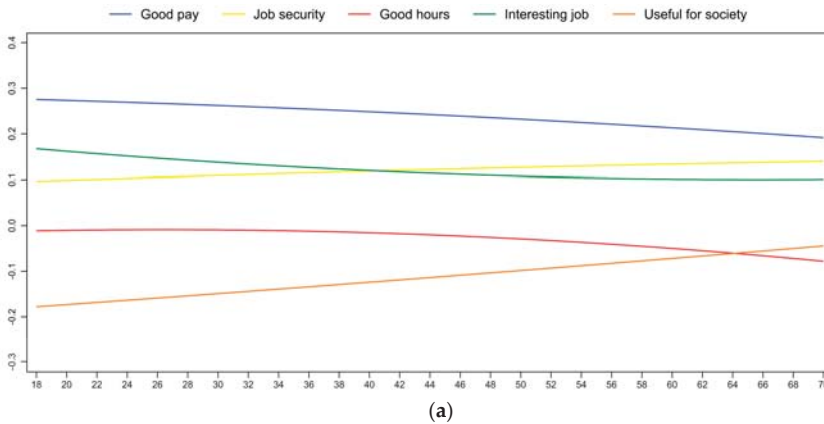
Figure 5. *Cont.*
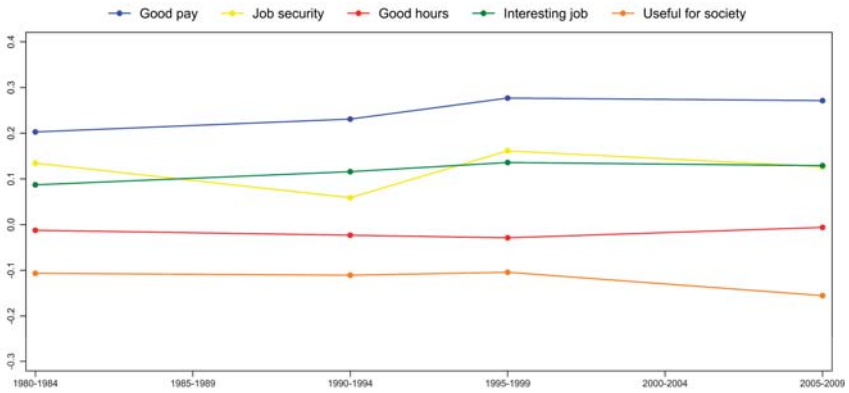
(**b**)
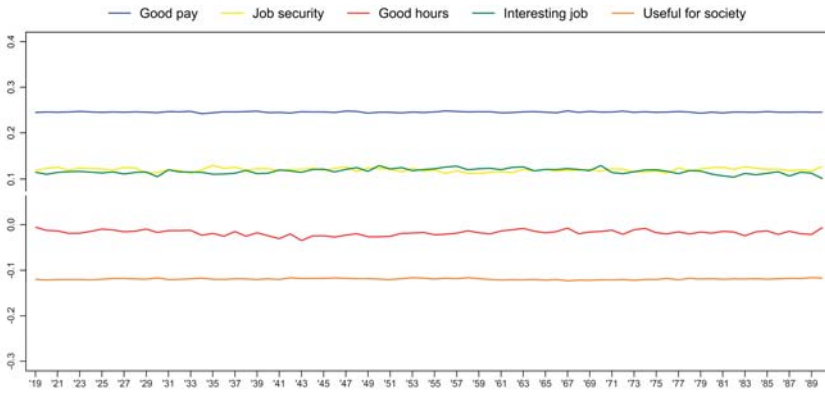
(**c**)

Figure 5. (**a**) Age, (**b**) period, and (**c**) birth-cohort effects on relative importance of work values (hierarchical age-period-cohort regression model). The *y*-axis shows the predicted value of the dependent variable (for an average respondent).

(**a**)

Figure 6. *Cont.*

(b)

(c)
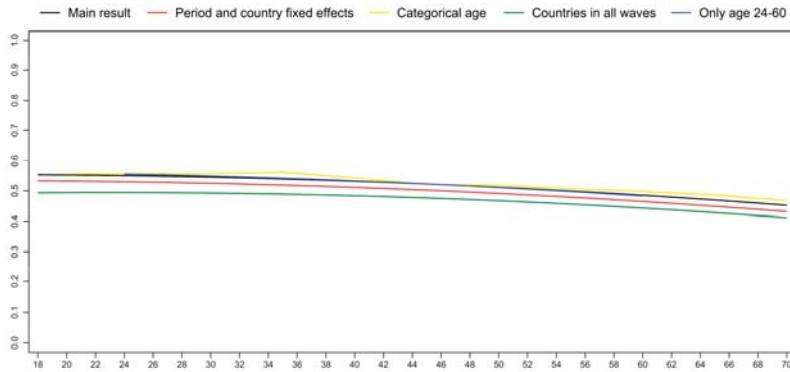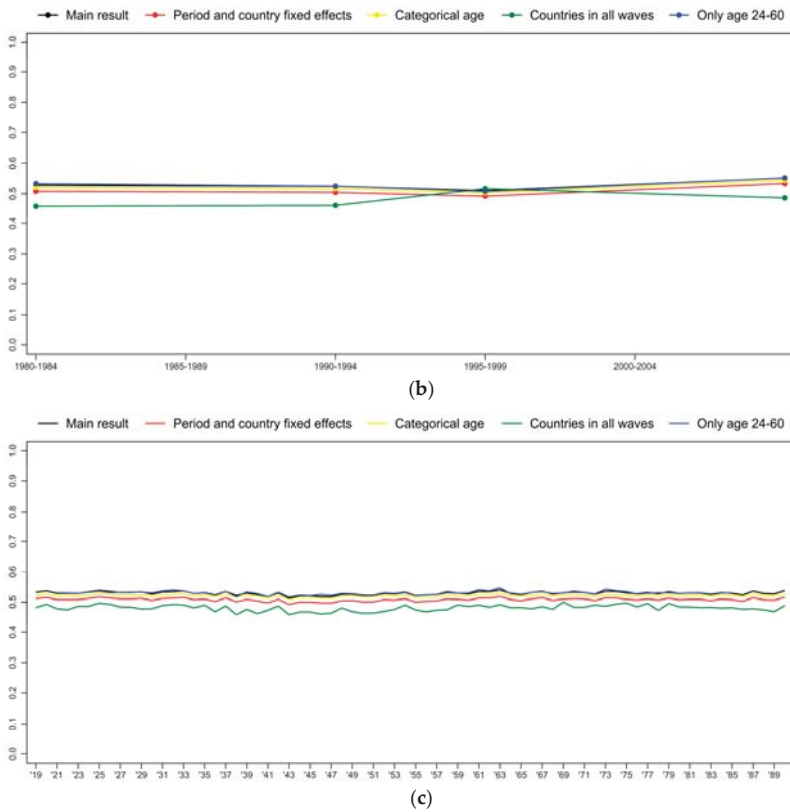
Figure 6. Robustness of the results: (**a**) Age, (**b**) period, and (**c**) birth-cohort effects on importance of good hours (hierarchical age-period-cohort regression models). The *y*-axis shows the predicted value of the dependent variable (for an average respondent).

First, we specify the effect of time period and country as fixed instead of random (red line on Figure 5). Then, we use a categorical age variable instead of the quadratic specification. This model includes age group dummies with 5-year brackets (yellow line on Figure 5). We also restrict the sample to fourteen countries that participated in all the four waves of the WVS/EVS (green line on Figure 5). Lastly, we restrict our sample to respondents in their active ages (ages 24–60) (blue line on Figure 5). None of these alter the conclusion of the main model. Only the period effect in the model with the countries participating in all waves differs slightly from the other results. This is not very surprising, since thirteen of these countries are Western European, and previous results suggest that period differences are not the same in post-socialist and in the EU-15 countries [1].

6. Summary and Conclusions

In this paper, our aim was to expand the empirical findings in the literature on the role of generation and birth cohort on work values using multilevel models of the three dimensions of time and data from cross-national surveys.

We argued that while the concept of generation is seemingly concise and elegant, there are several problems with it—especially if one wants to use it in a cross-national analysis. For example, in the empirical literature, generations are often loosely defined timewise. The characteristics used to capture the main features of generations are often based on anecdotal evidence or on invalid and unreliable

survey data. The assumption that there are global generations is questionable. Unlike generation, birth cohort is a narrowly defined and neutral phenomenon; therefore, our models use five-year birth cohorts.

From a methodological point of view, the main challenge stems from the fact that age, time period, and birth cohort are linearly interdependent, thus their effects cannot be simultaneously estimated using standard regression models. A possible solution to this identification problem for the analysis of individual level data of repeated cross-sectional surveys is the hierarchical age-period-cohort (HAPC) regression model as proposed by Yang and Land [3,4].

Using HAPC models and data from five waves of the World Values Survey and the European Values Study from more than forty countries, we did not find relevant gaps between birth cohorts with respect to the relative importance of work or with respect to work values. Regarding the relative importance of work, we found that work is slightly less important for birth cohorts born in the middle of the twentieth century compared to cohorts born earlier or later, but the effect size is rather small. Thus, we claim that, in European and Euro-Atlantic countries, birth cohorts are not divided significantly with regard to their work values. In this respect, our findings reinforce the results of Clark [57], Kowske et al. [17], Jin and Rounds [8], Costanza et al. [58], and Becton et al. [20]: instead of pointing to any cohort (or generational) differences, we should emphasize the lack of these.

Our results suggest that age correlates more strongly with the importance of work and work values than birth cohort. The relative centrality of work is higher in the middle age groups than among the younger or older groups, whereas the centrality of friends changes oppositely, being highest among the young and among the old. The importance of leisure time declines with age. This might be explained by the fact that leisure time is seen as the opposite of working hours. Since in older ages work is not central anymore, leisure time also loses its significance. Religion becomes more important with age.

Using a job-related set of work values, we found that the probability of selecting an interesting job, good pay, and good hours as important decreases with age; job security is equally important in every age, whereas the probability of having a useful job being important increases with age. These results suggest that individualistic work values might become less important and holistic or altruistic values might become more important as people get older.

We are aware that analyzing such a large sample of countries might "blind" us to differences among social groups and specific "stories" in single countries. Despite the lack of cohort effects in general, in a country or especially in a workplace, generations might have very diverse attitudes to work. Such analyses are beyond the scope of this paper, but it is a task for future research to identify cohort (or generational) differences in single countries or in subgroups of society. Another direction for future research is to analyze the effect of contextual variables using regional data of single countries. For example, it is possible that the level of unemployment or the activity rate affects work-related values.

In the case of European and Euro-Atlantic countries, the assumption that younger cohorts are less and less work oriented, have less faith in achieving a career, and are less optimistic about getting a job and making ends meet on the basis of a salary, turned out to be wrong. Thus, from a policy point of view, the implication of our results is that the generational differences often referred to in public debates and used in political discourses are very likely a myth. The lack of relevant differences among cohorts means that the social and economic efforts proposed to decrease youth unemployment will not be hindered by changing cohort attitudes towards work.

Author Contributions: Gábor Hajdu and Endre Sik made a substantial contribution to the design and planning of the study, the interpretation of the data, and the writing and revising of the manuscript. Gábor Hajdu performed the statistical analyses. Endre Sik conceived the theoretical background. Both authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. The number of observations by country and period (relative importance of work).

	1990–1994	1995–1999	2005–2009	2010–2014	Total
AD	0	0	990	0	990
AL	0	944	1502	0	2446
AT	1374	1475	1451	0	4300
AU	0	1867	1291	1307	4465
BA	0	788	1475	0	2263
BE	2634	1803	1445	0	5882
BG	961	1873	2316	0	5150
CA	1676	0	2002	0	3678
CH	0	1130	2349	0	3479
CS	0	0	1181	0	1181
CY	0	0	1973	976	2949
CZ	2964	2977	1684	0	7625
DE-E	1276	1917	1870	916	5979
DE-W	1910	1969	1898	963	6740
DK	978	960	1436	0	3374
EE	939	1955	1425	1452	5771
ES	3963	2309	2526	1101	9899
FI	570	938	2050	0	3558
FR	950	1583	2320	0	4853
GB-GBN	1351	854	2188	0	4393
GB-NIR	291	899	433	0	1623
GR	0	1095	1398	0	2493
HR	0	2092	1406	0	3498
HU	949	1582	2443	0	4974
IE	965	931	860	0	2756
IS	690	953	770	0	2413
IT	1986	1957	2397	0	6340
LT	919	1924	1421	0	4264
LU	0	1125	1563	0	2688
LV	780	2094	1418	0	4292
MD	0	930	2483	0	3413
ME	0	218	1473	0	1691
MK	0	890	1416	0	2306
MT	332	954	1384	0	2670
NL	987	955	2309	1726	5977
NO	1224	1127	2102	0	4453
NZ	0	1060	0	740	1800
PL	923	2096	2355	897	6271
PT	1133	945	1424	0	3502
RO	1058	2287	3041	1433	7819
RS	0	1239	1451	0	2690
RS-KM	0	0	1561	0	1561
RU	1768	4248	3254	2215	11,485
SE	971	1999	2057	1093	6120
SI	986	1967	2285	992	6230
SK	1557	2371	1402	0	5330
UA	0	3596	2345	1447	7388
US	1698	2607	1189	2137	7631
Total	40,763	69,483	83,012	19,395	212,653

Note: AD—Andorra, AL—Albania, AT—Austria, AU—Australia, BA—Bosnia and Herzegovina, BE—Belgium, BG—Bulgaria, CA—Canada, CH—Switzerland, CS—Serbia and Montenegro, CY—Cyprus, CZ—Czech Republic, DE-E—East-Germany, DE-W—West-Germany, DK—Denmark, EE—Estonia, ES—Spain, FI—Finland, FR—France, GB-GBN—Great Britain, GB-NIR—North-Ireland, GR—Greece, HR—Croatia, HU—Hungary, IE—Ireland, IS—Iceland, IT—Italy, LT—Lithuania, LU—Luxemburg, LV—Latvia, MD—Moldova, ME—Montenegro, MK—Macedonia, MT—Malta, NL—Netherlands, NO—Norway, NZ—New-Zealand, PL—Poland, PT—Portugal, RO—Romania, RS—Serbia, RS-KM—Kosovo, RU—Russia, SE—Sweden, SI—Slovenia, SK—Slovakia, UA—Ukraine, US—United States.

Table A2. The mean of the relative importance of work by country and period.

	1990–1994	1995–1999	2005–2009	2010–2014	Total
AD	-	-	1.121	-	1.121
AL	-	1.270	1.240	-	1.252
AT	1.143	1.131	1.089	-	1.121
AU	-	1.045	1.005	0.986	1.016
BA	-	1.118	1.085	-	1.097
BE	1.149	1.153	1.135	-	1.147
BG	1.162	1.158	1.117	-	1.140
CA	1.069	-	1.024	-	1.044
CH	-	1.096	1.108	-	1.104
CS	-	-	1.108	-	1.108
CY	-	-	1.054	1.067	1.058
CZ	1.214	1.173	1.125	-	1.179
DE-E	1.150	1.173	1.133	1.090	1.143
DE-W	1.042	1.048	1.052	1.044	1.047
DK	1.100	1.055	1.055	-	1.068
EE	1.121	1.203	1.143	1.105	1.150
ES	1.177	1.174	1.135	1.140	1.162
FI	1.134	1.091	1.048	-	1.073
FR	1.181	1.183	1.159	-	1.171
GB-GBN	1.029	1.016	0.968	-	0.996
GB-NIR	1.060	0.957	0.905	-	0.961
GR	-	1.111	1.081	-	1.094
HR	-	1.114	1.098	-	1.107
HU	1.185	1.159	1.153	-	1.161
IE	1.099	1.028	1.018	-	1.050
IS	1.121	1.119	1.100	-	1.114
IT	1.144	1.131	1.119	-	1.131
LT	1.135	1.152	1.122	-	1.138
LU	-	1.117	1.167	-	1.146
LV	1.114	1.239	1.192	-	1.201
MD	-	1.125	1.112	-	1.116
ME	-	1.127	1.095	-	1.099
MK	-	1.180	1.065	-	1.109
MT	1.155	1.121	1.079	-	1.103
NL	1.072	1.054	1.018	1.023	1.034
NO	1.144	1.111	1.083	-	1.107
NZ	-	1.069	-	1.014	1.047
PL	1.131	1.153	1.089	1.100	1.118
PT	1.148	1.139	1.126	-	1.137
RO	1.201	1.178	1.115	1.110	1.144
RS	-	1.157	1.120	-	1.137
RS-KM	-	-	1.114	-	1.114
RU	1.120	1.137	1.081	1.073	1.106
SE	1.144	1.092	1.060	1.062	1.084
SI	1.232	1.195	1.148	1.125	1.173
SK	1.182	1.132	1.125	-	1.145
UA	-	1.107	1.060	1.044	1.080
US	1.035	0.992	0.936	0.950	0.981
Total	1.136	1.129	1.095	1.056	1.110

Note: For country codes see Table A1.

Table A3. The mean of the relative importance of family by country and period.

	1990–1994	1995–1999	2005–2009	2010–2014	Total
AD	-	-	1.282	-	1.282
AL	-	1.341	1.352	-	1.348
AT	1.248	1.241	1.208	-	1.232
AU	-	1.225	1.269	1.286	1.256
BA	-	1.189	1.194	-	1.192
BE	1.263	1.262	1.278	-	1.266
BG	1.255	1.302	1.292	-	1.289
CA	1.223	-	1.229	-	1.226
CH	-	1.237	1.205	-	1.215
CS	-	-	1.257	-	1.257
CY	-	-	1.189	1.196	1.192
CZ	1.327	1.343	1.332	-	1.334
DE-E	1.251	1.282	1.301	1.284	1.282
DE-W	1.229	1.239	1.240	1.221	1.234
DK	1.262	1.274	1.224	-	1.249
EE	1.305	1.303	1.302	1.308	1.304
ES	1.260	1.284	1.278	1.304	1.275
FI	1.251	1.252	1.277	-	1.266
FR	1.274	1.270	1.247	-	1.260
GB-GBN	1.267	1.297	1.284	-	1.281
GB-NIR	1.277	1.253	1.267	-	1.261
GR	-	1.205	1.159	-	1.179
HR	-	1.236	1.226	-	1.232
HU	1.315	1.327	1.301	-	1.312
IE	1.219	1.228	1.211	-	1.219
IS	1.272	1.264	1.222	-	1.253
IT	1.240	1.241	1.228	-	1.236
LT	1.233	1.238	1.267	-	1.247
LU	-	1.263	1.249	-	1.255
LV	1.306	1.278	1.278	-	1.283
MD	-	1.281	1.254	-	1.261
ME	-	1.281	1.235	-	1.241
MK	-	1.238	1.162	-	1.191
MT	1.229	1.199	1.197	-	1.202
NL	1.183	1.188	1.217	1.292	1.228
NO	1.203	1.233	1.219	-	1.219
NZ	-	1.262	-	1.279	1.269
PL	1.223	1.238	1.234	1.221	1.232
PT	1.254	1.247	1.249	-	1.250
RO	1.264	1.266	1.249	1.278	1.261
RS	-	1.269	1.232	-	1.249
RS-KM	-	-	1.221	-	1.221
RU	1.309	1.298	1.286	1.338	1.304
SE	1.217	1.218	1.255	1.223	1.231
SI	1.262	1.288	1.277	1.326	1.286
SK	1.284	1.282	1.270	-	1.279
UA	-	1.292	1.283	1.293	1.289
US	1.191	1.177	1.232	1.224	1.202
Total	1.257	1.263	1.251	1.275	1.258

Note: For country codes see Table A1.

Table A4. The mean of the relative importance of friends by country and period.

	1990–1994	1995–1999	2005–2009	2010–2014	Total
AD	-	-	1.126	-	1.126
AL	-	1.027	1.005	-	1.014
AT	1.027	1.051	1.125	-	1.068
AU	-	1.126	1.136	1.148	1.135
BA	-	1.092	1.059	-	1.071
BE	1.114	1.088	1.112	-	1.106
BG	1.053	1.091	1.086	-	1.082
CA	1.070	-	1.123	-	1.099
CH	-	1.144	1.123	-	1.130
CS	-	-	1.111	-	1.111
CY	-	-	1.054	1.071	1.060
CZ	1.037	1.100	1.157	-	1.088
DE-E	1.040	1.144	1.174	1.179	1.137
DE-W	1.098	1.134	1.134	1.133	1.124
DK	1.121	1.147	1.123	-	1.129
EE	1.043	1.086	1.102	1.145	1.098
ES	1.103	1.086	1.113	1.159	1.108
FI	1.098	1.170	1.158	-	1.152
FR	1.089	1.120	1.109	-	1.109
GB-GBN	1.112	1.174	1.185	-	1.161
GB-NIR	1.121	1.174	1.205	-	1.173
GR	-	1.051	1.023	-	1.036
HR	-	1.088	1.075	-	1.083
HU	0.999	1.058	1.092	-	1.064
IE	1.081	1.116	1.155	-	1.116
IS	1.100	1.085	1.108	-	1.097
IT	1.053	1.029	1.043	-	1.042
LT	0.987	1.018	1.042	-	1.019
LU	-	1.097	1.112	-	1.106
LV	1.002	1.050	1.059	-	1.045
MD	-	0.978	0.990	-	0.987
ME	-	1.109	1.097	-	1.099
MK	-	1.054	1.086	-	1.074
MT	0.873	0.913	0.975	-	0.940
NL	1.130	1.133	1.142	1.161	1.144
NO	1.132	1.132	1.132	-	1.132
NZ	-	1.126	-	1.134	1.129
PL	0.927	0.979	1.042	1.030	1.002
PT	1.048	1.041	1.077	-	1.058
RO	0.973	0.950	0.956	0.936	0.953
RS	-	1.114	1.075	-	1.093
RS-KM	-	-	0.916	-	0.916
RU	1.045	1.046	1.077	1.070	1.059
SE	1.155	1.153	1.144	1.160	1.151
SI	1.059	1.111	1.127	1.138	1.113
SK	1.021	1.058	1.070	-	1.051
UA	-	1.080	1.058	1.070	1.071
US	1.045	1.076	1.099	1.089	1.076
Total	1.064	1.079	1.088	1.104	1.082

Note: For country codes see Table A1.

Table A5. The mean of the relative importance of leisure time by country and period.

	1990–1994	1995–1999	2005–2009	2010–2014	Total
AD	-	-	1.144	-	1.144
AL	-	0.808	0.939	-	0.888
AT	1.023	1.027	1.070	-	1.040
AU	-	1.052	1.090	1.092	1.074
BA	-	0.992	1.012	-	1.005
BE	1.074	1.052	1.079	-	1.068
BG	1.032	0.949	0.989	-	0.983
CA	1.026	-	1.030	-	1.028
CH	-	1.066	1.057	-	1.060
CS	-	-	1.018	-	1.018
CY	-	-	1.013	1.043	1.023
CZ	1.017	1.028	1.127	-	1.046
DE-E	1.049	1.051	1.074	1.094	1.064
DE-W	1.103	1.054	1.050	1.047	1.066
DK	1.095	1.099	1.099	-	1.098
EE	1.046	1.023	1.066	1.083	1.052
ES	1.057	1.033	1.102	1.118	1.070
FI	1.107	1.076	1.132	-	1.113
FR	1.039	1.056	1.031	-	1.041
GB-GBN	1.076	1.138	1.103	-	1.101
GB-NIR	0.985	1.060	1.097	-	1.056
GR	-	1.035	1.026	-	1.030
HR	-	1.001	1.031	-	1.013
HU	1.019	1.046	1.081	-	1.058
IE	0.966	1.020	1.076	-	1.018
IS	1.023	1.013	1.008	-	1.014
IT	1.010	0.978	0.976	-	0.987
LT	0.971	0.977	1.035	-	0.995
LU	-	1.061	1.032	-	1.044
LV	1.013	0.966	1.046	-	1.001
MD	-	0.953	0.955	-	0.954
ME	-	0.958	1.035	-	1.025
MK	-	1.020	1.056	-	1.042
MT	0.990	1.018	1.024	-	1.018
NL	1.089	1.104	1.122	1.133	1.117
NO	1.036	1.045	1.076	-	1.057
NZ	-	1.086	-	1.103	1.093
PL	0.965	0.950	1.006	1.001	0.981
PT	0.996	0.986	1.005	-	0.997
RO	0.953	0.952	0.972	0.991	0.967
RS	-	0.959	1.019	-	0.992
RS-KM	-	-	0.899	-	0.899
RU	1.018	0.987	1.022	1.029	1.010
SE	1.106	1.084	1.115	1.102	1.101
SI	0.985	1.042	1.088	1.110	1.061
SK	0.994	1.008	1.009	-	1.004
UA	-	0.967	1.007	1.019	0.990
US	0.987	0.982	1.006	1.034	1.002
Total	1.032	1.013	1.042	1.063	1.033

Note: For country codes see Table A1.

Table A6. The mean of the relative importance of religion by country and period.

	1990–1994	1995–1999	2005–2009	2010–2014	Total
AD	-	-	0.633	-	0.633
AL	-	0.911	0.841	-	0.868
AT	0.859	0.813	0.768	-	0.813
AU	-	0.769	0.707	0.679	0.725
BA	-	0.902	0.953	-	0.935
BE	0.770	0.773	0.717	-	0.758
BG	0.663	0.784	0.836	-	0.785
CA	0.846	-	0.849	-	0.848
CH	-	0.748	0.726	-	0.733
CS	-	-	0.898	-	0.898
CY	-	-	1.002	0.944	0.983
CZ	0.642	0.624	0.591	-	0.624
DE-E	0.654	0.547	0.554	0.573	0.576
DE-W	0.728	0.729	0.745	0.748	0.736
DK	0.661	0.656	0.676	-	0.666
EE	0.636	0.676	0.684	0.654	0.666
ES	0.809	0.809	0.714	0.656	0.768
FI	0.736	0.777	0.715	-	0.735
FR	0.738	0.689	0.694	-	0.701
GB-GBN	0.773	0.697	0.728	-	0.736
GB-NIR	0.911	0.850	0.861	-	0.864
GR	-	0.906	0.973	-	0.944
HR	-	0.894	0.914	-	0.902
HU	0.831	0.771	0.728	-	0.761
IE	1.011	0.940	0.854	-	0.938
IS	0.836	0.814	0.781	-	0.810
IT	0.906	0.938	0.924	-	0.922
LT	0.806	0.856	0.848	-	0.843
LU	-	0.747	0.689	-	0.713
LV	0.688	0.760	0.733	-	0.740
MD	-	0.964	1.002	-	0.992
ME	-	0.855	0.956	-	0.943
MK	-	0.861	0.921	-	0.898
MT	1.113	1.070	1.058	-	1.069
NL	0.730	0.700	0.699	0.622	0.682
NO	0.712	0.720	0.683	-	0.700
NZ	-	0.697	-	0.685	0.692
PL	1.048	1.020	0.980	0.975	1.002
PT	0.920	0.947	0.922	-	0.928
RO	1.010	1.030	1.103	1.073	1.064
RS	-	0.855	0.896	-	0.877
RS-KM	-	-	1.051	-	1.051
RU	0.717	0.793	0.808	0.792	0.786
SE	0.627	0.668	0.618	0.609	0.634
SI	0.774	0.766	0.748	0.720	0.753
SK	0.815	0.847	0.883	-	0.847
UA	-	0.837	0.878	0.901	0.863
US	0.979	0.991	0.944	0.911	0.958
Total	0.793	0.810	0.818	0.779	0.807

Note: For country codes see Table A1.

Table A7. The HAPC models of the relative importance of life aspects, only time related variables.

	Work		Family		Friends		Leisure Time		Religion	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Individual effects										
Age	−0.0011 ***	(0.000)	0.0003 ***	(0.000)	−0.0017 ***	(0.000)	−0.0023 ***	(0.000)	0.0037 ***	(0.000)
Age squared	−0.0002 ***	(0.000)	−0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0001 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)
Intercept	1.1515 ***	(0.014)	1.2582 ***	(0.008)	1.0574 ***	(0.014)	1.0260 ***	(0.013)	0.8142 ***	(0.021)
Variance components										
Individual	0.0512 ***	(0.000)	0.0328 ***	(0.000)	0.0360 ***	(0.000)	0.0443 ***	(0.000)	0.0744 ***	(0.000)
Period	0.0005 ***	(0.000)	0.0001 ***	(0.000)	0.0004 ***	(0.000)	0.0005 ***	(0.000)	0.0004 ***	(0.000)
Cohort	0.0002 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0003 ***	(0.000)
Country	0.0030 ***	(0.000)	0.0013 ***	(0.000)	0.0035 ***	(0.000)	0.0028 ***	(0.000)	0.0163 ***	(0.002)
N	209,851		209,851		209,851		209,851		209,851	
AIC	−27,567.3		−121,174.6		−101,906.1		−58,269.5		50,907.7	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A8. The HAPC models of the relative importance of life aspects, with control variables.

	Work		Family		Friends		Leisure Time		Religion	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Individual effects										
Age	0.0000	(0.000)	−0.0011 ***	(0.000)	−0.0013 ***	(0.000)	−0.0020 ***	(0.000)	0.0030 ***	(0.000)
Age squared	−0.0001 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)	−0.0000	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)
Female	−0.0190 ***	(0.001)	0.0161 ***	(0.001)	−0.0065 ***	(0.001)	−0.0137 ***	(0.001)	0.0739 ***	(0.001)
Education: more than secondary	−0.0172 ***	(0.001)	−0.0173 ***	(0.001)	0.0041 ***	(0.001)	−0.0087 ***	(0.001)	−0.0261 ***	(0.002)
Labor force status (reference: full-time worker)										
Part-time worker	−0.0285 ***	(0.002)	−0.0006	(0.002)	0.0080 ***	(0.002)	−0.0086 ***	(0.002)	0.0225 ***	(0.002)
Self-employed	0.0093 ***	(0.002)	−0.0021	(0.002)	0.0030	(0.002)	−0.0357 ***	(0.002)	0.0146 ***	(0.003)
Retired	−0.1204 ***	(0.002)	0.0310 ***	(0.002)	0.0205 ***	(0.002)	0.0041 **	(0.002)	0.0494 ***	(0.002)
Housewife	−0.0818 ***	(0.002)	0.0207 ***	(0.002)	0.0106 ***	(0.002)	−0.0243 ***	(0.002)	0.0834 ***	(0.002)

Table A8. *Cont.*

	Work		Family		Friends		Leisure Time		Religion	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Student	−0.0642 ***	(0.003)	−0.0014	(0.002)	0.0173 ***	(0.002)	−0.0078 ***	(0.002)	0.0212 ***	(0.003)
Unemployed	−0.0191 ***	(0.002)	0.0074 ***	(0.002)	0.0035 **	(0.002)	−0.0159 ***	(0.002)	0.0346 ***	(0.002)
Other	−0.0849 ***	(0.004)	0.0146 ***	(0.003)	0.0159 ***	(0.003)	−0.0130 ***	(0.003)	0.0652 ***	(0.004)
Type of settlement: city	−0.0099 ***	(0.001)	−0.0051 ***	(0.001)	0.0090 ***	(0.001)	0.0176 ***	(0.001)	−0.0317 ***	(0.001)
Marital status (reference: single)										
Married/living with partner	0.0029 *	(0.002)	0.0775 ***	(0.001)	−0.0498 ***	(0.001)	−0.0323 ***	(0.001)	0.0108 ***	(0.002)
Divorced/separated/widowed	0.0085 ***	(0.002)	0.0498 ***	(0.002)	−0.0266 ***	(0.002)	−0.0280 ***	(0.002)	0.0168 ***	(0.002)
Intercept	1.1873 ***	(0.014)	1.1800 ***	(0.011)	1.0939 ***	(0.014)	1.0666 ***	(0.013)	0.7642 ***	(0.021)
Variance components										
Individual	0.0497 ***	(0.000)	0.0319 ***	(0.000)	0.0356 ***	(0.000)	0.0439 ***	(0.000)	0.0716 ***	(0.000)
Period	0.0006 ***	(0.000)	0.0003 ***	(0.000)	0.0005 ***	(0.000)	0.0004 ***	(0.000)	0.0004 ***	(0.000)
Cohort	0.0002 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0001 ***	(0.000)	0.0003 ***	(0.000)
Country	0.0030 ***	(0.000)	0.0013 ***	(0.000)	0.0034 ***	(0.000)	0.0027 ***	(0.000)	0.0153 ***	(0.002)
N	209,851		209,851		209,851		209,851		209,851	
AIC	−33,859.2		−127,329.9		−104,071.3		−59,998.7		42,743.8	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A9. The number of observations for the importance of good pay by country and period.

	1980–1984	1989–1994	1995–1999	2005–2009	Total
AL	0	0	960	1508	2468
AT	0	1346	1414	1355	4115
AU	1098	0	1761	0	2859
BA	0	0	777	1419	2196
BE	1009	2600	1688	1329	6626
BG	0	962	1782	1281	4025
CA	1173	1584	0	0	2757
CH	0	0	1069	1080	2149
CZ	0	2844	2720	1565	7129
DE-E	0	1220	1781	875	3876
DE-W	1251	1860	1831	941	5883
DK	1087	921	915	1325	4248
EE	0	961	1895	1261	4117
ES	2140	3851	2163	1224	9378
FI	0	565	918	1069	2552
FR	1099	942	1469	1269	4779
GB-GBN	1034	1272	869	1223	4398
GB-NIR	284	270	843	399	1796
GR	0	0	1092	1248	2340
HR	0	0	2088	1306	3394
HU	0	897	1477	1371	3745
IE	1105	907	868	827	3707
IS	891	665	910	748	3214
IT	1298	1948	1849	1317	6412
LT	0	923	1902	1339	4164
LU	0	0	1090	1493	2583
LV	0	881	2052	1308	4241
MD	0	0	912	1372	2284
ME	0	0	217	1432	1649
MK	0	0	962	1395	2357
MT	424	335	899	1215	2873
NL	1123	951	890	1232	4196
NO	949	1146	1042	1005	4142
NZ	0	0	1044	0	1044
PL	0	938	2000	1344	4282
PT	0	1093	849	1208	3150
RO	0	1048	2219	1298	4565
RS	0	0	1195	1363	2558
RS-KM	0	0	0	1559	1559
RU	0	1858	4093	1304	7255
SE	889	968	1882	1090	4829
SI	0	1032	1866	1170	4068
SK	0	1515	2243	1223	4981
UA	0	0	3685	1315	5000
US	2122	1609	2409	0	6140
Total	18,976	39,912	66,590	50,605	176,083

Note: For country codes see Table A1.

Table A10. The number of observations for the importance of having a job that is useful for society by country and period.

	1980–1984	1989–1994	1995–1999	2005–2009	Total
AL	0	0	0	1508	1508
AT	0	1346	1414	1344	4104
BA	0	0	0	1419	1419
BE	1009	2600	1688	1329	6626
BG	0	962	872	1206	3040
CA	1173	1584	0	0	2757
CH	0	0	0	1080	1080
CZ	0	2844	1683	1538	6065
DE-E	0	1220	823	875	2918
DE-W	1251	1860	840	941	4892
DK	1087	921	915	1325	4248
EE	0	961	917	1248	3126
ES	2140	3851	1073	1224	8288
FI	0	565	0	1069	1634
FR	1099	942	1469	1269	4779
GB-GBN	1034	1272	869	1223	4398
GB-NIR	284	270	843	372	1769
GR	0	0	1092	1247	2339
HR	0	0	994	1246	2240
HU	0	897	890	1371	3158
IE	1105	907	868	750	3630
IS	891	665	910	748	3214
IT	1298	1948	1849	1305	6400
LT	0	923	961	1339	3223
LU	0	0	1090	1472	2562
LV	0	881	911	1287	3079
MD	0	0	0	1352	1352
ME	0	0	0	1432	1432
MK	0	0	0	1203	1203
MT	424	335	899	1189	2847
NL	1123	951	890	1233	4197
NO	949	1146	0	1005	3100
PL	0	938	974	1310	3222
PT	0	1093	849	1200	3142
RO	0	1048	1034	1197	3279
RS	0	0	0	1363	1363
RS-KM	0	0	0	1559	1559
RU	0	1858	2223	1277	5358
SE	889	968	956	1090	3903
SI	0	1032	931	1166	3129
SK	0	1515	1223	1162	3900
UA	0	0	1084	1298	2382
US	2122	1609	0	0	3731
Total	17,878	39,912	34,034	49,771	141,595

Note: For country codes see Table A1.

Table A11. The HAPC models of the importance of work values, only time related variables.

	Good Pay		Job Security		Good Hours		Interesting		Useful	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Individual effects										
Age	−0.0019 ***	(0.000)	0.0007 ***	(0.000)	−0.0015 ***	(0.000)	−0.0029 ***	(0.000)	0.0013 ***	(0.000)
Age squared	−0.0000 ***	(0.000)	−0.0000 ***	(0.000)	−0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)
Intercept	0.7949 ***	(0.027)	0.6685 ***	(0.028)	0.5238 ***	(0.022)	0.6580 ***	(0.025)	0.4275 ***	(0.023)
Variance components										
Individual	0.1483 ***	(0.000)	0.2095 ***	(0.000)	0.2384 ***	(0.000)	0.2126 ***	(0.000)	0.2282 ***	(0.000)
Period	0.0018 ***	(0.001)	0.0019 ***	(0.001)	0.0008 ***	(0.000)	0.0018 ***	(0.001)	0.0004 ***	(0.000)
Cohort	0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0001 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)
Country	0.0119 ***	(0.001)	0.0129 ***	(0.001)	0.0113 ***	(0.001)	0.0069 ***	(0.001)	0.0184 ***	(0.002)
N	176,083		175,712		175,523		175,631		141,595	
AIC	163,885.0		224,323.3		246,735.8		226,737.6		192,906.2	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A12. The HAPC models of the importance of work values, with control variables.

	Good Pay		Job Security		Good Hours		Interesting		Useful	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Individual effects										
Age	−0.0022 ***	(0.000)	0.0002 *	(0.000)	−0.0018 ***	(0.000)	−0.0021 ***	(0.000)	0.0019 ***	(0.000)
Age squared	−0.0000	(0.000)	−0.0000	(0.000)	−0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0000	(0.000)
Female	−0.0474 ***	(0.002)	−0.0003	(0.002)	0.0506 ***	(0.003)	0.0005	(0.002)	0.0145 ***	(0.003)
Education: more than secondary	−0.0340 ***	(0.003)	−0.0863 ***	(0.003)	−0.0525 ***	(0.004)	0.0806 ***	(0.003)	0.0597 ***	(0.004)
Labor force status (reference: full-time worker)										
Part-time worker	−0.0432 ***	(0.004)	−0.0482 ***	(0.005)	0.0514 ***	(0.005)	−0.0185 ***	(0.005)	0.0125 **	(0.005)
Self-employed	−0.0473 ***	(0.004)	−0.1264 ***	(0.005)	−0.0654 ***	(0.005)	−0.0116 **	(0.005)	−0.0288 ***	(0.006)

Table A12. *Cont.*

	Good Pay		Job Security		Good Hours		Interesting		Useful	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Retired	−0.0182 ***	(0.004)	−0.0230 ***	(0.005)	−0.0039	(0.005)	−0.0244 ***	(0.005)	−0.0138 **	(0.005)
Housewife	−0.0042	(0.004)	−0.0254 ***	(0.004)	−0.0013	(0.005)	−0.0362 ***	(0.004)	−0.0380 ***	(0.005)
Student	−0.0286 ***	(0.005)	−0.0443 ***	(0.005)	−0.0313 ***	(0.006)	0.0493 ***	(0.006)	0.0554 ***	(0.006)
Unemployed	−0.0119 ***	(0.004)	−0.0123 ***	(0.004)	−0.0026	(0.005)	−0.0229 ***	(0.004)	−0.0189 ***	(0.005)
Other	−0.0238 ***	(0.007)	−0.0250 ***	(0.008)	−0.0028	(0.009)	−0.0372 ***	(0.008)	−0.0058	(0.010)
Type of settlement: city	0.0019	(0.002)	−0.0297 ***	(0.003)	0.0028	(0.003)	0.0335 ***	(0.003)	−0.0054 *	(0.003)
Marital status (reference: single)										
Married/living with partner	0.0205 ***	(0.003)	0.0280 ***	(0.003)	0.0110 ***	(0.004)	−0.0054	(0.003)	−0.0001	(0.004)
Divorced/separated/widowed	0.0247 ***	(0.004)	0.0192 ***	(0.005)	0.0096 **	(0.005)	−0.0160 ***	(0.005)	−0.0093 *	(0.005)
Intercept	0.8262 ***	(0.025)	0.7046 ***	(0.026)	0.5217 ***	(0.019)	0.6644 ***	(0.018)	0.3964 ***	(0.025)
Variance components										
Individual	0.1473 ***	(0.000)	0.2074 ***	(0.000)	0.2367 ***	(0.000)	0.2111 ***	(0.000)	0.2274 ***	(0.000)
Period	0.0014 ***	(0.001)	0.0014 ***	(0.001)	0.0003 ***	(0.000)	0.0006 ***	(0.000)	0.0005 ***	(0.000)
Cohort	0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0001 ***	(0.000)	0.0001 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)	0.0000 ***	(0.000)
Country	0.0117 ***	(0.001)	0.0121 ***	(0.001)	0.0113 ***	(0.001)	0.0066 ***	(0.001)	0.0194 ***	(0.002)
N	176,083		175,712		175,523		175,631		141,595	
AIC	162,748.6		222,600.1		245,546.4		225,539.6		192,397.8	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

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Media and Generations in Portugal

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Abstract: Many discourses link media with generations, ascribing particular appetence for the use of new media to youth, in contrast with older generations. This article aims to give an account of the empirical regularities but also differences found in a longitudinal quantitative analysis of Internet users, uses, and media preferences among different Portuguese age cohorts. Making use of questionnaire surveys with representative samples, the importance of generational belongings in structuring different types of relationships with media is demonstrated, as youngsters seem to prefer new media. However, this variable does not hold in itself complete explanatory power. The importance of formal education, besides other sociographic variables, is clear, indicating the existence of social disparities within age cohorts, with repercussions on the mediated access to resources and opportunities. The diversity and inequalities found through the statistical analysis help to combat the rhetoric of a supposedly innate, all-encompassing digital nativity. By adopting a social constructivist approach, with a more holistic scope, this article also aims to reconstruct part of the complexity and multidimensionality of the relationship between and within Portuguese generations with media, thereby deconstructing more essentialist and homogenising notions of youth and generations.

Keywords: generations; media; digital divide

1. Introduction

1.1. Aims, Research Questions, and Relevance

We constantly see the category "generations" being used as a way of understanding and describing the world—generationalism [1]—and, in parallel, a re-emergence of its use in youth studies [2].

It has also been used to understand the relationship of people with media in a contemporary world characterized by the increasing importance of mediation [3] within a process of deep mediatization [4] that, dialectically, influences society. More than ever, media pervades everyday life [5] and are part of the "texture of experience" [6] (p. 2), amounting to a crucial force of symbolic power [7], for much of the social construction of reality is now mediated [4]. Therefore, media is a crucial field that must be studied if we wish to better understand contemporary societies.

Drawing on the sociological importance of generations, this article aims to provide an account of the empirical regularities, but also differences, found in a longitudinal quantitative analysis of Portuguese Internet uses and media preferences among different age cohorts—which can be defined as "those persons born in the same time interval and aging together (. . .)" [8] (p. 844), "who experienced the same event within the same time interval" [8] (p. 845).

Approaching the problem from a multidimensional perspective rooted in the Portuguese context—a country that ranks 16th out of the 28 EU member states in "The Digital Economy and Society

Index" (DESI[1]) 2018 edition, therefore belonging to the medium-performing cluster of countries — the following main research question was formulated:

RQ: Is there, in the Portuguese context, anything particular about the relationship of youth with media?

Alongside which, a few subsidiary research questions were formulated:

SRQ 1.1: Are there different patterns of Internet use in Portugal? SRQ 1.2: If so, what are they like? Is Portuguese youth more predisposed to new media use and online activities than the older generations? SRQ 1.3: If it is, can we relate these differences to age cohorts?

SRQ 2.1: Do different age cohorts prefer different media—youth favouring new media vs. elderly generations favouring mass media? SRQ 2.2: If this is the case, can these differences be explained solely on the basis of age cohorts?

1.2. Generations

To discuss generations by overcoming a more naturalistic definition, one that sees generations as simply succeeding one another in linear order, we must turn to the seminal work of Karl Mannheim [9]. Mannheim proposed a historical, culturalist view of generations, stating that age cohorts on their own are not sufficient to shape a unified sense of generational belonging within coevals. He thus unfolded generations into a tripartite typology: a sense of collective generational identity is formed not merely out of being born at the same historical time and place (generation as location - Generationslagerung), but by synchronically experiencing crucial, shared historical events and societal processes, at the same biographical stage (generation as actuality—Generationszusammenhang). Hence, generations are not reducible to coevals. Generation as an actuality only emerges when a worldview, a collective memory, and self-consciousness are shared but, even within this age cohort, social differentiation will be found—the so-called generation units (Generationseinheiten), or social generations, as refined by Pilcher [10] and Aboim and Vasconcelos [11], who have shed light on this multidimensional approach to generations. This notion of generation unit intends to move beyond a reductionist, homogeneous view of age cohorts by fostering a sociological view instead.

Many have followed and proposed refinements of Mannheim's seminal contributions [10–15]. Some have combined Manheim's legacy with the contributions of Bourdieu [13,16,17]. Based on sociological theory and drawing mainly on Bourdieu, a generation can be defined as "a cohort of persons passing through time that come to share a common habitus, hexis and culture, a function of which is to provide them with a collective memory that serves to integrate the cohort over a finite period of time" [13] (p. 93). A generation must then have a kind of self-reference and a "we-sense" [14] (p. 258).

1.3. Media and Generations

The academic discourse relating generations and media is not new [18]. One of the most strongly used terms in contemporary discourse on media and generations has been that of "digital natives", coined by Marc Prensky [19,20]. However, other concepts attempting to refer to the relationship between generations and media have been crafted. To name a few: Tapscott [21] employed the term "net generation" for all those born between 1977 and 1997, Rheingold [22] coined the term "generation txt", associating it with the use of text messages, Feixa wrote about the "generation@" [23] and later on the "#generation" [24], Huang [25] of the "social media generation" and Taipale of "first" and "second digital generation" [26], Sackmann and Winkler, based on the idea of technology generations, as "groups of birth cohorts whose conjunctive experience with technology is differentiated by social change" [27] (p. 493), have found empirical evidences of a technological associated cohort influence with the emergence of an "internet generation" (those born after 1980).

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1   https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/desi.

1.4. Media, Youth, and the Social

At an almost similar pace to this lexical fruitfulness and sometimes simplistic abuse by media discourses (often transforming complex and multidimensional concepts into shallow buzzwords) contributions have been made towards the critical deconstruction of the rhetoric present in some of the epistemological foundations of a supposedly "digital global generation" composed of "digital natives" [28–34]. These criticisms call for a more refined and multidimensional view that does not conceal internal variations existing within this age cohort, situating it instead within multiple contexts of existence. Special vigilance against the danger of expressions like "digital generation" is stressed [35,36], as well as against other kinds of essentialist notions, abusive, labels, and forced dichotomies between generations, based solely on the year of birth and apparently defined by technology alone.

It is important not to forget that media and youth are not monolithic categories [37]—in fact, youth and its meanings are increasingly elastic [38] (p. 6). Reference to Bourdieu's classical text—"Youth is just a word" [39]—is already an academic social regularity in the sociological approach to youth. It is typically employed to promote an understanding of youth that is not only biological but that views youth as a socially constructed category—since the divisions between ages are arbitrary. It is a socially (re)constructed and contingent notion that depends on the historical, cultural, and social context in which it is rooted. As such, the prior delineation of youth in an age cohort is artificial and does not allow to encapsulate the juvenile condition. This condition is typically marked by a transitional phase in the life course, between adolescence and adulthood, characterised by dependence, but also by the construction of autonomy. At this articulated juncture, there is an enormous diversity of individual biographies and social contexts of existence.

Buckingham [40] supports that the repercussions of technology are not rigid, affecting all social agents, regardless of their generation. The impacts of media will depend more on the conditions of their use than on generational belonging. These individual contexts and life courses, id est "a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time" [41] (p. 22) are variable and unequal, even within a specific age cohort. Buckingham also criticises the dualistic narrative of natives versus emigrants, and therefore, an exotic and essentialist take on youth, which can inflate the already distorted view of a profound and uncommunicative generational divide. Moreover, continuity, intrinsic of social change, is still often neglected and absolute power is conferred to media and technology [36,42]. In fact, a historical reading shows that many of the apparently radical innovations are, in fact, reconfigurations through new modalities [43].

Therefore, it is necessary to reject views of media and society imbued with technological determinism [44]. As Wajcman [45] advises, it is important to refute the grounds of this more essentialist view, realising that any technological system is never merely technical, but rather the reflection of a technical dimension, which is also political, economic, cultural, and organisational. Selwin [46] even appeals for academics to critically withdraw from this sociocentric view on youth and new media, stressing the need to "make the familiar strange"—here paraphrasing Mills' classic [47]. To that effect, it is important not to forget the social component of digital technologies and to recapture social theory for a sociological mode of reasoning that avoids, among others, on the one hand, the danger of technological determinism and Manichaean cause-effect thinking; but also, on the other hand, the opposite intellectual trap of anti-essentialism or sociologism. In that sense, it is important to adopt anti-deterministic theories that defend the flexibility both of technology and of social interpretations. Namely, those under the terminological umbrella proposed by MacKenzie and Wajcman [48]—the "social shaping of technology" (SST) [49]—from where the line of the "social construction of technology" (SCOT) is derived [50,51], as well as theories of domestication [52–56]. Both proposals, epistemologically rooted in social constructivism, make it possible to understand the relationship between technology and society in dynamic terms, defending that the two are mutually shaped in a dialectical way. In other words, technologies and practices of users are co-constructed [57]. Therefore, the relationships between media and society are dynamic and dialectical, and the process of information and communications

technologies (ICT) adoption and domestication is not homogeneous in all age cohorts but characterised by social disparities instead.

1.5. Digital Divide

Focusing on these differentiations and social inequalities, the problem of the digital divide emerged in academic and political discourses in the 1990s [58]. In that still, embryonic stage of Internet dissemination characterised by relatively unsophisticated platforms and uses, academic and political agents analysed the problem mainly in infrastructural terms [59] (p. 193), and particularly concerned with issues related to the inequalities existing in patterns of access to ICTs [54,60].

The passage of time—both in social reality and in technology, as well as in the ways of thinking this relation—brought the term "second-level digital divide" [61] into academic discourse. This term calls for the need of a more sophisticated and multidimensional analysis [62], one that pays due attention to the differences in activities and uses [63,64], as well as to different levels of media literacy. Essentially, with the change in nomenclature, there was a shift from the dichotomous digital divide to a more nuanced digital spectrum [65,66] and an interest in digital inequality [67], id est in the digital and networked disparities resulting from (and leading to) different social contexts and the unequal access and distribution of resources.

More recently, with increasing access to ICTs and the consolidation of research, some authors have started to refer to a "third-level digital divide" [68], linked to individuals' capacity to effectively capitalise the potential of *new* media and their tangible outcomes [69,70]. Since Internet use may, or may not, be used as a tool for capital accumulation [71], the central question now is: who benefits from the use of ICTs and how? This view establishes the link between online and offline by calling for an epistemological approach that regards these two dimensions as being interdependent and superimposed [72–75]—debunking the myth of the cyberspace [73]. Likewise, it thereby rejects technological determinism, attempting to understand how new media are embedded in the social fabric, and consequently, are also socially co-shaped.

1.6. Youth and New Media Studies

An empirical observation of the disparate relationships social agents establish with media helps to deconstruct discourses on the homogenising power of media and to overthrow any deterministic, linear and rigid conception of society and generations. In fact, and focusing on young people, there is countless empirical evidence reflecting, on the one hand, their unequal access to ICTs, and, on the other hand, their varied relationships with media [31].

These studies empirically show how generational belonging has served to predict the use of new media over the years and across different national contexts, with youth being faster in the adoption of ICTs [75].

According to Mannheim's generational reasoning, being part of the same age cohort implies the location and exposure to specific historical events, particular life chances and, at the same time, the experience of a particular media environment—defined as "the entire body of available media at any given time" [76] (p. 3). Besides this affinity on a more material and infrastructural level, media can participate at the symbolic level in this process of mediating forms of collective memory, while also promoting generational identities [18,77]. This is even more relevant, especially with "fresh contact" amid the formative stages of the life course, such as the years of late adolescence and youth [9,78]. Therefore, there is theoretical basis supporting the fact that childhood and adolescence are fundamental stages at the beginning of media socialisation and media biographies [77], which can shape future patterns of media domestication and literacy [18], as well as promote media nostalgia [79,80].

These studies tend to recognise greater appetence on the part of younger people, nevertheless, this does not happen in an all-encompassing manner that allows saying there is a unitary digital generation. It is not only technologies that promote and accelerate those differences in practices and representations in a direct, unilateral way. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt a critical perspective

towards homogeneous categorisations of merely generational or age cohorts and be vigilant to *contexts of use* (and non-use) in order to better understand practices and their circumstances [54]. Especially because most of the research suggests that young people are interested in, and motivated for, the use of ICTs, more because of what they can access and do by using them than because of technology in itself [36] (p. 9).

Additionally, the use of new media does not, on its own, miraculously instil in its users neither digital erudition nor a conscious, critical and sophisticated media use. Hargittai [81] portrays different levels of literacy and autonomy in the use of new media through the so-called Internet generation—from digital natives to "digital naives". In other words, uses among young people are not always as sophisticated and rich as is commonly believed, nor are these agents as techno savvy [82] as some less attentive, homogenising interpretations portrait them. In this fashion, even among young people with access to ICTs, gradations of digital inclusion/exclusion were found; not all were capable, to the same extent, of a selective, filtered appropriation, guided by the achievement of individual and collective goals. This means they reached different positions on the ladder of opportunities [83]. What qualifies a basic, autonomous user in the use of media is to be found in a complex network of variables, which includes, for example, the experience and scope of the use, but also attributes like age, gender, and education [30] (p. 506), as well as the person's stage in the life course. Recently a new body of knowledge tries precisely to promote a generational perspective to social change [84] and address the importance of media in the formation of generational belonging [85] alongside the role of individual life course regarding media adoption and use [86–88].

2. Materials and Methods

The data analysed here stem from the collection of data lead by the Portuguese Observatory of Communication (OberCom) and Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology—CIES-IUL (Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia), through the wave of surveys "Sociedade em Rede" (Network Society)[2], to which the 2015 questionnaire "ERC—Públicos e Consumos de Média" (ERC—Media Audiences and Consumption)[3] from the Portuguese Media Regulatory Authority (ERC—Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social) was added.

They are face-to-face questionnaire surveys representative of Portuguese subjects living in mainland Portugal aged 15 or more. The analysis combined the use of univariate and bivariate descriptive statistics, as well as multivariate methods of analysis carried out with the SPSS program.

Using the theoretical insights presented in the introduction, data was analysed in order to find the importance of age of birth in shaping different domestications and preferences regarding the media, understanding that the concept of generation is problematic, as it simplifies multidimensional features. Following Mannheim, one should be vigilant in order to not take the risk to conflate generation as location as generation as actuality or unity, knowing that the family of three time based, historicising concepts of generation, cohort and life course are many times, erroneously, conflated and used interchangeably [89]. Nevertheless, in order to operationalize empirically the research question age cohorts were drawn, knowing that in a generational analysis the difficult question is inevitably were to draw sharp cuts between age cohorts [84–87].

3. Results

3.1. Growth in the Number of Internet Users and Digital Divide

First of all, considering the rate of Portuguese Internet users, considerable growth was witnessed in Portugal (Figure 1). Whereas in 2003 Internet users accounted for less than a third (29%) of

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[2]   Data collected in 2003, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2011, and 2013.
[3]   Fieldwork conducted by Intercampus and GfK in continental Portugal.

the population above 15 years, in 2015 that number had risen to nearly two thirds (60.5%)—in the intervening years the rate was, respectively: 33.8% in 2006; 40.7% in 2008; 44.5% in 2010; 49.2% in 2011; and above the half threshold (55.2%) in 2013.

Focusing on the 39.5% who claimed in 2015 to be non-users, 7.2% stated they had used before. That is, in overall terms, 2.8% abandoned their use and can be considered dropouts. Among the reasons for non-use and digital disengagement [90] nearly half (48.3%) of those who stopped using indicate price, but motivational elements are also important: 27.6% point to a lack of interest and 24.1% to lack of time.
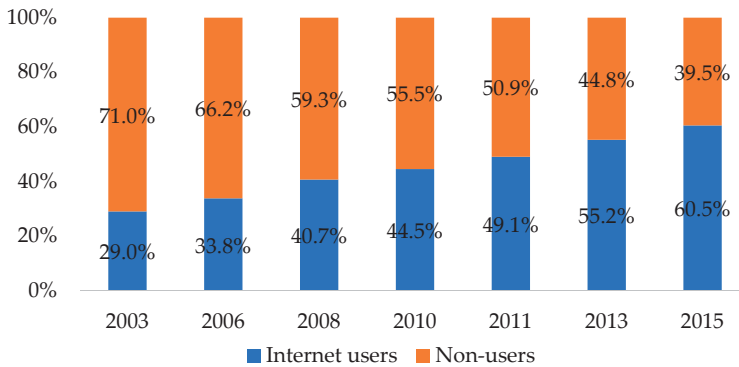
Figure 1. Internet users in relation to non-users. Source: SR2003, SR2006, SR2008, SR2010, SR2011, SR2013, ERC2015. SR2003, *n* = 2450; SR2006, *n* = 2000; SR2008, *n* = 1039; SR2010, *n* = 1255; SR2011, *n* = 1250; SR2013, *n* = 1542; ERC2015, *n* = 1018.

3.2. Internet Use by Key Sociographic Variables

A bivariate analysis helps to understand that being, or not being, an Internet user is not randomly distributed across contemporary Portuguese society. It is in fact structured by age cohorts, but not only.

3.2.1. Internet Use by Age Cohorts

Making an analytical cut across the different age cohorts, Figure 2 clearly shows the effect of this variable. Starting with the most striking value, we realise that 96.3% of the respondents born between 1991 and 2000 (15–24 years old) described themselves as Internet users, whereas this percentage decreases at every jump in the generational ladder. While in the age cohort of 1981–1990 (25–34) the value is not so different (93.1%), the drop is more accentuated at every rise in age—between 1971 and 1980 (35–44) with 81.4%; 1961–1970 (45–54) 63.4%; 1960–1951 (55–64) 36.1%; and, in a more contrasting way with the youngest generations, among the respondents born before 1951, we only find 11.5% of users. Hence, this evidence about a (pre)disposition in Portuguese youth for new media use converges with results unveiled by previous studies.

In fact, if we observe the measures of central tendency, the average age of the total surveyed sample[4] was 47.4 years, with a standard deviation of 18.5. Now, using the two box plots (Figure 3) and focusing on the average age of the Internet users surveyed, we observe that it was 38 (standard deviation of 14), and, among non-users, 62 (also with a standard deviation of 14). Moreover, the comparative analysis of the quartiles supports the fact that non-users tend to be older in Portugal.

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4   It must not be forgotten that the minimum threshold for taking part in the 2015 survey was 15 years of age.
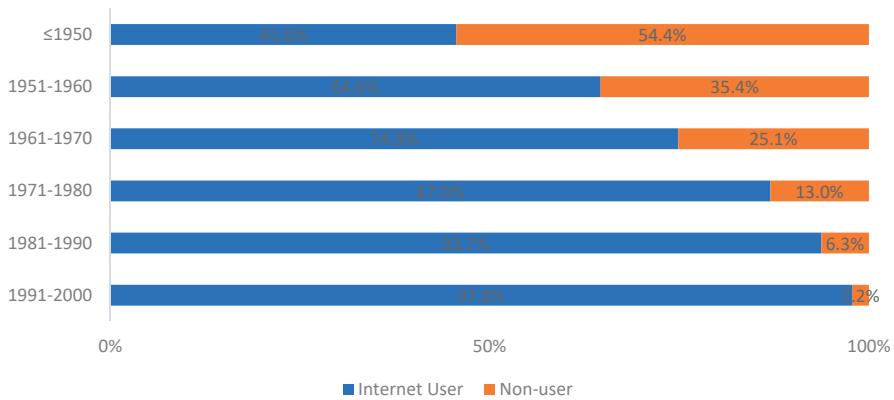
Figure 2. Internet users in relation to non-users, by age cohorts. Source: ERC2015—The new dynamics of audio-visual consumption in Portugal; *n* = 1018.
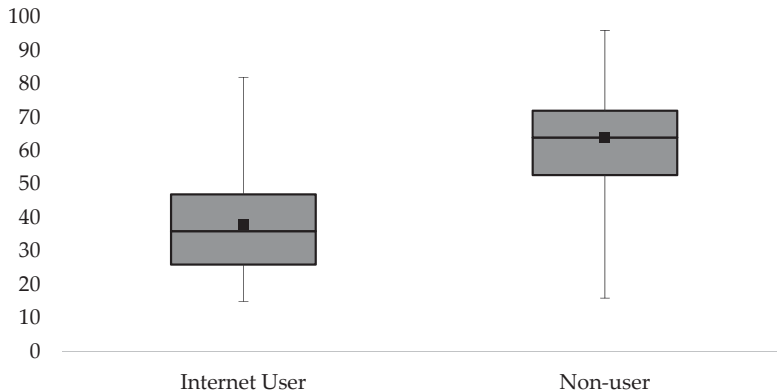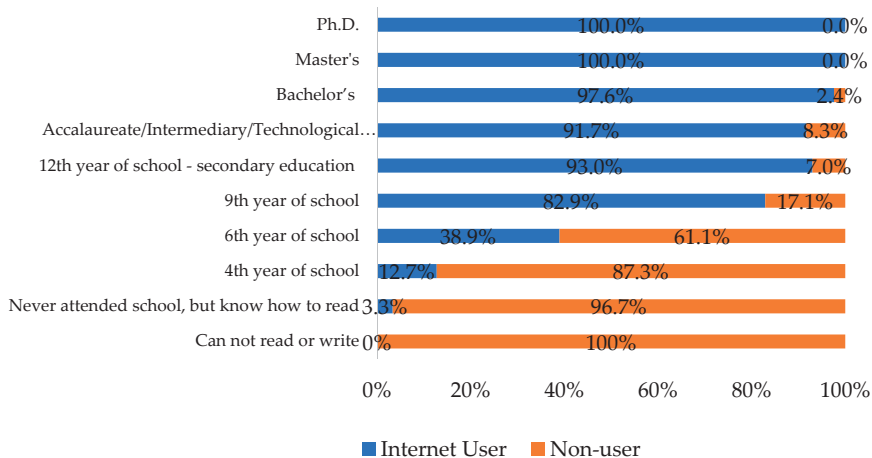

Figure 3. Box plot of ages: Internet users in relation to non-users. Source: ERC2015—The new dynamics of audio-visual consumption in Portugal; *n* = 1018.

However, focusing once again within the youngest, we see that 3.7% consider themselves non-users. This evidence helps to refute the minimally shared commonsensical view that all young people are equal in what concerns access to ICTs and shows that generational belonging does not suffice to explain the relationship with media since we witness a digital divide even within the younger generation in analysis. This digital divide, even amid Portuguese youth, goes along with findings from former research.

Measuring the strength of the relationship, we have a strong relationship with a Cramer's V of 0.650 and an Eta of 0.650. Treating age as a continuous variable (not fragmented into different age levels)—which allows us to measure the relationship in a more refined and robust approach—we have an equally strong Pearson's r[5] of 0.640. Therefore, corroborating previous findings, there is a statistical

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[5] Pearson's r is used with two quantitative variables. In this case, as the variable use is dichotomised, this measure might be used, since it is more powerful—just as defended by some authors, namely [91,92]—and allows this type of tests. The simple linear correlation makes it possible to obtain a measure (correlation coefficient—Pearson's r) through which the strength or intensity of a linear association between two or more variables is determined.

relationship between the two variables, where the probability of finding an Internet user increases when we look at a younger generation.

3.2.2. The Importance of Formal Education

Examining formal education (Figure 4), in relation to the highest level of education completed, we notice there is not a single Internet user among the illiterate in Portugal. Moving on to those who never attended school, but know how to read, we find 3.3% of users; in the so-called first cycle of education in Portugal (4th year of school), we have 12.7% of users; and in the second cycle (6th year of school) that percentage increases substantially to 38.4%. However, it is in the third cycle (9th year of school) that we notice a double increase in relation to the previous one (82.9%). Already at secondary education level, the rate reaches 93% and, at the level of baccalaureate/intermediary/technological specialisation courses (CET), we have 91.7%. Moving into higher education and, unlike what could be expected, from those who completed a bachelor's degree, 97.6% claimed to be users—which refers us to 2.4% of non-users. Finally, at second-level (master's) and third-level (Ph.D.) degrees, all respondents presented themselves as users.

Figure 4. Box plot of ages: Internet users in relation to non-users. Source: ERC2015—The new dynamics of audio-visual consumption in Portugal; *n* = 1014 (4 respondents chose not to answer—0.4% of the total).

Using a Cramer's V to measure the strength of the relationship between the two variables, compared with the remaining variables tested, we get to the strongest value of 0.760. In sum, in Table 1, ordered in descending order, and by adding other sociologically relevant variables, we understand the explanatory power of education—a variable, without a doubt, closely linked to generation. This evidence is in harmony with previous studies and reinforces the importance of cultural capital in the institutionalized state [93] as a predictor of new media use.

Making use of the several previous rounds of surveys on the network society and measuring the relationship of Internet use with the highest level of education completed[6] and age in continuous numerical terms[7], we notice, in a powerful and recurring way, the importance of education in explaining Internet use (Table 2). In a longitudinal view of all the rounds, education was always the variable with greater explanatory force—not the year of birth, although its importance is also great.

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[6]   Cramer's V.
[7]   Pearson's r.

Table 1. Coefficients of association/correlation with Internet use.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable: User or Non-User
	Association/Correlation Coefficient
Level of education completed	0.759
Age group	0.650
Age	0.631
Work situation	0.595
Professional group	0.482
Marital status	0.417
Net monthly income of the household	0.401 *
Net monthly income	0.392 **
Size of the household, including the respondent	0.284
Type of employment contract	0.214
Gender	0.056
Region of residence (NUTS II)	0.002

Source: ERC2015—The new dynamics of audio-visual consumption in Portugal; $n = 1018$; * DK/NA = 435 (43%); ** DK/NA = 413 (41%).

Table 2. Coefficients of association/correlation with Internet use in previous years.

	Coefficient of the Measure of Association/Correlation						
Year of Data Collection	2003	2006	2008	2010	2011	2013	2015
Highest level of education completed	0.597	0.591	0.658	0.662	0.685	0.707	0.759
Age	0.469	0.537	0.516	0.585	0.520	0.613	0.631

Source: SR2003, SR2006, SR2008, SR 2010, SR2011, SR2013, ERC2015; SR2003, $n = 2450$; SR2006, $n = 2000$; SR2008, $n = 1039$; SR2010, $n = 1255$; SR2011, $n = 1250$; SR2013, $n = 1542$; ERC2015, $n = 1018$.

3.3. Internet Uses: Online Activities

Transposing this to Internet uses, we can indicate many different uses of ICTs—from more communicational ones (and, as such, relational and social) to others that are more informational, as well as activities driven by entertainment, consumerism, or online expressive and productive practices.

Focusing on the total surveyed Internet users (Figure 5), in decreasing order of the listed activities, those carried out the most are of the communicational/relational type: 87% send and receive emails, 79.9% use websites of online social networks, and 68% use instant messaging programs[8]. Next in the list, 62.8% of all Portuguese Internet users usually use the Internet to search for information with recreational purposes; over half (58.9%) to watch videos by amateurs in sharing websites[9] and 57.5% to watch videos by professionals[10]. More informational and news-oriented uses follow, with a little over half (53.6%) using the Internet to read contents from newspapers or magazines and 52.9% to search information for professional purposes. Half also use the Internet to make/receive phone calls. With values below the average of Internet users, less than a third (30.4%) use the Internet to read blogs, 28.4% to play online games, and 25% for professional social networks. Moving on to media consumption through the Internet, 22.7% use it to listen to radio programs and 21.4% to watch television programs. Finally, only 11.5% say they take part in online courses and, giving reason to criticisms of an excessive optimism in relation to an apparent growth of a participatory culture in new media [94–97], we witness instead also in Portugal to a participatory divide [98] or digital production gap [99]: only 6.3% of Portuguese users produce contents for their own blog.

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[8] For example: Messenger, iChat, WhatsApp.
[9] The case of YouTube.
[10] In official websites of television channels, Internet platforms, YouTube, among others.

Compared to the younger generation of Internet users (Figure 5), the ordering is practically maintained but nearly always with higher values, except in the search for information with professional purposes and in pure news contents, namely the reading of online newspapers and magazines. At the top, we still have a communicational dimension of usage, where 89.2% of young people use the Internet to send and receive emails, 87.7% for online social networks, and 86.9% for instant messaging programs. An audio-visual dimension follows, with 72.3% using the Internet to watch videos by professionals and 71.5% to watch videos by amateurs. Moving on to voice communication, but through the Internet, we see 64.6% of young users making use of online phone calls. We still observe that 62.3% use the Internet to search for information with recreational purposes. It should be noted that a little over half (51.5%) claim to play games online.

Already with values below the average, 46.9% use the Internet to search for information with professional purposes, 45.4% to read newspapers or magazines, and 35.4% to read blogs. The young users who use the Internet to access other traditional media amount to nearly a third, 32.3% to watch television programs, and 32.3% to listen to radio programs. Finally, 27.7% of young Internet users use the Internet for professional social networks, 15.4% to take part in online courses, and only 6.2% to work on their own blog.
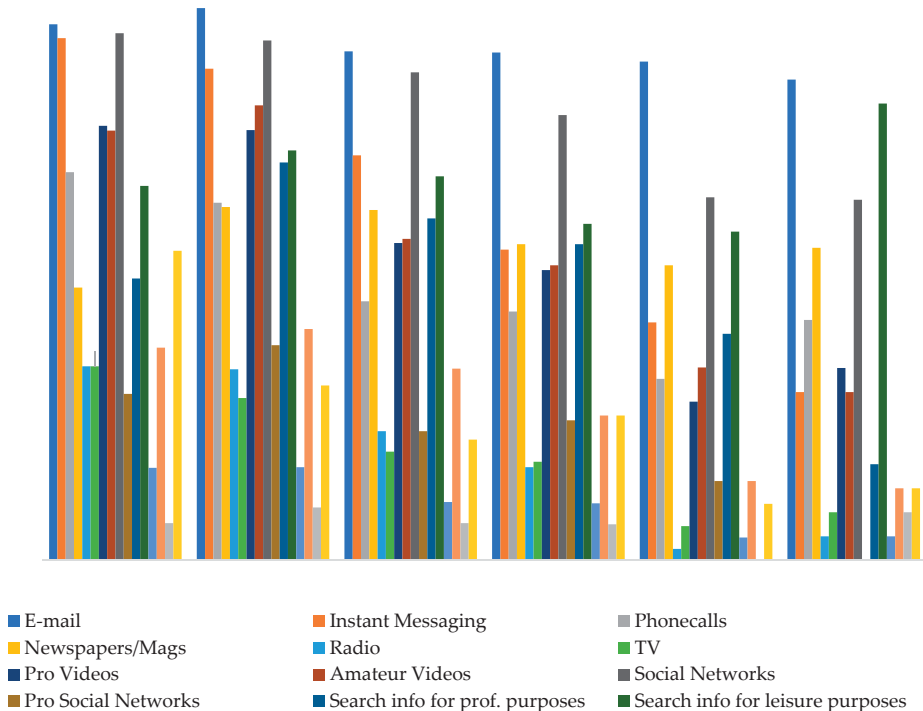
Figure 5. Activities carried out online by generation. Source: ERC2015—The new dynamics of audio-visual consumption in Portugal; *n* = 616.

Creating an index[11] with these 16 activities[12] and then measuring it with age[13], we obtained a correlation coefficient of −0.617. Therefore, we have a negative correlation of strong magnitude: the more age goes up, the more the cumulative number of activities carried out online decreases.

In the 2013 version, a quantitative index including a battery of 71 online activities (spanning the dimensions of communication, entertainment, information, user-generated contents, goods and services, and social networks) was combined. Relating this index with the variable age in scale, an average negative correlation (−0.589) was also found. Likewise, in 2010, creating indexes for activities of communication[14], information[15], entertainment[16], user-generated contents[17], goods and service[18], education[19], and measuring the association with age groups, significant values were found in the measures of correlation[20]—except for the correlation with the indexes goods and services and age. The correlation was negative, in the sense that the levels of use were higher in the younger ages and would decrease in more advanced ages. In other words, the more varied uses would decrease as age would go up. Hence, in a recurring way in all the survey rounds analysed, the more one advances in the age cohort of the sample, the smaller was the number of accumulated online activities and, therefore, the number of users not involved with this type of resources was superior.

3.4. Media Preferences

Broader media consumption, beyond new media alone, seems to be increasingly wider, diversified, fragmented, and structured through several media, whether this phenomenon is called "cross-media" [100,101], "polymedia" [102], "transmedia" [103,104] or "media manifold" [105]. Now, this progressive mediation and cross use of several media further complicates a holistic view of media choices that is vigilant towards the consumption of each individual across different media and devices, whether theoretical one calls it media diets[21] [106] or media repertoires [107–110].

Measuring the growing plurality of uses in a combined way and across the different media seems to be increasingly difficult [111][22]. In view of space limitations, we chose to use a variable with, we believe, a high heuristic potential. It implies ranking the importance of the different media and activities (television, radio, print newspapers/magazines, Internet, video games) and selecting the favoured medium in everyday life.

Television and its consumption are clearly central: when confronted with this choice, from the total population, more than half (65.5%) chose it as their favourite medium from which they could not be deprived on daily life. Second, we have the Internet among 26.7% of the respondents, then the radio (chosen by 4.4%), and 2.6% prefer to read newspapers and/or magazines. Finally, with minor relevance, we have video games for 0.8% of the respondents.

With these national figures set out, is there anything specific about the relationship of the youngest age cohorts with media? A bivariate analysis shows that the orderings vary according to the age groups, almost promoting a ladder effect (Figure 6). Contrastingly, whereas the Internet is the most

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[11] With a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.922, which provides safety on the reliability of the measurement scale, i.e., they are measuring the same.

[12] All the online activities were added up. Consequently, the scale ranged from 0 (none, either because the respondent was not a user or because s/he did not carry it out) to 16 activities.

[13] Treating it as numerical and, therefore, using a Pearson's r.

[14] Chronbach's alpha of 0.7437.

[15] Chronbach's alpha of 0.8027.

[16] Chronbach's alpha of 0.8882.

[17] Chronbach's alpha of 0.9246.

[18] Chronbach's alpha of 0.8219.

[19] Chronbach's alpha of 0.7150.

[20] Pearson's r.

[21] A concept that refers to the combined whole of daily media choices, continued over time, at the level of practices, consumption, and lifestyles.

[22] Notice that this need for an overall framework for the different media had already been subscribed by Katz et al. [112] when analysing mass media in the seventies—so it is not a true novelty.

important activity for the young generation, receiving 66.7% of the votes (against 28.1% for television), in the sample of respondents aged above 64 the importance of television is overwhelming—90.3% (against 2.8% for the Internet), with radio in the lead (4.6%) in this age group.
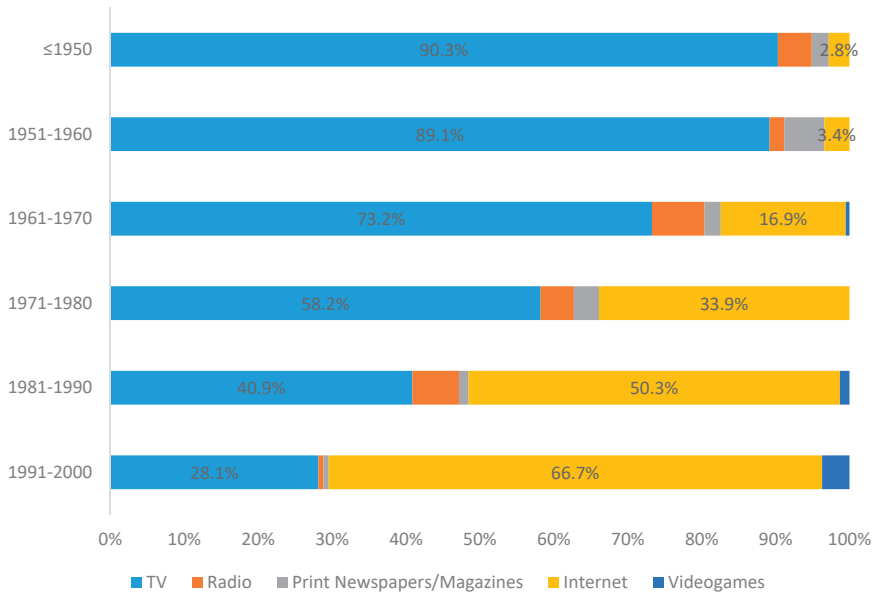

Figure 6. Most difficult activity to give up, by age cohort. Source: ERC2015—The new dynamics of audio-visual consumption in Portugal; *n* = 1018.

Moving this to a multivariate analysis of the same question and bringing in some of the sociographic variables[23] we have previously seen on this article to embrace greater sociological relevance and explanatory power vis-à-vis the different relationships with media, an interesting social phenomenon is observed.

To carry this exercise out, a multiple correspondence analysis was conducted with the aim of graphically representing the data on social context together with this key variable (*media preferences*), since this technique enables an integrated view of the structural interdependencies among the multiple variables in question, managing the multidimensionality of their relationships. Graphically projecting these variables as quantifications facilitates a topological reading and its corresponding comprehension, allows us to interpret and clarify the relational structure underlying the relationship dynamics between the participating variables. As a methodological reminder, it should be mentioned that these are favoured associations, which does not mean that the whole subsample displays all of the distinct and distinctive features of each profile.

Starting our analysis in the first quadrant (+X; +Y) on Figure 7, by quantifying the categories, we see a favoured association between those married, with average to low educational qualifications (second and first cycle of education, respectively), aged between 45 and 64, and those who prefer more traditional media like television or print newspapers and magazines.

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[23]   Due to space limitations, no more were selected, particularly those with a poor explanatory power for the relationship with media (the case of gender).

Right opposite to these profiles, in the second quadrant (–X; +Y) we have—and by comparison with the first dimension, structured according to age and educational capital—respondents with an average or very high educational capital (third cycle of education and PhD, respectively), between the ages of 35 and 44, divorced or separated, closer to the radio. The third quadrant (−X; −Y) points to a favoured trend associating the categories of young people (15–24) and young adults, who are single or in non-marital partnership and have completed secondary education, a bachelor or master's degree, being closer to the Internet and videogames.

Finally, focusing on the fourth quadrant (+X; −Y), we have an older population profile (65 or more years of age), with little or no education, widowed, and more connected to the television. Within this type, which points to the most common and overrepresented categories in each subgroup—where space is essentially structured by age and education (dimension 1) and marital status (dimension 2), these social profiles are the most distanced from a digital and networked way of life. In other words, they are in the field of digital exclusion and, therefore and concurrently, social exclusion.
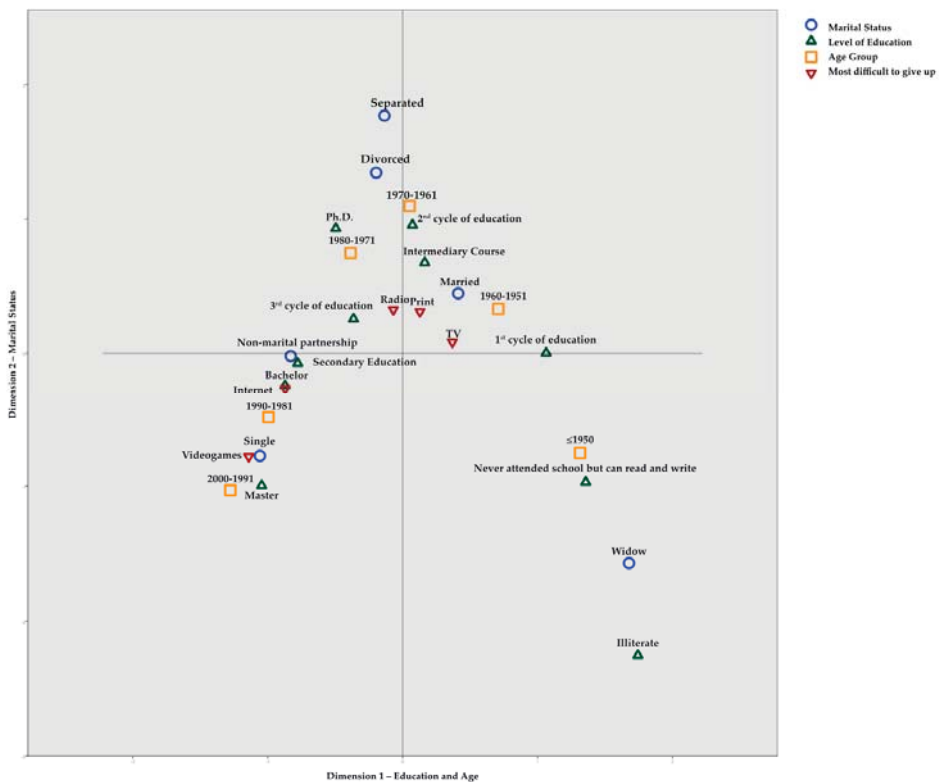
Figure 7. Multiple correspondence analysis. Source: ERC2015—The new dynamics of audio-visual consumption in Portugal; *n* = 1018.

4. Discussion

This article attempted to contribute to a reflection on the relationships of Portuguese generations with media by providing some empirical clues based on a quantitative methodology and an age cohort analysis focusing on youth.

The centrality of mediation was demonstrated, whether this mediation is digital and networked, or done through the more traditional media. Television seems to still act as a strong vector structuring

national media repertoires, particularly among the older generations who elect it as their favourite medium. However, with greater incidence in the younger generations, the emergence of digital and networked media repertoires and cumulative consumption patterns is noticed and here the importance of television seems to dilute itself, bearing in mind the atomisation, but also the convergence, of mediation platforms.

Concerning the Internet, the younger age cohorts are those who ascribe greater importance to it, preferring entertainment uses to traditional news information (when compared to other generations). However, intra- and inter-generational diversity reigns in Portugal. Inequalities in access and uses were demonstrated by a cross-generational analysis, which helps to deconstruct certain types of discursive rhetoric of the so-called digital generation based solely on age or of digital natives as a homogeneous global whole.

In fact, through bivariate and multivariate readings, the co-importance of formal education in shaping media uses was recaptured. The interpretation of the graphs allowed to perceive favoured associations between some attributes of social contextualisation and their relationships with media. The younger generations, with more institutionalized cultural capitals and not in a formal partnership, tend to ascribe more importance to new media. It is certainly important not to forget that the different relationships with media are not only shaped according to the generation, but also by individual life courses, contexts and resources, as well as by what people do with technology and why—what is their involvement and engagement, what are their particular motivations.

5. Conclusions

Returning to the main research question (RQ) of this paper—is there, in the Portuguese context, anything particular about the relationship of youth with media?—some conclusions can be drawn. The statistical analysis showed that there are specificities of the relationship of Portuguese youth with media that set them apart from the older age cohorts.

So, are there different patterns of Internet use in Portugal (SRQ 1.1)? Is Portuguese youth more predisposed to new media use and online activities than the older generations (SRQ 1.2)? Indeed, different patterns of Internet use in Portugal where discovered in this longitudinal analysis. In all of the scrutinised years, Portuguese youth tended to dedicate more time to online activities than the older generations. Nonetheless, can we relate these differences to age cohorts (SRQ 1.3)? Age is important, but these intergenerational differences cannot be explained solely on the basis of the age criterion, since variations in inter-age cohorts were found in the samples.

Regarding the subsidiary research questions relating to media preferences in Portugal, do different age cohorts prefer different media—youth favouring new media vs. elderly generations favouring mass media (SRQ 2.1)? Younger age cohorts said they preferred new media in daily life, in contrast with the elderly generations, which preferred television. Hence, not all the Portuguese are the same with regard to (new) media uses and representations, and age seems to be an important variable to consider. However, can these differences be explained solely on the basis of age cohorts (SRQ 2.2)? No, since homogenous age blocks were not found.

Generational commonalities, such as a shared history, social, and cultural frames, but also a particular and situated media environment, seem to be important but are not sufficient to produce sharp different modes of media use and appraisal. These differences cannot be explained solely by generational belonging or age cohorts. This kind of reasoning can shade internal differences and crystallise a false sense of unity among individuals born in the same space-time macro context, since not all coevals will experience the same event in the same way—there are always differences in social context at a more micro level, as well as biographical specificities.

This paper attempted to link social demography with patterns of preference and use of (new) media, while also overcoming the reductionism of cohort analysis by introducing other social variables into the discussion. This exercise shed light on inter- and intra-age cohort specificities, but also on heterogeneity, which can be explained by education and other important variables.

As a limitation of the study, focusing merely on quantitative data collection can obscure finer relationships and nuances that escape the large sieve of extensive research methods. More qualitative and mixed methods are needed in order to better and holistically understand relations with media. Additionally, as already stated [86,88], future research agendas should explore the life course as a critical dimension in shaping people's relationships with media. Future research should move beyond a demographic approach to media uses and summon not only social and cultural forces and processes, but also biographical traits that, together and dialectically, shape different forms of social appropriation of media. With that research programme in mind, in order to analyse the individual and societal level, agency and structure, contextualised in space and time, life story interviews could be useful to, in a sociological sense, be able to "hear, behind the solo of a human voice, the music of society and culture in the background" [113] (p. 168).

All in all, we should not deny a kind of generational order, but it is important to acknowledge that it must be intersected by other variables. The generation concept is essential to understand the different types of relationships the Portuguese establish with media "insofar as it keeps its complexity" [34] (p. 187), because it does not explain everything—instead, it conceals a large variety of media uses, domestications, preferences, and repertoires.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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A Generational Approach to Somatic Cultures: Modes of Attention to the Young Body in Contemporary Portuguese Society

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Abstract: The aims of this article are to identify, describe, and sociologically understand the different somatic cultures in contemporary Portuguese society—i.e., the distinct ways in which different generations have thought about, used and lived the body from the time of the *Estado Novo* (the New State, which was the regime that governed Portugal from 1933 to 1974) until the present day. Beginning with the hypothesis that there are different, historically institutionalized, somatic modes of attention to the "young body", the author uses the most relevant institutions of the socialization of the body as analytical dimensions and investigates their main incorporation strategies and models of corporality. This hypothesis is informed by different generational conditions that change people's uses of their body, their experiences of living in it, and their thoughts on the matter. Using these analytical dimensions, the article presents a typology that identifies, describes, and comprehends the three somatic cultures in the recent history of Portuguese society: the *culture of physical invigoration* that forms part of the legacy of the New State; the *culture of physical rejuvenation* inherited from youth cultures of the 1960s and 70s, along with the growth of body design industries in the 1980s; and the *culture of physical perfection* inherited from the biotech culture in the 1990s, accompanied by the radicalization of the body design industry. This approach entails the discussion and reinterpretation of a *corpus* of historical literature, presenting research data on the body in a defined time period (1930 to date) and space (Portugal), analyzed from an embodied perspective of generational change.

Keywords: young body; generation; somatic cultures; Portugal; sociology; social history

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1. Introduction

Youth is a recently invented and socially constructed category. However, to see it as a mere *word* [1] or *metaphor* [2] is an assumption that implies an attitude of extreme nominalism. Although "youth" is a historically and contextually "unstable social fact" [3] and not a biological one, nowadays the body is unquestionably a privileged *locus* in which to visualize young age in the social arena [4]. This in turn means that being identified as *young* implies an age codification linked to a certain model of *modal corporality* [5]—i.e., an established set of bodily traits that are socially recognized and valued as juvenile.

There are norms that frame the social figure of being young and which, to a large extent, are established on the basis of a corporeal criterion. It is important to acknowledge that one of the most visible and privileged attributes that make it possible to identify "youth" as a social category in daily interactions is bodily condition. The *young body* condition is substantiated by a multiplicity of images and physical performances that are symbolically correlated and assigned to a specific age condition. Ultimately, the demarcation of borders that define being young implies a social reading of attributes associated with the biological process of growth and aging, which are socially codified by relating them to certain phases of the life course.

The bodily attributes related with the beginning of the youth condition are, for example, the early signs of puberty. These are often experienced with some awkwardness and strangeness by adolescents: pimples on the face, hair appearing in some zones of the body, the beginning of the menstrual cycle for girls, initial ejaculations for boys and so on. The end of the "young age" stage is physically signaled by the initial attributes of "maturity": the first gray hair or baldness, wrinkles, adiposities, a variety of aches and pains, etc. Beyond these phenotypical marks, the public image of being young—based on corporeal appearances (such as clothing and hairstyles) and performances (attitudes, gestures and physical practices)—is also an important reference for the social game of approximation or distance from the youth condition, in relation to the conditions of childhood and adulthood.

Youth is therefore a socially constructed, specific time of life that is codified in the body. The period known as "youth" is becoming increasingly longer [6], and individuals are attempting to extend it due to a social belief nurtured by the commercializing promises of the juvenilization of bodies [7]. In fact, the evolution of the public image of youth has been marked by a progressive attention to bodily image by both younger and less young people alike. This is evident in the exponential increase in advertising seeking to sell objects, practices, and other consumer goods by framing them within contexts of fashion, sport, music, and dance, in which the aesthetic, spectacular, or erotic value of the physical image of youth is intensively explored.

The social value attached to the "young body", and to the body by young people, is not new but has a recent social history in Portugal. In the 1980s, a number of empirical studies on the Portuguese reality highlighted the image of the body as one of the most important aspects of both the public image of youth [8] and the social life of young people [9]. The "physical aspect" was particularly relevant when people defined and distinguished themselves and their peer groups, and entailed not just physical attributes themselves, but also "the look". On the other hand, some older research also pointed to the existence of a generalized and consensual agreement on the assumption that the latest generations are distinguished from their predecessors by the fact that they attach greater value to the body, clothes and physical activities [10,11].

The body thus emerges as part of the hardcore of referents which serve as poles in the structuring of the symbolic borders that define current young people as a *social condition* and simultaneously distinguish them as a *social generation* [12,13][1] (p. 87). What clothes they wear, the shoes they put on, what they use to garnish, to disguise, what they try to modify or to keep, are resources which make their body a signifier reality, which ensure "the passage from the sensitive to the sense" [14] (p. 286), acquiring meanings that express important social differentiations. At the end of the day, these bodily signs are referential dimensions that acquire a wide social visibility and unanimity as identity signs of "youth" today, extrapolating criteria rooted in mere age proximity and acquiring a generational configuration.

However, this contemporary trend towards attaching value to the "young body" and to the body by young people has not been closely accompanied by youth studies. To a large extent this may be because the work of sociological deconstruction and social archaeology with regard to the categories "youth" or "young" has employed strategies of avoidance and distancing from biologisms, naturalisms and evolutionisms ingrained in the category "adolescence". This was indeed an analytical category which was widely celebrated and legitimated by psychology, but which always looked at "adolescents" from the perspective of biological and physiological development, thereby assuming that this phase of life coincides with "puberty".

In this context, sociology has not shown much interest in the corporeal dimension that is itself implied in this "new age of life" [15], either in terms of the symbolic value and social use which the figure of the "young body" has assumed in contemporary society, or the symbolic value and social use

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[1] Contrasting with the notion of *demographic generation* defined merely by age criteria, some literature on the topic argues that a *social generation* is established by means of a self-reference to other generations (from which it sees itself as distinct).

which young people assign to their own body in their representations of and social experiences with it. It was only more recently, over the course of the 1990s, that sociology started to look more carefully at young people from the point of view of their bodies, but even then, the extent to which the topic was of interest to the youth studies agenda was still much more marginal than the value that is socially assigned to it among the new younger generations.

A context like this invites youth studies to pay more attention to social representations of the "young body", to the relationships young people establish with their own bodies, and to the interactions and sociabilities they build on the basis of bodily practices, be they imagetic, kinetic or sensitive [16]. It has proved analytically productive for me to cross the areas of the sociology of youth and the sociology of the body. Recently rescued by sociology from the life sciences [17], this *live* and *developing* structure that is the organic body is also a *lived body*, in the first person and among other people [18]. Although usually understood as an individual and natural subject, the human body is experienced in distinct ways, not only because of each body's specific physical properties, but also considering the different social and cultural contexts in which it is born, grows, is modified (voluntarily and involuntarily) and dies. As Boltanski pointed out in the 1970s, the experience of the body is conditioned "first, by the reception system between the set of corporeal behaviors of the members of the same group, and secondly, by the relations system that joins those corporeal behaviors and the objective conditions of existence proper to that group" [19] (p. 208).

This is the perspective from which I return to an old concept of Boltanski's: *somatic culture*, as a system of specific rules, attitudes, and codes of body production, perception, and consumption applied to a particular social formation, or to the different objective conditions that underpin the systems of social differentiation and inequality which characterize each social formation (class, age, generation, gender, ethnicity, etc.), with repercussions for the distinct ways in which the body is lived socially [20] (pp. 135–173). In recovering this concept, I consider its heuristic relevance as a descriptive and comprehensive operator of a set of associations and disjunctions relating to the ways in which the body is used, approached, thought and classified by different (institutional and informal) social actors, in certain cultural forms situated in time and space (geographic and social). The concept of somatic culture is thus useful to an understanding of the different ways in which the body is socially lived and experienced in time and space, given that it corresponds to the socio-symbolic structure which frames certain *somatic modes of attention*—i.e., "culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others" [18] (p. 138).

In this sense, the concept of somatic culture allows the current context of *body hysteria* [21] to be seen from a historical perspective—marked by the social proliferation of experiential or institutional discourses, images, activities and worries about the carnal dimension of life—and to go beyond an understanding that is founded on a supposed historical absence of the body in daily life. In fact, as suggested by Neves, the presence of the body has always been "amazingly obsessive in the history of the western world" [22] (p. 66). The fact is that a set of social processes has recently transformed earlier versions of the symbolic structure of contemporary somatic culture, modifying the conditions of body *socialization* (incorporation), of body *reflexivity* (thought body), and of body *experience* (lived body) of the new generation in relation to previous ones.

How did this come about? As Crespo says, if in the past the body was assimilated to an "actual object, existing by itself, in its biological materiality", nowadays "the body is not immutable data, rather revealing itself in its historicity, being the origin and the outcome of a long process of social elaboration" [23] (p. 8). The gradual emancipation of the body towards its apparent natural condition implies a set of structural sociocultural, political, economic and technological transformations that interact with an intense rationalization, commodification, individuation and privatization of the body in recent social history.

Against this background, the aim of this paper is to analyze the social conditions that gave rise to the process of the denaturalization of the body in Portuguese social history, namely from the *Estado Novo* (the New State, which was the regime that governed Portugal from 1933 to 1974) until the present

day. This period was chosen because it enables us to identify, describe and sociologically comprehend the different somatic cultures that still coexist in contemporary Portuguese society, revealing distinct ways of using, thinking and living the body in time which, to a large extent, possess a generational configuration. Considering the theoretical structure presented above, the selected dimensions of analysis for each somatic culture are the most relevant *institutions of body socialization*, together with their *ways of thinking/conceiving the body* and the *strategies of incorporation* they have applied in order to obtain the *models of corporality* they value and seek to disseminate socially.

Given the high social and symbolic value attached to it across time and space by the institutions of body socialization, the figure of the "young body" and of the bodies of young people forms a privileged *locus* in this essay. Despite the different ways of attending to the "young body" in time and space—i.e., the different somatic modes of attention towards the "young body"—the fact is that historically, young people's bodies have always occupied a central position in the reflexivity and practices of different institutions of body socialization across time and space.

Within the scope of these theoretical issues, I introduce a typology identifying three somatic cultures that are still present in contemporary Portuguese society: (1) a *culture of physical invigoration*, which is a legacy of the New State; (2) a *culture of physical rejuvenation*, inherited from the youth cultures of the 1960s and 70s and the expansion of the body design industries in the 1980s; (3) a *culture of physical perfection*, heir to the biotechnological culture of the 1990s and of the latest radicalization of the body design industry. I take a *corpus* of historical literature and research that was developed in Portugal and provides a broad description of the somatic modes of attention to the body during the New State, in the period following the revolution that overthrew the regime on 25 April 1974, and today, and reframe the data from the theoretical perspective of somatic cultures. My goal in doing so is to sociologically understand each of the three somatic cultures as potential socio-symbolic structures for different generational ways of living the body. As Csordas put it, "an approach to cultural phenomena through embodiment should also make possible the reinterpretation of data already analyzed from other standpoints" [18] (p. 146).

Over the course of the historical narrative, I recover some empirical data from research projects I participated in or coordinated, in more of an illustrative than a demonstrative way with regard to the set of hypotheses I am developing for further, more in-depth and more theoretically focused research. I use some specific elements from a set of institutional and media sources published during and after the New State (1970s and 1980s), with discursive and visual data collected as part of the editorial projects entitled in English *A History of Private Life in Portugal: These Days* [24] and *A History of Sport in Portugal* [25], in order to illustrate and describe the somatic cultures of physical invigoration and physical rejuvenation. These are complemented by a few extracts from a large set of comprehensive interviews [26] with young people engaging in different bodily regimes, such as tattooing and body-piercing [27],[2] diets and bodybuilding,[3] which serve to help understand the contemporary somatic culture of physical perfection.

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[2] Fifteen comprehensive individual interviews with extensively tattooed young people were collected as part of the research project "*Corporeidades In-Disciplinadas: vivências e sentidos juvenis*" [In-disciplined corporalities: youth experiences and meanings], which I undertook in 2002–2006 for my PhD. All the methodological procedures and ethical protocols developed and employed in the research were approved by the Sociology evaluation panel which the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) designated for the 2001 Call for PhD Scholarships (REF. SFRH/BD/5264/2001).

[3] Fifteen comprehensive individual interviews with young women who said they were anorexic or were having anorexic episodes during their life courses, plus 15 comprehensive individual interviews with young men who said they were addicted to bodybuilding, were collected as part of the research project "*Corporeidades Hiper-Disciplinadas: vivências e sentidos juvenis*" [Hyper-disciplined corporalities: youth experiences and meanings], which I undertook in 2007–2012 for my post-doc. All the methodological procedures and ethical protocols developed and employed in the research were approved by the Sociology evaluation panel which the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) designated for the 2006 Call for Post-Doctoral Fellowships (REF. SFRH/BBD/27158/2006).

2. Somatic Culture of Physical Invigoration

From its establishment onwards, the *Estado Novo* (New State)—an authoritarian regime inspired by fascism and the social doctrine of the Catholic Church—paid close attention to the image, movements, emotions and physical energy of its citizens, and tried to socialize, regulate and discipline the ways in which the Portuguese people looked, acted, and expressed desires, feelings and corporeal abilities. The New State's leader, António de Oliveira Salazar, gave the body a prominent place in his political project. As part of the latter, it was considered that maintaining the individual body helped maintain the social body, and that even in the most intimate privacy of home and bed and in the most basic care, aesthetics and behaviors, bodies should obey and reiterate the collective order, reflecting and extending the regime's moral and political values. This was a physical ideal of virtue and modesty, obedience and discipline, sobriety and austerity, hygiene and robustness; a body dedicated to God, Nation, Family, and Work [28].

In order to adjust people's bodies to the prescribed corporeal model—puritan and austere in look, humble and ceremonious in attitude, robust and vigorous in movement—the New State equipped itself with a set of institutions and mechanisms of control, monitoring and socialization of the body. Their purpose was to soften the body's look, movements and emotions, while simultaneously enhancing its strength and energy [29,30]. The primary target was the body of the youngest. Aware that they might provide access to mundane spaces of circulation of ideas and ideals which could potentially be dangerous for the regime, the New State chose not to leave the exclusive responsibility for socializing youngsters in the hands of the school, the family or the Church, instead creating its own organizations for the "comprehensive education of youth".

Considering different statutes and physical missions for young male and female bodies, the New State created the *Organização Nacional Mocidade Portuguesa* (MP) [National Organization of Portuguese Youth] for young men in 1936, and the *Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina* (MPF) [Female Portuguese Youth] for young women in the following year. These two youth organizations established a clear gap between both the social indoctrination of young men on the one hand and young women on the other, and the strategies for training their bodies. This gap was visible from the outset in the imposition of moral limits on the display of the female body, with a set of increasingly severe prohibitions on how it should be exhibited in public. In this domain, the restrictions on the physical education, clothes and bathing suits of girls in the *Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina* were exemplary by the standards of Christian morals [31] (pp. 348–349). The length of skirts generated heated debates in the specialized press of the day—opponents of the trend towards shorter skirts invoked questions of morals and elegance, while defenders presented arguments based on cost, hygiene and pragmatism [32] (p. 316).

The policy of controlling the female body not only addressed the issue of modest clothing, but also sought to regulate exaggerated forms of behavior. Behavior was supposed to be characterized by correct and elegant movements, and by restraint in the public expression of certain gestures and facial expressions, such as laughing or speaking loudly, chatting or displaying grimaces of impatience or suspicion. Single young women were required to maintain self-control, politeness and good sense in spaces of social coexistence: "A true girl does not use complicated hairstyles, gaudy garments, exaggerated necklines. She does not adopt studied postures like the 'stars'. She does not make herself interesting with squeals and chuckles just for show. A true girl is distinguished by naturalness and correction. It is simplicity that determines the elegance of fashion and manners" [33].

The strategy was thus to make the female body as invisible as possible in the public space. Any sign, expression or adornment that might attract glances should be avoided or hidden—a concern that was also present in many of the etiquette manuals of the time. The body of the "virtuous woman" should be seen as a "temple of the soul", sacred, preserved in the "gifts" and "natural" attributes that God gave her. The young woman's body was socialized primarily with a view to reproduction, playing her role as the "mother of the family", and thus "remaining in the domestic space" and "not using makeup, laughing or being educated, but being discreet, intelligent, disciplined, polished in manners and poise" [34] (p. 134).

The political investment in the physical socialization of male bodies was directed towards the glorification of the Nation. The strength and tonus of the male body and the order and collective discipline displayed during the public marches of the youth affiliated to the *Mocidade Portuguesa* symbolically served to project the strength of the State. In its daily life, the expression of the male body was expected to convey the image of the "head of the family", classical and sober, mature and anonymous, kempt and smelling good, with well-groomed hair and wearing impeccable suits and starched collars. Men were not supposed to be attached to fashion and manners—an area that ought to be left to their wives. Indeed, the recommendations on the care that men should take were principally published in women's magazines, clearly indicating that a woman's role was thought to include the responsibility for her husband's appearance.

In short, in both men and women value was attached to a quiet, contained and discreet corporality at the level of the gesture and imagetic expression, all in accordance with the rules of "good taste" and "good manners". Any gesture that emphasized a person's public presence, such as wearing useless adornments or clothes that underlined or revealed certain parts of the body, could suggest excess and become a target for criticism. Attempts were thus made to more efficiently indoctrinate the youth from the urban and more highly schooled elites, who were not always docile, obedient and acritical. With a view to the socialization of the bodies of working-class children, above all those who were in the poorest economic circumstances and were therefore more distant from the instances of body control, in 1935 the regime also created the *Fundação Nacional para a Alegria no Trabalho* (FNAT) [National Foundation for Joy in Work], in order to provide them with physical activities involving contact with the sun, the sea and the countryside.

Because physical ills were symbolically represented as symptoms of moral—and when disseminated, national—weakness, a number of institutional strategies were developed in order to transform potentially meager, skinny and bony bodies into robust, ruddy and upright ones, capable of facing any adversities for the good of the Nation: parades, outdoor activities, camping, summer camps, bathing in the sea, and above all else, physical education. The Ling system, also known as "Swedish gymnastics", was institutionally adopted to this end [35–38]. It was a rational system of localized and sequentially measured movements, promoting breathing, verticalization, uprightness and correction of the body. Performed in synchronized collectives and white uniforms, these movements suggested an image of discipline and order, physical and moral pureness, cooperation and national exhortation, that both blurred and established the uniqueness of each physical body on behalf of the social body.

The regime's body rectification goals were thus not achievable by means of an *athletic* physical culture, with narcissistic intentions of personal satisfaction, but by a *moralizing* physical education, designed to fulfill Juvenal's expression *mens sana in corpore sano*, a "saying that righteous Salazarism interpreted to mean the formation of the mind in and through discipline and submission of the body" [30] (p. 109). The main driving force in the national plan to *physically invigorate the people* was thus the moral regeneration of youth in general and the most privileged urban youth in particular, with the latter considered to be adepts of a certain relaxation of customs or a resistance associated with a bohemian life.

The culture of invigoration promoted by the regime also sought to address the economy of the body. Along with objectives of a moral nature, the body socialization strategies pursued by official institutions were designed to prevent the population from wasting energy on parties, amusement, or acts of violence. Augmenting physical education was also intended to promote the "greater efficiency" of the "useful work" done by workers' bodies in such a way as to "reduce [the amount of public] funds [spent on] public health" [39].

Similarly, the body was colonized by several scientific disciplines and submitted to rationalized health and hygiene norms. It would seem that the political action targeted at the body in these areas no longer included an eminently religious content, instead taking on economic outlines and demanding more rationalized behaviors based on scientific knowledge about managing illness. Medical, pedagogical and police authorities cooperated to monitor and control people's bodies, as well

as in the scientific validation of the strategies that were adopted, in a joint action undertaken in the fields of human motricity, public health and social prophylaxis.

Faced with social realities of the day, which included extreme physiological, nutritional and civilizational shortages, the authorities sought to promote public health and foster improvements in the nutrition, health and hygiene of the poorest sections of the Portuguese population. This ill-nourished majority, with debilitated, careworn, dirty and tired bodies, represented around three quarters of the rural population in 1950: "wage-earning rural workers, shepherds, blacksmiths, millers, innkeepers were the foremost characters in a universe dominated by unthinkable misery" [40] (p. 220).

The goals of promoting "devotion to water and soap" and punishing "everyone who excreted outdoors" were proclaimed by the *Direção Geral da Saúde* [Directorate-General of Health] in 1950 [41]. The sanitary education campaigns initiated by the *Liga Portuguesa de Profilaxia Social* (LPPS) [Portuguese League of Social Prophylaxis] were intensified, with the aim of disseminating civilizational principles of coexistence and gradually increasing the hygiene of public spaces, which had thus far been difficult to incorporate into the mentality of the Portuguese people. The many campaigns conducted by the LPPS included a "campaign against bare feet"—one of the longest-running (1927–1965)—and another "against the habit of hawking and spitting outdoors"; the latter was such a legitimate practice, according to existing social codes, that "it was not rare to see people of high social status, even ladies, engaging in this serious disrespect to the code of good manners, infringing it in a reprehensible way" [42].

In this rationalization process, the body was institutionally thought and designed as a *production tool*. By acquiring knowledge about and monitoring and disciplining bodily habits regarding hygiene, eating and physical activity, the regime tried to promote the body's efficiency and performance in its role as the primary tool of the country's workforce. In a society where the production system was heavily based on the human and animal workforce, physical capital was the only resource that guaranteed the subsistence of a population whose material needs were not provided for in other ways [43] (p. 34). Even for the countless peasants who began to migrate to the city or to foreign countries over the course of the 1950s, the body, and its strength, energy and vitality, continued to be their only saleable capital, as laborers in the developing major industries or domestic servants in bourgeois homes.

The value of work and physical effort formed the basis for a certain social discourse on the part of the New State, which disapproved of the indolence of the "idle classes", pleasure-lovers and an easy life. However, these particular members of society didn't have to worry about subsistence; they were more concerned with "the look". The "high society" body ended up mirroring the regime's ideology. Many of its corporeal doctrines were adopted in order to make social distances visible. Even though the New State's official discourse frowned on sophisticated forms of body modification other than those that promoted the "naturalness" and "spontaneity" of a vertical, healthy, clean and courteous body, "actually, what this game of the spontaneous fails to hide is all the incessant work of the 'social body' on the 'real body', a canonical conformation to the severities of fashion, an urge to transform the biological destiny of the body into a symbolic instrument of status, of value" [44] (pp. 349–350).

With access to a set of material and social resources unavailable to other layers of the population, the bodies of the bourgeois elites were civilized by imitating distinctive foreign models: either those adopted by wealthy refugees who escaped the Great War by moving to Lisbon and who circulated in exclusive and selective sociabilities; or international and especially French models of fashion, which were institutionalized as paradigms of "good taste", "elegance" and "sobriety", hand-made from *toiles*[4] by private dressmakers and major *maisons de couture*.

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4   Name given to special sewing molds that French dressmakers and seamstresses sold to their Portuguese counterparts and were originally acquired from the great Parisian *maisons de couture*.

However, the profusion of communication media caused the ideals and expectations of "being in fashion" to expand to an increasingly wider range of social classes. The popularization of the cinema, and then the emergence of television in 1957 [45], played a role in this process, disseminating new ways of living and producing the body. For "modern" young women, "being in fashion" changed from copying the ladylike models of their mothers to imitating the seductive forms and walks of Hollywood divas, as seen on cinema screens and in magazines that explored the *glamour* of the bodies and the lives of emergent cinematographic myths. Marcel Mauss ethnographically noted a similar process in the case of young women in New York and Paris: "A kind of revelation came to me in hospital. I was ill in New York. I wondered where previously I had seen girls walking as my nurses walked. I had the time to think about it. At last I realized that it was at the cinema. Returning to France, I noticed how common this gait was, especially in Paris; the girls were French and they too were walking in this way. In fact, American walking fashions had begun to arrive over here, thanks to the cinema." [46] (p. 100).

3. Somatic Culture of Physical Rejuvenation

A certain degree of daring and a desire to break with existing attitudes and practices in relation to the body took hold among a larger number of urban young people in the 1960s. They produced their bodies not with reference to the regime's official socializing institutions, but in the light of the more mundane corporalities they saw every day in magazines, at the cinema and on TV.

The "modern woman" gradually affirmed herself in the public domain—at schools and universities, in industry and offices, in mundane spaces like cafés or night clubs. Previously modest in their movements, concealed in their look and oppressed in their emotions, many women then began to display a body that was increasingly vainer, lively, dancing, and sensual. In terms of their experiences, pleasure and self-determination were made possible by the advent of the contraceptive pill in 1958. In their looks, there was a casualness and freedom provided by the emergence of *prêt-à-porter*.

The female body rarely had the opportunity to be contemplated naked, even in private. In the 1960s, however, the "modern woman's" body undressed itself in terms of both clothes and prejudices, unveiling itself to other people's eyes at the beach, in the evening and in daily life. The miniskirt was a thunderous success, with the female press emphasizing the "new meaning" of its colors and shapes, which were considered "spectacular" and "amusing to the eyes and the spirit" [47]. In addition to hemlines rising above the knee, necklines became pronounced, rigid lines were abandoned in favor of a light, joyful, and comfortable silhouette, and the use of pants spread, highlighting feminine shapes.

Although officially forbidden, the bikini started to be popular on Portuguese beaches at the end of the 1960s. In 1966, the magazine *Modas & Bordados* included an advert for the most recent novelty in Portugal with regard to female hygiene—tampons—which allowed women to feel "free at the beach all summer long". This ad reveals that something was changing in Portugal in attitudes to the exhibition of the female body in public spaces: "The body is uncovered, reveals and exhibits itself, gaining a new functional effectiveness. [. . .] Fatness is not prettiness anymore, it becomes a tenebrous concern for those who need to exhibit an elegant body exempt from superfluous masses, not only in bathing suits, but also in evening *toilettes*" [44] (p. 350).

Men also started to change their body image, with a wider range of clothing on offer and a greater democratization of men's garments. The traditional industry of individual tailor's workshops went into crisis with the emergence of *prêt-à-porter*, a reality that also won over the male consumer [32]. Men began to assimilate fashionable trends in hairstyles, beards and mustaches, which became longer and more spontaneous. The hairspray and pomade that were previously used to shape hair gave way to the unkemptness of a "young fashion" that affirmed itself nationally and internationally.

"Nowadays, fashion is a youth phenomenon" was a headline in 1967 [48] (p. 26). The 1960s were in fact a time of the *rejuvenation* of bodies, with the adoption by younger generations of a more informal and colorful visual image. *Prêt-à-porter* was increasingly common in Portuguese streets and magazines, (un)covering a young body which, in the city, had acquired a degree of consumerism and autonomy. A body trying to be free from official models and conventions, namely gender conventions.

The *unisex* fashion began to emerge, despite accusations and lamentations that it was no longer possible to distinguish between males and females: both shopped in the same stores and went to the same hairdressers, and wore their hair long or short, with bell-bottom jeans, leather jackets, and a variety of adornments.

Individual difference and social rebellion were values that the bodies of the youngest sought to express, inspired by a number of youth "subcultures" that were recognized in other European countries and the USA by their spectacular garments: *rockabillies*, *teddy boys*, *hippies*, *rockers* and other youth subcultures of the time . . . The body also became free in dance, with effusive movements that escaped the need for a partner and searched for ways to excite the senses. *Ié-ié*—an adaptation of the English phoneme *yeah* and representative of the Beatlemania experienced in Portugal—vibrantly inflamed the bodies that filled the stage and seats of Lisbon's Monumental Theater, either in competitions between new values present in modern music, or at the concerts of international stars.

The dominant production references for the body image of young people were no longer the sophistication of movie stars, but the cheerful irreverence of emerging national and international rock and pop stars. Radio and TV opened up horizons that included other sound and imagetic realities, other products and values, disseminating signs of and for a new generation, with bodies, senses and mentalities that were distinct from those of the past. The multiple musical styles disseminated by these media brought with them styles of dress, dance and behavior that inspired many urban youngsters from the middle and higher layers of Portuguese society.

These transformations expanded in the 1970s, and tended to become generalized after the revolution in April 1974. This was a time when Portuguese society transversally lived through a period of revolutionary exaltation, celebrating the social freedom it had won. In the bodies with their raised fists, adornments and libertarian clothes that included unbuttoned shirts with pointed collars and unseemly pants instead of ladylike skirts, the country experienced a collective euphoria to which it was unused: "The country is in a shambles and Lisbon is the mirror of this chaos that precedes new times, with the heart of the Rossio infested with hippies and punks and radical political refugees [. . .]. Very young people, dressed in a whole rainbow of colors, from the darkest to the brightest. Young men and women in tunics and Afghan coats, ripped, threadbare, mended jeans—extremely expensive and imported!—long skirts, miniskirts or hotpants" [49] (p. 141).

Although not everything was allowed, much was demanded. Information was diversified and many of the subjects that had previously been taboo—examples include sex, abortion, and homosexuality—were addressed and discussed in the media, at schools and in political life as rights to something that was seen as personal property and began to be claimed as *private*: the body. In the 1980s, regardless of social class or sex, Portuguese young people distinguished themselves from previous generations by attaching greater importance to the body, physical activities and sex life, as well as by their very different tastes in clothing [10] (pp. 198–210) [8] (p. 1062).

To the context of sexual freedom inherited from the 1970s was added the individual desire to become attractive and different, just like the worldly bodies with which the Portuguese came into contact every day through the media and advertising. "Originality" and "style" were values that crossed the body productions which demarcated the new "youth tribes" that emerged in Portugal's public urban spaces. The creative phantasy that characterized fashion and manners in the mid-1980s came to transform the body in terms of the way that it was dressed, the shoes it wore, the way it was combed or decorated, into a personalization resource that was invaluable to younger generations [50] (p. 341).

Fashion began to give way to style, in which the value of individual difference, more than of social distinction, was bodily explored. The absolutism of *haute couture* was dethroned by the expansion of the increasingly inventive *prêt-à-porter* industry, which assimilated a variety of international trends and became accessible to a larger number of people. The seasonal dictatorship of a single line including a complete look with all the details of beauty, hairstyle and accessories was de-multiplied, and body production norms were assumed to be more indicative than directive [51] (p. 158) [52] (p. 59).

As the fashion industry expanded, there also arose a body design industry offering a plethora of body-maintenance products, techniques and services. New national and international stores, companies and services established themselves in the Portuguese market, promising an adjustment to the aesthetic rules of the moment and simultaneously producing the massified illusion that each person was able to plan and sculpt their own body within a globally established beauty standard.

Amidst the booming body design industry, there arose a range of commercial initiatives linked to physical activity, either at the level of investment in products for use in the domestic space—from exercise systems, specialized magazines, clothes, and footwear to a variety of home equipment—or at the level of investment in collective spaces [25]. In the 1980s, the latter started to take the shape of "neighborhood" gyms, where people could access modern ergonomic equipment with which to exercise their body individually or collectively, trying new and appealing physical activities imported from the USA, like aerobics, along with other modalities that were created and imported under the conceptual umbrella of body training systems or group fitness programs.[5]

In the 1990s, "neighborhood gyms" were then threatened by health clubs—multi-functional spaces that were depositaries of diverse valences in the fields of aesthetics, health, nurturing and body leisure, many of them representative of international chains that set up in some of the major Portuguese cities. The process of the growth and commercial diversification of indoor physical activities benefited from a favorable economic conjuncture, characterized by the increased purchasing power of the Portuguese population and the improvement in the life conditions of some of its sectors and social groups, namely from its middle classes. The proliferation of gyms and health clubs was also favored by the increase in both average life expectancy and the process of schooling—dynamics that made retired people and young students two essential target groups for such spaces.

The paradigm of a "healthy mind in a healthy body" was replaced by other, more imagetic ones, illustrated by the sayings "look good, feel good" or "be somebody". "Being in shape" implies exhibiting (certain) shapes, certain forms. The most highly valued manifestation of the "healthy body" was no longer its efficiency, strength and resistance, but its look. Health acquired a cosmetic aspect and became an aesthetic phenomenon: it was not enough to remain healthy, good health had to be made evident, namely by preserving a rejuvenated body image: "While the vocation of 'physical education' gyms was to discipline the body to educate better, healthier and more competent citizens, preparing them for the challenges of the new societies that emerged with industrialization, the current health clubs associate youth, beauty and body health with self-confidence, self-esteem and well-being, offering products and services aimed to 'shape the body' to the extent of the cultural needs and concerns of each individual" [53] (p. 54).

The whole panoply of products, services and techniques made available by the expanding body design industry emphasized mercantile promises of bodily *rejuvenation*, nurturing the mythology of a perpetual "young body" that is also attractive, healthy and energetic. Promoted to the status of a value of reference and reverence, this corporality corresponds to a body image materialized in the desire to obtain the smoothest, firmest skin and a silhouette that matches the imaginary biology of youth; to preserve an active and always fit body far from the threat of illness or the forewarning of death; to build a seductive and sensual body, always desirable and eager; to explore a hedonistic and desiring body that provides immediate delight and pleasure.

In its beauty, curves, health, vitality and sensuality, the "young body" appeared as ideal(ized) reality, glorified archetype, fetishized, envied, persistently desired, nurturing the anxieties and expectations of many, young and less young. The bodily attitudes and practices cultivated by young people were reflected in the corporeal experience of their parents' generation, who were pressured to maintain the youthfulness of their bodies and to be open to the value of the "young body". A "bigger inversion in behavioral models took place", says Lipovetsky, justifying this claim with a quote from

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[5]   Such as body pump, body balance, body combat, body step, body attack, body jam, body jump or spinning—RPM.

Yves Saint-Laurent: "once, a girl wanted to look like her mother. Currently, we see the opposite". From the same perspective, Lipovetsky adds that "the cult of youth and the cult of the body walk side by side" [54] (p. 166).

It can thus be claimed that, to a great extent, the culture of physical rejuvenation emerges from the commodification process which the social production of the body begins to demand. Capitalism continues the work of colonizing the human body as a resource to be *capitalized*, albeit now in a gradual emancipation from the distress of manual work and the physical constraints of the duty to be laborious. It surrenders to the vacations and free time that pertain to a consumer society, to *sport, sun, sex and sea* [55] (p. 58), to the cult of pleasure, well-being, good shape, a young, attractive, athletic, healthy, energetic body that desires (and is desired) and shows no calluses or signs of work. In this context, the body becomes socially invested and valued not as a *productive body*, but as a *produced body*, "the most beautiful, precious and radiating" of all consumer objects [56] (p. 212). While it loses its functional value as a *tool* that produces a workforce, its symbolic value grows as an *accessory* of the self's presence in the world [57] (p. 42), the cultural sign most closely associated with the person and the expression of their personal identity, socially denoting and distinguishing each individual as a singular and unique subject [58].

The body is thus glimpsed in emancipation from its supposed "natural condition". Within the context of the several available possibilities in terms of corporeal production and modification, the body becomes socially conceived and lived, not as an inherited and untouchable *destiny*, but as a projected and modifiable *resource*, subject to acts of will that express its owner's expectations and identity desires, within both the diverse possibilities currently offered by body design industries and the inequality of the actual ability to access them. As Giddens pointed out, if in the past the body was thought as being the *locus* of the soul, and later as the center of obscure and perverse needs, the body now becomes more available "to be worked", and the whole of its exterior, or at least the visible part, becomes permeable to the "offers" emanating from society [59] (p. 201).

4. Somatic Culture of Physical Perfection

In complicity with media channels that are becoming more specialized in the body, an increasingly more diverse and sophisticated body design industry is creating the social illusion of the individual's omnipotence in relation to the body, not only in terms of its exterior look but also its internal functioning. However, these days this illusion goes far beyond the yearnings for and expectations of conserving a perpetual present. More than just the rejuvenation of the body, people dream of its *perfection*. The image of a "young body" is now surpassed by the ideals of a "perfect body" as a corporality to be reverenced and serve as a reference.

The goods, services and technologies recently made available by the body design industry no longer act at just the most superficial and holistic level of the body in order to ensure its maintenance (in the way the physical activity systems available in the 1980s did), but instead introduce the hypothesis of body's correction using techniques and products that are increasingly focused, detailed and invasive of its inner boundaries. Corporeal production and modification no longer operate solely on the *whole* body and in a standardized way, but increasingly in relation its *tiniest parts* [60–62] and focused on particular and concrete details of a singular body. In this context, the contemporary body is increasingly thought and lived as a reality that is amenable to being constructed, manufactured—"a kit, an addition of occasionally detachable parts at the disposal of the individual" [57] (p. 24), each driving specialized forms of consumption that seek to match the ideals of each body's *perfectibility*.

The exponential growth of today's body design industry extends far beyond the "empire of vanities" of fashions and cosmetics, with medicine, nutrition and motricity sciences, technology and genetic engineering, among other fields, associated in the production of a range of techniques and technologies that increasingly invade the body in its daily life. The resources that the current body design industry develops and places on the market comprise more diverse scopes, with more diversified, creative and personalized products.

Along with the cosmetic products that act on the skin's surface, the *good-looking* segment is developing a whole set of dietary, chemical and biological resources that intervene in the body's biological processes and internal mechanisms to modify corporeal shapes and silhouettes (specific diets, nutritional supplements, diuretics, steroid-anabolic drugs, etc.). Jewelry and makeup, which ephemerally decorate the skin, are now joined by things that invade it permanently, such as tattoos and multiple types of body-piercing and other accessories. In academies and health clubs, collective exercise systems with standardized choreographies are articulated with services that provide customized responses to the ambitions, problems, risks and physiological and morphologic characteristics of each body, accompanied by the proliferation of the figure of the personal trainer.[6] Plastic surgery has become a popular way to "correct" or value specific parts of the body, going far beyond the renewal or stretching of the epidermis to disguise signs of age.[7] The developments in the fields of genetics and biotechnology have opened up the possibility of directly acting on the cellular formula of the subject's tissues and/or organs.

The development of the *good-looking* industry segment has been accompanied by that of the corporeal *well-doing* segment, formed by goods, services and technologies that fulfil the high standards of performance, health and vitality demanded of the human body in contemporary society, which always wants it to be dynamic and active: energy drinks and products that make it possible to handle an increasingly accelerated lifestyle; chemicals that are ingested in order to sleep or wake up, or provide long periods of activity, increasing the capacity for effort and overcoming fatigue or the desire for sleep; products that improve the memory or ensure improved sexual performance and efficiency, true "potions of elongation and prolongation" ... These are just some of the pharmacological or "natural" prostheses for correcting and regulating each body that are available nowadays, considering the needs for a performance that enables users to face the challenges of the contemporary world.

Finally, we have also witnessed the development of an area devoted to corporeal *well-being*, comprising products, services and technologies that go far beyond a hygiene-based concern about being kempt, promising pleasure and personal satisfaction by means of the body: a whole range of accessories that offer relaxation and a pleasant stimulation of the senses (candles, soaps, essential oils and perfumed bubble-bath foams); various therapies at the service of the body or anchored in it to serve the psyche (such as spas, bioenergetic therapies and meditation, as well as the innumerable types of massages and other activities imported from the eastern hemisphere); and the pharmacological prostheses that regulate, dominate and/or transform the mood—i.e., the emotional tonality of the individual's relationship with the world, either in a context of pathological malaise (like antidepressants and anxiolytic drugs), or in ludic contexts (like many psychotropic substances currently consumed by some youth) [57] (pp. 53–58).

Along with the development of the body design industry, and to a great extent supporting and promoting it, Portuguese society has also seen the emergence of an increasing thematic and media diffusion of images of and information about the body, not only through advertising, but also in other, journalistic, formats: "magazines, programs and thematic TV channels, newspapers, advertising and public medical debates disseminate more or less specialized information on nutrition and physical exercise, presenting solutions that promise physical and psychological health or body transformation" [30] (p. 152).

Challenging the boundary between fiction and reality, the mediatic messages transmitted in these specialized forms tend to disseminate the belief that, by following the instructions of a certain product

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[6] A physical activity professional who is asked to draw up a suitable training program for a particular body and to individually follow up the program's implementation; a symbol of *egobuilding par excellence* [63] (p. 129).

[7] See, for instance, Rodrigues's paper [64] on vaginal plastic surgery, where the desire to improve certain physiological functions is outweighed by the will to morphologically aestheticize the organ—a motivational reconfiguration that is transversal to the plastic surgery which many other organs of the human body are currently undergoing.

or service to the letter, it is possible to attain the desired ideal of body perfectibility. At the same time, they make individuals more aware of and reflective on their external look, comforting them with icons that attach a certain definition to (and actually shape) ideals of physical perfection—"dream bodies" that leave the kingdom of the exception and invade daily life.

By widely exploring body images that establish high standards of attractiveness and corporeal performance, the action of the media and the market enhances feelings of dissatisfaction with and physical incompetence in the image that each person develops of their own body: in Portugal, at the turn of the millennium, more than a third of young people between the ages of 15 and 29 revealed a desire to improve their shape and physical aspect, with around 20% of the youth universe saying that they regularly (often or occasionally) feel that they do not like their body as it is [50] (pp. 275–280).

These are effects that materialize in (among other behaviors) the intensification of strategies for monitoring the shapes and functions of the body, often along with an "at risk" form of bodily management, when adherence to certain body modification practices, such as diets or physical activity, occurs to a radical extent [65]. It is in this context that the occurrence of some behaviors known to be psychopathological disorders—anorexia or binge-eating disorder, for example—has increased in Portuguese society, namely among the youngest.

V., a young woman (aged 28 years), told me about the anorexia she experienced between the ages of 15 and 22:

> It all had a little bit to do with the ideal of perfection. Because everything was linked to that—being the best student, having a perfect body—it all had to do with that standard. So I was the best student, I was praised because I wrote well, and yet something was missing, and that was being pretty, being perfect. Like the models I used to see on TV and all those things; like some friends of mine who didn't make any effort at all and were like what I would have wanted to be.[8]

B., a young man (aged 28 years) who was a bodybuilder, explained the following to me about his well-built body, which he had cultivated since he was 19:

> I began to take supplements, a little protein, a little creatinine. However, I was told about anabolic steroids, and I tried them ... [...] Spectacular, really! The person even reaches a level... really good, indeed! The quality is enormous! That's why they say that the guys who start to do these things, later it becomes an addiction. [...] I became addicted to that. I even became addicted to the gym... If I didn't go, it was like a disease for me ... I had to go and train ... I was really obsessed with that ... [...] I had a goal, I wanted to be big. And I became big! [...] The ideal (body) was ... yes, the goal was to attain a body like that of those guys we see around the place, in those magazines, I don't know, all well-built ... [...] Like Schwarzenegger, for instance, who was Mister Universe ... [8]

This is the context in which the uses of many of the body modification techniques that are currently available on the market, or their corporeal results, are socially perceived, above all among the older generations, as "abuses" of the body, "excessive", "exaggerated", "extremes", "unnecessary", body "mutilations" or "disfigurements" made in furtherance of supposedly shallow and futile aesthetic motivations. However, when they decorate their skin with tattoos or piercings, take anabolics or follow radical diets to modify their silhouette (just a few examples of the techniques I researched [24,66]), and even when they run risks, young subjects believe that in doing so they are exercising a basic right: to the fruition of an individual legacy which they perceive as their private property and over which they believe they possess complete authority.

M., a young man (aged 25 years) whose body was covered by tattoos, heatedly said:

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[8] Individual interview conducted within the scope of the research project "*Corporeidades Hiper-Disciplinadas: vivências e sentidos juvenis*" [Hyper-disciplined corporalities: youth experiences and meanings].

No one is going to tell me what I do or don't do with my body! It's mine, first and foremost! It's not my mother's, it's not my father's, who are responsible for me being alive. Even they are not the ones who can control what I do or don't do. Only I, no one else, can say what I do with my body![9]

A., a young (aged 24 years) female medical student had, since her adolescence, developed an eating restriction she believed to be anorexia, although it had never been diagnosed and clinically followed-up. She described the following:[8]

I always thought I was controlling everything [in the weight-loss process] [. . .]. I thought I had to control that way of being and that [my] weight. [. . .] I thought they wanted to control me, but that nobody would control me, because I controlled myself. [. . .] I thought they wouldn't control me anymore, because I was the one who knew what I wanted, and I was moving forward with it. [. . .] And we think we're controlling [it], but we aren't.

In the frenzy to conform to a "perfect body", these young people voluntarily subject their body to almost sacrificial sports or alimentary restriction regimes under the illusion that this will allow them to dominate biological mechanisms; and based on a feeling of control over their own body, these young subjects build up a subjective feeling of empowerment in relation to both their body and their identity. This is a fiction that not infrequently compromises biological sustainability itself and endangers the organism's homeostatic balance. Modifying the body thus configures a person's ownership of themselves, celebrating in the eyes of others the power to (self-) determine and (self-) control their own actions—a power which these young subjects know is fragile and vulnerable in the face of the conditionings imposed on them in contemporary society. The testimonies show how many young people in fact find in the body a performative place for the expression and implementation of a way of thinking freedom and individual autonomy, when facing forms of social control to which they are subjected in their daily life.

The meanings invested in the uses of body-perfecting strategies are not merely of an aesthetic order, but also emancipatory. They are uses and abuses of the body that often come to challenge the instances which, in several domains of social life (family, school, professional, medical, legal, etc.), are traditionally authorized to exert the power to produce and regulate the corporeal figure and gestures. The body thus appears to be capitalized as an individual legacy in the subject's struggle for their place in the world, for the control of themselves and their life.

In passing, it is worth noting that this is one of the major traits that mark contemporary somatic culture, demarcating the current civilization of the body's newness in relation to the past. To a great extent, it results in a structural process which I call a *social privatization* of the body, and which occurred in Portuguese society over the course of the second half of the 20th century [24], as it did within the context of many other contemporary western societies. This means that, in terms of the reflexivity and experience of the body, while we observe both its gradual exposition and denudation in the public space and an apparent liberalization of its use and even abuse, the body has been socially understood as a private and individual "good", an item of property in relation to which each person understands they have the complete right and individual authority to intervene and make choices.

This process has not been not uncontroversial. There has been a set of social struggles to claim the power of self-determination and personal control over the body itself, namely vis-a-vis the state. While some of these struggles are limited to the informality of individual manifestations and reactions within the boundaries of each person's life world, others have taken on wider and more organized forms of citizenship, developed within the scope of associations and social movements (such as feminist or LGBTQ+ movements) and even finding a place on political party agendas.

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[9]   Individual interview conducted within the scope of the research project "*Corporeidades In-Disciplinadas: vivências e sentidos juvenis*" [In-disciplined corporalities: youth experiences and meanings].

These causes have been diverse—examples include the "right" to contraception and abortion, to pleasure and a free sexuality, to the rental or sale of corporeal organs, tissues and fluids, to the free modification of any part of the body, from a mere piercing, to tattooing, to the surgical alteration of organs. The most extreme is perhaps terminating the body's life, with appeals for the legal recognition of formats such as the "living will" or "euthanasia", when the individual's physical and/or mental conditions do not allow them to exercise their will for and in relation to themselves.

On the other hand, I also consider that the process of body privatization is not solely substantiated by the struggles to claim rights to the free use and expression of and individual authority over the body. It also lies in collective dynamics of individual accountability for the body itself, which are the organizer of a new psychic economy that tends to intimately regulate emotions, manners and "the look". While in the first place, each person has the full right to their body, they are equally responsible for the fulfilment of a set of social duties linked to this "good". Duties that mean not only taking care of the body's look, vitality and mood, but also being attentive to the length and quality of its life, playing a preponderant role in the control and timely identification of the symptoms of diverse pathologies (cancer, cardiovascular conditions, etc.), in the prevention of risky behaviors (namely by reducing alcohol and tobacco consumption, doing physical exercise and only engaging in protected sex), and the avoidance of excesses (food, exposure to the sun, medicalization, etc.).

Thus, while at first sight the body privatization process seems to correspond to a gradual disappearance of normative interdicts, in fact we find that it is an expression of a new social distribution of constraints and body disciplines, which are subtler than in the past because they are voluntary, de-multiplied and discreet. The successive forms of corporeal release that have taken place translate not an eclipse of the exterior constraints on the body, but their displacement to an individual level, operating by means of increasingly imperceptible, seductive and efficient mechanisms of internalization and reproduction of new body norms and standards.

5. Conclusions

Notwithstanding its discreetness, the struggle for the control of the body's meanings, behaviors and pleasures has been a crucial one in the last few decades, with the body as the place where the social is more firmly represented as individual and the policies are better disguised as nature. This was the political project that underlay the somatic culture of physical invigoration promoted by the *Estado Novo* (New State): to build a body disguised in a "naturalness" that would mirror its deeper values and act in conformity with and the interest of the regime. A body thought and lived as a *tool* to be taken care of as a workforce, socially valued for the labor income it provides and as an instrument of the moral expression of a collective, socialized in the dependence of a nationalistic collective project and monitored according to very strict and conservative ethical-moral standards.

The socialization spaces (the country's schools, as well as the *Organização Nacional Mocidade Portuguesa* and the *Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina*, allied with religious education institutions) directly created and controlled by the powers that be, cultivated the body as a territory of interdictions, sacred, untouchable, only amenable to rectification to the extent of that which was understood to be its "naturalness": a discreet, kempt and healthy body, ready to serve the state by working, reproducing, and obeying the morals of the day. As such, the political regime called on the knowledge and action of medical, physical education and religious professionals to help convince the Portuguese people that their bodies should become accustomed to new conservative fashions and new civilizational manners. These recruited agents undertook the task of correcting and monitoring in accordance with a set of social and political values, with strategies that were differentiated in such a way as to suit quite distinct target groups: simple people from the countryside, unruly and idle bohemians from the cities, youth threatened by various kinds of temptation.

However, from the mid-20th century onwards, various social forces—not only political (such as the feminist movement), but also mundane (like the market and the media)—started to subject the body to a process of denaturalization, emancipating it from an attitude that saw it as a genetically

inherited *destiny* in relation to which the only key concern was to preserve its vitality. Under the social, cultural and economic conditions inherited by post-revolutionary Portugal (i.e., after 1974), the body, in the way that it is kept, rejuvenated or improved, was turned into an important *accessory* of the individual's presence and social recognition in the world, to be planned according to their desire, persistence and resources. A private legacy that each person must explore, manage and capitalize as best as possible, considering the new aesthetic and ethical imperatives established by the markets of good-looking, well-doing, and well-being.

Whereas, under the aegis of the somatic culture of physical invigoration, the control of excesses in gestures, silhouettes and emotions was clearly undertaken by means of the action of institutions like the police, medicine, religion, and school, which were charged with enforcing and monitoring the multiple institutionalized corporeal interdicts, the somatic culture of body perfection makes the individual themselves accountable for that same regulation and control, with constant attention to its presentation, forms, performance and disposition. Individuals are invited to responsibly disguise signs of aging, eradicate symptoms of physical degradation, improve or maintain shape, correct defects, and improve performances and moods. Perpetually subjected to their own view of themselves, constant self-monitoring and self-disciplinary strategies are "naturally" assumed, incorporated and transformed into automatisms and obligations to be fulfilled within the scope of one's private life, often under the epithet of "a healthy lifestyle". The body that is publicly presented as personal and free thus finds itself to be one that is privately socialized and disciplined after all.

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Young People's Critical Politicization in Spain in the Great Recession: A Generational Reconfiguration?

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Abstract: During the last decade, Spain has experienced, like other surrounding countries, a deep economic crisis accompanied by an unprecedented political and institutional crisis. This has led to a growing mistrust in institutions and a dissatisfaction with democracy, but also an increase in interest in politics, which implies an interesting change regarding other situations. Young people of the so-called 'crisis generation', who have socialized in a new and changing context, also participate in this process of change, and have moreover played a leading role in the public space. In order to analyze young people's politicization process, in this article we use data from the European Social Survey (rounds 1–7, from 2000 to 2014) and the Young People in Spain Survey (2016). We developed a typology of attitudes towards politics and identified, using discrete choice models, the demographic and socioeconomic profile of young people particularly dissatisfied with politics. Our results show that, although young people socialized in the context of the crisis are very critical of politics, instead of moving further away from democratic politics or rejecting it openly, in most cases they politicize their discontent. Even those most critical of the way in which democracy works in the country have a very participatory political behavior, both in forms of nonelectoral and electoral participation.

Keywords: youth studies; generations; political socialization; political discontent; political behavior; trust in institutions; democracy satisfaction; transitions to adulthood

1. Introduction

The economic-financial crisis that began in 2007–2008 has had an undoubted impact throughout the Western world, but in some European countries, such as Spain, it has reached huge proportions. To the economic consequences of the prolonged recession, with its negative effects on the standard of living of large sections of the population, we must add a profound political crisis that has affected virtually all institutions in the country and the democratic system itself.

According to all available data, young people have been one of the groups most affected by the effects of the socioeconomic crisis [1]. Beyond the visible consequences in specific areas of social life (for example, youth unemployment rose above 50%), the Great Recession has meant that a large number of young people have stopped their integration processes and have had to face an increasing number of obstacles to achieve personal autonomy [2]. This situation has been aggravated by a succession of corruption scandals and austerity policies, which have ended up showing, for many young people, that this was not simply an economic problem but rather the inability of the political system to meet their needs and allow them to defend their interests.

This general feeling of generational frustration is what underlies the protagonism that certain youth sectors acquired in the Spanish public sphere during the *indignados* movement and in the cycle of

protests that followed. Their active presence and their transformation into leading political actors has been one of the most novel and surprising features, as it seems to indicate the existence of significant changes in the relationship that young people have with democratic politics.

In line with this approach, this article aims to empirically analyze the impact that the shared experience of the crisis has had on youth evaluations of the sociopolitical situation of Spanish democracy and on the political expression of their discontent. The hypothesis from which we start is that, in these years, there has been a reconfiguration of the relationship that broad sectors of Spanish youth have with politics. This reconfiguration has led to a highly politically critical stance towards democracy, which, instead of promoting distance and indifference (as it would have been predictable given the previous predominant positions), has led to a notable increase in subjective involvement, and an active presence in the political sphere. This politicization of discontent, although present in broad sectors of the Spanish population, becomes more important among young people socialized during the crisis. This is because, according to many authors, youth is a decisive stage of the life cycle of the formation of political attitudes, which then tend to stabilize [3,4], and when 'period-specific shocks' have a greater impact [5].

In order to meet our objectives, this article begins with the development of the theoretical generational approach employed throughout the text, where we explain how a shared experience of economic, social, and political problems constitute the distinctive element of this 'crisis generation' (Section 2). Then, we broadly describe the context in which the politicization of this generation has taken place in Spain, identifying the four main elements: political management of the economic and financial crisis, corruption scandals, institutional distrust, and blockage of the political system (Section 3). In the next section, we make a preliminary approach to change in the political attitudes of young people during the Great Recession (Section 4) Afterwards, we present the research design, explaining the two stages of analysis, as well as the data and methods we used (Section 5). Then, in Section 6, we present the results. In particular, we first analyze the evolution of the typology of attitudes towards politics in Spain between 2002 and 2015 based on the longitudinal data from the European Social Survey, showing that the 15-M movement clearly marks a milestone (Section 6.1). From that moment on, there was a reconfiguration of attitudes towards politics: the proportion of Spaniards that we label as conformist or satisfied in political terms is reduced, whereas the proportion of critically politicized individuals increases, especially among the youngest and those less than 45 years old. Secondly, to give a deeper picture of the reconfiguration of youth attitudes towards politics, we focus on the analysis of the political discontent, restricting our analysis to cross-sectional data of young people coming from the Young People in Spain Survey 2016 (Section 6.2). In particular, we focus on two issues: the characterization of the most discontented youth by identifying the sociodemographic and political explanations of their political discontent; then, we analyze how they express the dissatisfaction through political mobilization to answer the question of whether political discontent could be a factor that deepened the distance these young people felt from politics and, ultimately, whether it increased their democratic disaffection. Section 7 discusses the findings and concludes.

2. Crisis Generation: A Shared Experience

The explanation of the relationship between the structural conditions in which young people develop their lives and the processes through which they build their life experiences is one of the main challenges of youth research [6,7]. This interrelation acquires special relevance in moments of deep transformations in the social, economic, and political context of young people's lives, and especially in those moments that involve significant transformations in the experience of youth. In this sense, once we become aware that people are not 'young' in the same way as those in previous times, we can indeed talk about the emergence of a generation [8] (p. 71). As Mannheim established [9], it is the existence of a certain rupture or discontinuity in historical time experienced by a cohort of individuals in the process of socialization that defines the emergence of a generation. The events that mark a

milestone and define a "before" and "after" are the grounds of the new generation and the social identities they create. What distinguishes them, however, is sharing certain social experiences at a specific moment in the course of their life [10]. Historical time and biographical time, therefore, intersect in the definition of generations.

This generational approach differs from the usual media discourse that by identifying a generation (for example, Millennials or Generation Z) based on a set of attributes (psychosocial traits, lifestyles), defined very generically, this would be shared by members of the same age group and differentiate them from those of earlier times. Apart from the lack of precise criteria for the identification of generations, this perspective carries a homogeneous vision of youth, forgetting that young people often respond differently depending on their social situation. Our approach also differs from that sociopolitical research that implicitly identifies cohort and generation. From our analytical perspective, based on Mannheim's generational theory, it is wrong to think that social generations follow each other with the same temporal regularity as biological cohorts. On the contrary, a social generation is always social-historically situated. Each new cohort opens the possibility of a new generation, and "is a 'potential generation' that may or may not develop the common bond that transforms it into an 'actual generation'" [11] (pp. 17–18). Its emergence depends on the existence of a shared experience that breaks the continuity of historical time and forces its protagonists to build new subjectivities. Therefore, speaking of generations in the analysis of youth implies trying to understand the experience of young people in the historical moment they are living and how they face this situation of change, always in interaction with older generations [8].

2.1. Dimensions of Generational Analysis and "the Crisis Generation"

There are three dimensions to consider when we want to study a generation. Firstly, structural conditions, which are a product of the processes of social change, and in which the socialization of a determined cohort takes place that also defines the social situation in which its members grow. Secondly, the characteristics of the responses that young people construct to face these generational conditions, giving rise to new subjectivities. Specific forms of expression, collective feelings, and orientations towards action converge in these subjectivities and are at the base of the generational link. Thirdly, the internal divisions that can be established within a generation as a consequence, basically, of the action of a system of social inequalities on the experience of youth. Groups resulting from these divisions, so-called "generational units" by Mannheim [6], are defined by their varying reactions to the historical conditions in which they live, depending on the different social positions that their members occupy. In this sense, it is important to emphasize that working with the idea of generation does not imply forgetting the decisive importance of class, gender, and ethnic inequalities that intersect with the category of youth [8,12,13].

These three dimensions are clearly recognizable in what we have called "the crisis generation". With this term, we refer to that cohort of young people who have undergone most of their socialization in a new sociostructural context, defined by: (1) the deterioration of the socioeconomic conditions in which they carry out their processes of transition to adult life; (2) the exponential increase in uncertainty about possible future integration; and, above all, (3) the generalization of precariousness in most areas of youth life. These new conditions in which young people must learn to build their biographies have become a decisive generational experience. The intensity of the crisis and its effects, both individually and collectively, constitute a shared experience that redefines the way to be young today. Although it should not be forgotten, as previously mentioned, that beyond the generational bond that unites them, this experience of crisis is lived and interpreted by young people in different ways, depending on where they are located within the structure of social inequalities and opportunities.

2.2. Shared Experience of Job Insecurity and Lack of Expectations

The economic-financial crisis, which in countries such as Spain has acquired broad dimensions with consequences in practically all areas of collective life (social, labor, political-institutional)

has meant, as Mannheim said [6], a discontinuity in historical time. That is, it is an event that marks a before and an after in the existence of many citizens, especially those who are in the middle of a formative stage of life, because it can leave important scars in the course of one's life [14,15]. The situation of precariousness and the "horizon of uncertainty" that requires individuals to be in a continuous search for balance [16], exacerbated during the crisis, constitutes an experience shared by a great majority of young Spaniards, for some directly and very intensely, and others vicariously, but also close up. In all cases, this generational experience has forced them to improvise new survival strategies and new repertoires of skills and competencies to face this difficult reality. To fully understand the impact of the crisis on this generation, however, we must bear in mind that many of these problems, which are now evident, have been marking the existence of young people for several decades. Precarity, uncertainty, or the "absence of a future" are distinctive features of the transformation of the model of youth in global capitalism [17] and, therefore, had already been conditioning the development of the life projects of the clear majority of young Spanish people for a long time. What has changed with the crisis is that these phenomena have become visible and sharpened, and, above all, daily experiences.

The various socioeconomic indicators of these years leave no doubt about the great difficulties that young people have faced in the development of their transition processes. This has been basically due to the worsening of living conditions and growing obstacles to building biographical projects in keeping with their expectations for the future. The figures on the evolution of the labor market for young people are undoubtedly the most striking. According to the Spanish Statistical Office (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística*, www.ine.es), among young people between 20 and 24 years of age, the percentage of unemployment rose from 15% in 2006 to an impacting 52% in 2013, a peak in "job destruction", and, among young adults from 25 to 29 years old, those seven years saw increases from 10% to 33%. Youth employment, for those between 16 and 29, has fallen by 50% in these years, and the labor market has lost almost two million young people, who in 2013 only represented 16% of the employed. In addition to the difficulties in entering the labor market, working conditions have deteriorated significantly and, with this, a feeling of insecurity has spread among young people. As of 2010, temporary contracts for young people began an upward trend, reaching the peak of 54% in 2015; almost 30 points more than all wage earners. The consequences of this sociolabor context on purchasing power and, in general, on the living conditions of young people, are predictable. According to the results of the Youth in Spain Report 2016, young people earn around 8000 or 9000 euros less than the average of the salaried population; youth economic independence, either total or partial, has been reduced from 71% in 2008 to 57% in 2016; average income has fallen 16% in that same period of time; and, among young adults aged 25 to 29, only 38% had income to live without family support [2].

The key element in defining the crisis generation is the shared experience of life problems caused by this profound worsening of living conditions. References to material conditions, however, are insufficient. We must also consider the meanings that protagonists attribute to the experience of the crisis [8]. Through narrations in which young Spaniards explain how they experience the crisis, their aspirations, expectations, frustration, and bewilderment with which they face the scenario, are visible. The 'blockade' of the labor market, the need to emigrate abroad as the only survival strategy, or the uncertainty generated by their predictable precarious future are constant references in stories through which they build the link that gives them meaning as a generation. From the optimistic vision that prevailed previously, we turn to narratives in which young people appear as the main victims of a system that does not offer a future promise of integration [18–20].

The crisis, in the Spanish case, has a relevant cultural dimension, as it represents the bankruptcy of a tale of generational progress that has been built since the beginning of the 1980s. Social progress, associated with the project of the modernization of democratic Spain, would be reflected, according to this cultural construction, in a better and more prosperous future for new generations in exchange for postponing rewards in the present [21]. This promise of deferred success worked as a kind of intergenerational pact that was resistant to various unfavorable circumstances (e.g., economic crises,

corruption scandals, terrorism, persistence of social problems) that took place in the decades following democratic transition. The start of the new century represented a turning point. Symptoms that the optimistic story of generational progress lost real basis and symbolic strength accumulated despite the climate of certain economic euphoria prevailing in the first years of the 21st century [22]. When the socioeconomic climate changes and the Great Recession 'settles' in Spanish society, with known consequences on the lives of young people, the feeling of disappointment and frustration will spread. From the promise of a better future we turn to outrage at the blocking of life expectations.

3. Context of Youth Politicization

When in 2011 the "indignant" young people of 15-M shouted the famous slogan "They do not represent us!", they were not only expressing their frustration at the negative consequences of a deteriorating economic situation and protesting against austerity policies defended by the main political leaders [23].[1] This, and other slogans that became famous, also reflected the many factors that converged in the social construction of the crisis in Spain and the consequences of the lack of the legitimacy of the political and institutional system [25]. 15-M and the protest cycle developed in subsequent years have highlighted the political nature of the economic crisis and the importance of criticism towards a political and institutional system that offered no alternative to austerity policies or solutions to problems like corruption [23,24,26,27].

In order to understand in all its complexity the context in which young Spaniards have become politicized, the classical argument that explains the changes in the attitudes and political behavior as a direct consequence of the effects of the economic recession on their living conditions is insufficient. To this argument, which is undoubtedly relevant, as has been shown in many analyses [28,29], we must add another series of factors that have also played a fundamental role in the aforementioned process of youth politicization.

3.1. Political Management of the Economic and Financial Crisis

The management of the economic crisis by the ruling elites is the first factor to be considered. In Spain, the economic crisis has been especially long and intense. Specifically, the circumstances that triggered the recession in the Western world from 2008 were compounded by the consequences of the collapse of a speculative real-estate bubble and the accumulation of private debt, which would later end up becoming public debt. Additionally, all this occurred within the framework of the contradictions arising from the introduction of the euro [30]. After the failure of an initial strategy of countercyclical public investment, government (first socialist and then conservative) policies for cutting public spending, focusing almost exclusively on the reduction of the public deficit, had a powerful impact on economic activity and the purchasing power of citizens. These austerity policies, together with the agreement reached by the two major parties in 2011 to introduce the "budgetary-stability rule" into the Constitution, implied endorsement by the political elites of the austerity strategy as the only possible route to overcome the crisis.

Austerity policies, however, not only failed to provide any solution to existing problems (GDP continued falling between 2011 and 2013), but the situation worsened when the government was forced to address the financial crisis through a loan of about 50 million euros from the European Union. Unemployment rose to almost 26% in 2012 and 2013, cuts in key areas of the welfare system, such as health and education, were increased, and inequality also markedly increased. Meanwhile, citizens tended to the rescue of banking entities that, to a large extent, were at the origin of the crisis due

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[1] The 15-M Movement ('*Movimiento 15-M*' in Spanish), also known as the Indignados Movement, stands for 15 May, the 2011 date when the first large demonstration took place that started an important antiausterity movement in Spain. Demonstrators protested against the lack of a 'real democracy', high unemployment rates, particularly for young people, but also against politicians, the political system, political corruption, and welfare cuts more generally. See Reference [24] for further details.

to their collaboration with real-estate speculation, the unprofessional behavior of their top managers, and, in some cases, corrupt practices.

3.2. Political Corruption and Its Impact on Public Opinion

The unpopularity of austerity policies, concern about an increasingly negative economic situation, and the widespread feeling that there was connivance between economic power and political power explain the climate of social unrest and street protests that occurred between 2011 and 2013/14. This climate of generalized discontent was reinforced by ongoing corruption scandals during these years, and this constitutes to be another decisive factor in the explanation of the crisis.

Problems of political corruption cannot be said to be something new in Spanish democratic history. However, after the economic expansion following entry into the euro, and especially the construction boom in the first decade of the 21st century, news about corruption began to proliferate in Spanish public opinion [31]. This situation became increasingly concerning as the economic crisis deepened, but above all when corruption scandals linked to the Popular Party began to happen without interruption, affecting not only well-known leaders but also the ruling party's financing system. The other main party, the PSOE, was also affected by cases of corruption, especially in the region of Andalusia, where the party has governed continually since the restoration of democracy. No institution seemed to be above suspicion during those years, as evidenced by the Noos scandal involving King Juan Carlos' son-in-law, which damaged the monarchy's image in the eyes of the public.

Experts believe that the level of objective corruption in Spain is lower than that perceived socially, and that this corruption is not systemic in nature since it does not affect the administrative sphere in a broad way [32–34]. However, the succession of scandals and the extensive coverage given by the media has led to very high levels of perception of corruption and citizen concern about the phenomenon. According to opinion polls conducted by the Center for Sociological Research in 2012, 89% of respondents considered that corruption was very or fairly widespread in national politics and, since 2013, corruption has become the second most important public problem for Spaniards after unemployment [35,36].

3.3. Political and Institutional Distrust on the Rise

The third factor to be considered is closely related to those previously mentioned, since it deals with the crisis of political and institutional distrust that has occurred among very large sectors of the Spanish population during the Great Recession. Political and institutional disaffection was not an unknown feature in Spanish political culture, although, according to existing analyses, the bases of legitimacy of the political system were solid, despite successive problems experienced in these years [37,38]. During a great part of Spain's democratic history, low levels of trust in political institutions and their leaders have coexisted with broad support for democracy as a political system [39,40].

However, this situation dramatically changed when the economic crisis erupted due to the sharp decline in levels of trust in the main democratic institutions and discontent with the way in which the democratic system works. Before the crisis, average trust in democratic institutions and average satisfaction with democracy were low, but remained more or less stable. However, when the effects of the recession began to be felt, the scores on all indicators plummeted, especially after 2013, the worst year of the Great Recession. Figures 1 and 2 show several indicators that illustrate this process. The three indicators related to trust in key institutions of democracy, such as Parliament, politicians, and political parties, show unequivocal evolution. In these latter two cases, the evolution is the same. Public distrust reaches surprisingly high levels from 2013 onwards: not only is the average below 2 on a scale of 0 to 10, but almost 80% display extreme distrust by giving a score between 0 and 3. In the case of Parliament, however, it is also significant that this 'greater distrust' group doubled between 2009 and 2013, going from 25% to around 50% in 2013 and 2015, respectively. Growing dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy allows us to complete the picture. As had been usual in the previous decades,

at the beginning of the 21st century the 'functioning of democracy' was highly valued by the majority of the population and around 40% even described themselves as 'very satisfied' (they rated performance between 7 and 10). At the beginning of the second decade, however, dissatisfaction increased, and it did so in a very marked way starting in 2013: the average score fell by more than one point between 2011 and 2013 and was reduced by half in 2015.[2]
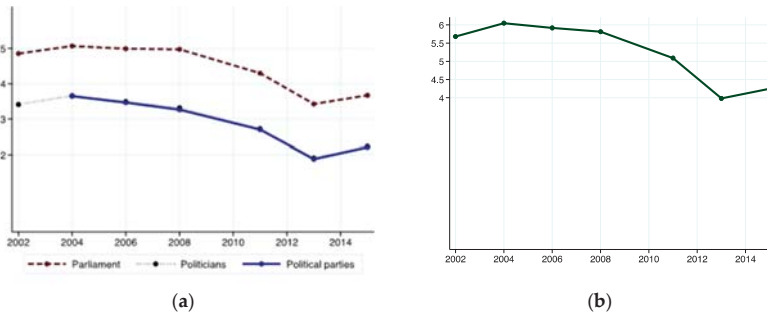

(a)   (b)

Figure 1. Evolution of political trust and satisfaction with democracy. (**a**) Average trust in Parliament, politicians, and political parties on a 0–10 scale. (**b**) Average satisfaction with the way in which democracy works in Spain (0–10 scale). Source: European Social Survey, rounds 1–7 (Spain).

(a)   (b)
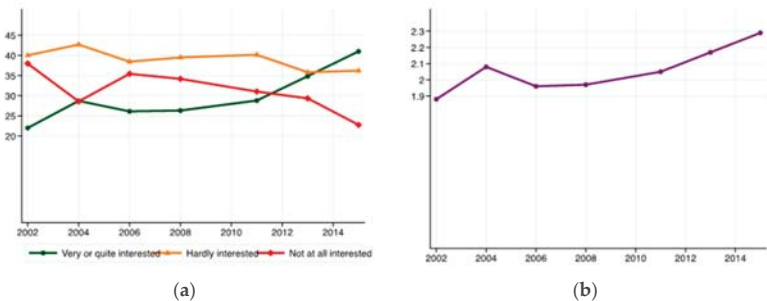
Figure 2. Evolution of political interest and politicization index. (**a**) Interest in politics, measured as the percentage of individuals very or quite interested in politics, hardly interested, or not at all interested; (**b**) politicization Index, which has been built with the following formula: $P.I. = \frac{p_1 \cdot 4 + p_2 \cdot 3 + p_3 \cdot 2 + p_4 \cdot 1}{p_1 + p_2 + p_3 + p_4}$, where p_1, p_2, p_3, and p_4 are the percentages of "very interested", "quite interested", "hardly interested", and "not at all interested", respectively. Source: European Social Survey, rounds 1–7 (Spain).

The sharp decline in institutional trust and satisfaction with the functioning of the political system are closely related, as is logical, with the evolution of economic problems. The development of the economic crisis, however, is not the only factor responsible for this situation. The widespread citizen feeling that political elites are incapable of responding to growing problems, the absence of alternatives to policies that do not lead to results, and the perception of almost systemic corruption explain why distrust and dissatisfaction are common among large sectors of the population, regardless of their economic situation [28,41,42].

Most noteworthy, however, is that this increase in institutional disaffection has not been accompanied by a parallel increase in political detachment, as would have been expected in a country where interest in politics has traditionally been negligible. On the contrary, the economic, political,

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2   Additional analyses of the evolution in the average evaluation of these indicators are available from the authors upon request.

and institutional crisis has generated an increase in the politicization of citizens. Figure 2 clearly shows a positive evolution of interest in politics among the Spanish population. If at the beginning of the 2000s only two out of every 10 Spaniards were 'very' or 'quite interested' in politics, in 2015 this percentage doubled, also exceeding both those who are 'not very interested' or those who are 'not at all interested', which had been the two hegemonic categories until that date. When the evolution from the beginning of the crisis is analyzed, progress in political interest is also surprising. From 2009 to 2015, the percentage of people interested in politics increased by 15 points, and that of those 'totally removed' from politics fell by 11 points. The trend followed by the politicization index that we have built clearly shows this upward trend since 2009; neither does this stop after 2013, as what happened with other previously analyzed indicators.

This mixture, on the one hand, of institutional mistrust and dissatisfaction with the functioning of the political system and of greater politicization on the other, expressed by the increase in political interest and also in the level of political participation (see Figures 1 and 2), seems to point to the emergence in Spanish society of a significant percentage of critical citizens oriented towards social change [43,44]. The importance of this critical citizenship lies, as Norris has argued [45], in the fact that their political involvement and democratic commitment makes them more inclined to try to change the situation that generates social and political unrest. Perhaps the first sign of that 'will to change' in Spain occurred in the 2014 European Parliament elections, in which a broad protest vote was generated against the two largest parties that had monopolized Spanish political life since the 1980s (the PP and PSOE), which resulted in: (a) a sharp decline in the vote for these two parties (from 73.4% in 2011 or 80.9% in previous European elections to only 49.1% of the vote); (b) an increase in the number of small parties; (c) the emergence of new parties, in particular 'Podemos', which with 1,300,000 votes and 8% of the electorate exceeded all predictions [46].

3.4. Problems of Representation and Blockage of the Political System

The rupture of the bipartisan system that began in the 2014 elections is an evident consequence of the last dimension of the crisis to which we are going to refer: the blockade of the political system and the problems of representation that derived from it. Since the 1980s, Spain maintained a system of imperfect bipartisanship, hegemonized by two major parties (socialist and conservative), which relied on nationalist parties to govern alone. At the beginning of the 21st century, some symptoms of the 'exhaustion of the model' emerge, but the period of tension and polarization related to the Rodríguez Zapatero government diverted attention to other issues [47]. Since the beginning of the crisis, the insufficiencies of the traditional partisan system have become evident: the main political actors lost citizen trust and the sectors dissatisfied with the management of the crisis could not find representation.

Although some symptoms of the exhaustion of the bipartisan model were already present in the 2011 elections, it was not until the electoral cycle of 2014–2015 that the model collapsed. While the PP and PSOE experienced an unprecedented fall in their respective support (the socialists in 2015 obtained their worst result since the beginning of the transition), two new parties emerged strongly: Podemos, created in 2014, and Ciudadanos, which up until a short time previously had been a small Catalan antinationalist party with very little presence in the rest of Spain. Various analyses carried out in this process of electoral change have shown that economic factors are insufficient to explain the rupture of the party system. On the contrary, the main factor associated with the emergence of the new parties is related to the political crisis and representation. Both the vote for Podemos and Ciudadanos expressed the feeling of critical discontent—in one case in a more disruptive way and in the other a more reformist one—with the social and political situation [42,43,48,49]. This result represented a shift from traditional bipartisanship to a situation of electoral and parliamentary fragmentation that greatly complicated the formation of governments at all levels. The general elections of 2015 had to be repeated six months later because the parties failed to achieve an agreement on government formation [50].

All the factors that have been described above, along with others that should not be forgotten (such as territorial tensions deriving from the rise of the Catalan independence movement), result in a complex context of politicization where young people have not only found encouragement to express their dissatisfaction with the consequences of the crisis, but have often taken a leading position in the direction of change. Undoubtedly, the 'indignant' movement is the clearest exponent of this youthful protagonism because, although it is not strictly a youth protest movement, there is a predominance of new generations among its active participants, especially university students and those from the middle classes [51]. Young people have also, however, been prominent protagonists in the emergence of new parties [52]. According to available analyses, age is one of the main predictors of electoral support for the two new parties in 2015 [42,43]. This generational dimension is especially evident in the case of Podemos, which obtained a much higher percentage of votes than other parties among voters under 35, while it fell sharply among those over 55 (see Figure 3).
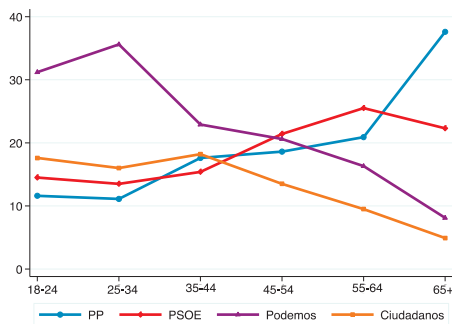
Figure 3. Vote for the four main parties in the 2015 General Election by age group. Source: Centre for Sociological Research, Postelection Surveys (2015 General Election).

4. Youth Attitudes Towards Politics in Changing Times

The change in Spanish politics in recent years has been largely, though not exclusively, led by highly politicized and mobilized youth sectors. However, there are many clues that this politicization is not limited to small groups but that, in general terms, the relationship of young Spaniards with politics during the Great Recession has undergone an interesting process of change. The evolution of political attitudes of young people clearly shows the impact of the socioeconomic and political crisis on their relationship with politics (Figures 4 and 5).

(**a**)

(**b**)
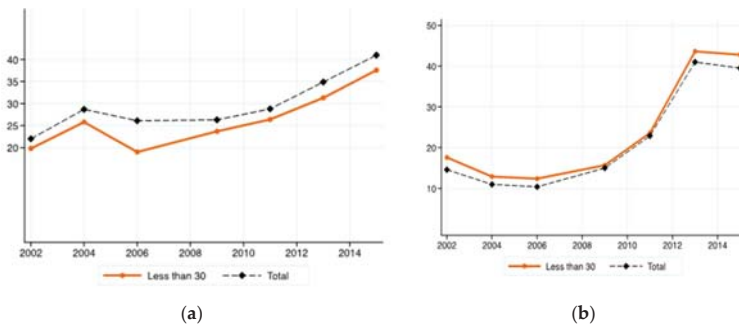
Figure 4. Young people interested in politics and dissatisfied with democracy. (**a**) Interest in politics, measured as the percentage of individuals very or quite interested in politics; (**b**) dissatisfaction with democracy, measured as the percentage of individuals with low satisfaction with the way in which democracy works in Spain (0–3 on a 0–10 scale). Source: European Social Survey, rounds 1–7 (Spain).
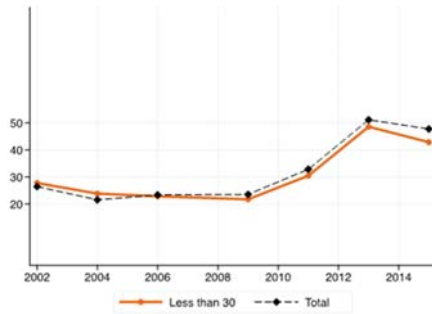
(**a**)
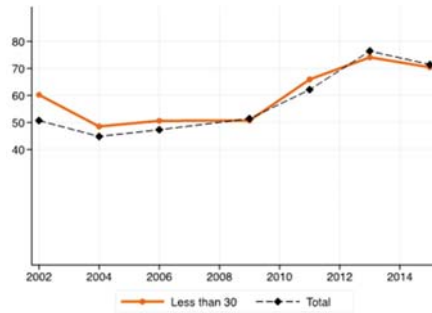
(**b**)
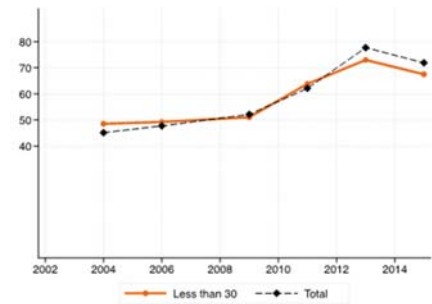
(**c**)

Figure 5. Young people's mistrust in political institutions. (**a**) Mistrust in Parliament, measured as the percentage of individuals with low trust in Parliament (0–3 in a 0–10 scale); (**b**) mistrust in politicians, measured as the percentage of individuals with low trust in politicians (0–3 in a 0–10 scale); (**c**) mistrust in political parties, measured as the percentage of individuals with low trust in political parties (0–3 in a 0–10 scale). Source: European Social Survey, rounds 1–7 (Spain).

The most noteworthy feature is growing discontent among young people about the functioning of democracy and growing distrust in political institutions and those responsible for them. Three out of four young people have expressed 'high distrust' in parties and politicians since 2012, and those satisfied with the functioning of democracy have gone from 40% in 2009 to around 15%. However, at the same time, interest in politics has increased consistently during this period, with the percentage of young people who are very or quite interested in these issues almost doubling in 10 years (Figures 4 and 5). Taken as a whole, these indicators of attitudes towards politics give us an idea of, on the one hand, an increase in young people's critical views towards representative democracy

and particularly towards politicians and political parties, and, on the other, a generalized reduction in apathy or political indifference. Dissatisfaction with the sociopolitical situation and, in general, with the performance of democracy, does not seem to have caused a distance of young people from democratic politics. Many previous studies have shown a tendency of young people to political disengagement [53–56],[3] especially in a country like Spain where disaffection has been a feature of political culture [41,59]. As disenchantment and distrust increase, one would expect that distance and disinterest in democratic politics would have increased. The novelty of this historical moment is that the relationship is reversed.

This trend, which is especially evident since 2012, does not only affect young people, but also characterizes the whole of the Spanish population, as the data in Figures 4 and 5 clearly show. For that reason, after this broad contextualization of the Spanish political panorama, in the findings section below we will compare different birth cohorts to have a more precise idea of the position of young people and the so-called "crisis generation".

5. Research Design: Data and Methods

Our research about the impact of the shared experience of the crisis on the political attitudes of young Spanish people is based on the hypothesis that along these years there has been a reconfiguration in the attitudes towards politics of broad sectors of the population. This reconfiguration is characterized by the significant increase of what we call 'politicization of discontent', that is, broad youth political involvement despite widespread dissatisfaction with the functioning of the democratic system.

To test this hypothesis, we performed the analyses in two stages. First, we analyzed how the young people of this generation respond to the new socioeconomic (deterioration of living conditions) and political (growth of institutional distrust and the beginning of a cycle of protest mobilization) circumstances. Then, at a second stage, we focused on the group of young people most dissatisfied with the situation to know how they politically express this discontent.

5.1. First Stage: Attitudinal Change of Young People in Spain

Aggregate analysis of the temporal evolution of some political attitudes exposed in the previous section provides interesting clues about the attitudinal change experienced by young people and by broad sectors of the Spanish population during these years. However, from there, solid conclusions about the specific features of this change cannot be drawn. Even when, as shown in Section 4, there is, on average, a growing interest in politics and also growing criticism towards 'political elements', both trends do not necessarily occur simultaneously at the individual level. In fact, growing distrust of politics in Spain, particularly among young people, has been accompanied for many by an increase in interest in politics (these are the individuals who we will call "critically politicized"); it is also true that for other individuals their strong criticism of politics is associated with a low interest in politics (those who we call "disengaged").

In order to better account for these trends, we have developed a typology of attitudes towards politics (see Table 1 below). With this typology, we synthesized them into a single variable different element of a multidimensional concept such as political support. Specifically, we incorporated elements of regime performance (how democracy works), regime institutions (trust in Parliament), political actors (trust in politicians and political parties), and interest in politics.

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[3] This tendency toward disengagement is explained in some cases by the lack of interest of young people in politics and in other cases because, it is argued, they are interested in politics in another way, less institutionalized and/or more expressive [57,58].

Table 1. A typology of attitudes towards politics.

		Interest in politics	
		Low	**High**
Satisfaction with democracy or/and	Low	DISENGAGED	CRITICALLY POLITICIZED
trust in political institutions and actors *	High	CONFORMIST	SATISFIED

* The category 'Low' refers to low satisfaction with democracy or low trust in political institutions and actors, while 'High' refers simultaneously to high satisfaction with democracy and high trust in political institutions and actors. For further details, see the text and Table A1 in Appendix A.

Table A1 in the Appendix A shows the operationalization of the dimensions included in our typology of attitudes towards politics. As can be seen, it includes not only the conceptual dimensions incorporated in the typology, but also its empirical measurement.[4]

As a result of the combination of these different indicators, synthesized in just two dimensions (satisfaction and trust vs. interest), we obtained a variable with four categories that are represented in the following table. Specifically, we identified four attitudinal positions: disengaged, critically politicized, conformist, and satisfied. This allowed us to make a more fine-grained classification and distinguish, among those who have low satisfaction with democracy or low trust in political institutions, between, on the one hand, those with a high interest in politics (critically politicized) and those who, on the other, show a low interest in politics and move away from it (the disengaged). Similarly, with our classification we could differentiate among those who manifest a high level of satisfaction with democracy and also high trust in political institutions, two types of individuals: those who positively evaluate political elements and have a high interest in politics (satisfied) and those who are satisfied with the political situation and who trust in the institutions but have a low interest in politics (conformist).

To analyze the evolution of this typology of political attitudes, the first seven rounds of the European Social Survey in Spain (2002–2014) have been used (N = 13,498). This dataset allowed us to make a double comparison. On the one hand, a temporal comparison that covers not only the moment of the Great Recession and change in the political cycle, but also the immediately preceding period of political and economic stability. On the other hand, it allowed a comparison of the so-called "crisis generation" with other age groups and birth cohorts. It is important to note that below we will present the typology of political attitudes before and after the 15-M movement by cohorts defined by year of birth.[5] The distribution of cases among age groups and year of data collection, and birth cohorts and year of data collection, is displayed in Appendix B (Tables A2 and A3).

To analyze the effect of 'cycle change' in different age groups, in Section 6.1. we ran several multivariate models where the dependent variable was our typology of attitudes towards politics. In particular, we estimated four separate binominal logistic models, including an interaction term between age and political cycle[6]. Our main independent variables were, therefore, the dummy variable cycle (before or after 15-M), and age, measured in five birth cohorts (1911–1925; 1926–1945; 1946–1965; 1966–1980; and 1981–2000). Additionally, we included as control variables gender, education (measured as the highest level of education expressed in three groups), and economic difficulties in the household,

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4   Our contribution was built upon classical texts that account for the complexity and multidimensionality of the concept of political support. We refer of course to David Easton's seminal works [60], where he distinguished between support for the political community, the regime, and the authorities, but also to Pippa Norris [45], who developed a fivefold conceptualization that defined the political community, regime principles, regime performance, regime institutions, and political actors.

5   Cohorts used replicate one of the most common classifications internationally. Each cohort is usually identified with a generational label: those individuals born between 1911 and 1925 are labelled as the "Greatest generation"), the so-called "silent generation" (1926–1946), baby boomers (1946–1965), generation X (1966–1980) and millennials (1981–2000). See, for example, Reference [61]. Members of the crisis generation are included in the last cohort.

6   For expository reasons, although the typology comprises four categorical values, we preferred to run four separate binomial logistic models instead of a multinomial logistic regression.

a more comparable proxy of economic situation across age groups than other indicators such as unemployment, income, or occupational attainment.[7]

5.2. Second Stage: Analysis of the Most Discontented Youth

After presenting a detailed picture of the reconfiguration of youth attitudes towards politics, at a second stage we delved into a more specific aspect: the characteristics of political discontent among young people given the high degree of dissatisfaction with politics that they showed during the Great Recession. Thus, we identified the profiles of the most dissatisfied young people and, above all, their implications for the future of democracy.

Study of youth political discontent has a special interest in Spain for at least two reasons. First, because Spanish youth have traditionally been characterized by their lack of interest and high degree of disaffection [39,59,62]. Increase in dissatisfaction and discontent in recent years could have deepened the process of distance and apathy of young people with respect to democratic politics. Second, because the study of political discontent among young people provides an idea of the legitimacy of the political system for the future, especially in a country like Spain where there has been a large fall in satisfaction with democracy [63,64]. It is therefore necessary to ask whether political dissatisfaction among young people translates into a loss of legitimacy of representative democracy or if it supposes a departure from politics that could jeopardize the bases of representation in the future.

To answer both questions, we studied, through bivariate and multivariable analyses (Section 6.2), the sociodemographic and political profiles, and the degree of political mobilization of the most discontented youth, i.e., those who are most dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy and with the least trust in politicians and political parties. In order to have a large sample of young people with these characteristics, and to be able to use other socioeconomic and political indicators, for this analysis we have drawn on the results of the Young People in Spain Survey 2016 [2]. Survey fieldwork was conducted at the end of 2015 on a representative sample of 5000 young people between 15 and 29 years old.

To delimit the collective, and in coherence with previous analyses, the 'discontented young' are considered to be those who are very dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy (scores between 0 and 3 on a 0–10 scale) and, at the same time, manifest their distrust of politicians and political parties (they scored between 0 and 4 on both scales). Therefore, the three main elements of discontent in recent years in Spain are summarized in a single indicator, identifying a group that represents a quarter of the total of young people (24.2%).

6. Findings

6.1. Between Disengagement and Critical Politicization

First and preliminary analysis of our attitudinal typology developed in Section 5.1. shows that, for the period between 2002 and 2014, the most frequent category among the Spanish population was disengaged (54.3%), a long way from the other three categories: critically politicized (19.3%), conformist (16.4%), and satisfied (10.0%). However, this first descriptive referring to the population average throughout the period hides changes in time and differences between groups, which will be analyzed in detail below.

When we examined the distribution of these categories throughout the period under consideration, the high degree of discontent associated with the socioeconomic and political crisis became evident

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[7] The question is formulated as: "Which of the descriptions on this card comes closest to how you feel about your household's income nowadays?", with four possible responses. In the models, this variable was included as a dichotomous variable, referring, on the one hand, to those with economic difficulties ("Finding it difficult on present income" or "Finding it very difficult on present income") and, on the other hand, to those with a good economic situation at household level ("Living comfortably on present income" or "Coping on present income").

(Figure 6). While the two categories that reflect satisfaction with the functioning of the system (satisfied and conformist) moved between 30% and 35% in the first years of the decade, from 2012 they were reduced to less than half. On the contrary, the categories that reflect discontent with the situation (disengaged and critically politicized) were triggered from this last date, reaching percentages of around 85%. Within this last group, progression of the critically politicized stands out against those who hold positions of distance: in 2008, the relationship between both categories was 3.5 in favor of the disengaged, while in 2014 it was reduced to only 1.5.
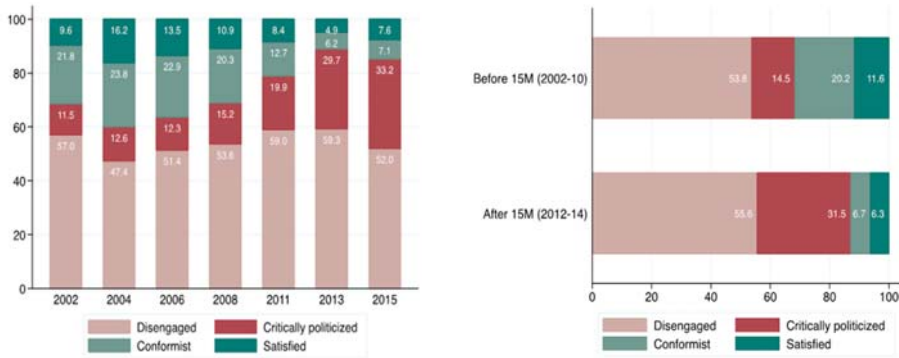
Figure 6. Evolution of the typology of attitudes towards politics in Spain, 2002–2015. Source: European Social Survey in Spain, rounds 1–7.

It is important to remember that, as explained in Section 3, 2011 was a year that marked a milestone in the recent political history of Spain and the beginning of a protest cycle and political change. It was precisely in 2011 when the biggest protest on 15 May (15-M) took place and the so-called *Indignados* Movement 'exploded', in a context of growing perception of corruption and mistrust in politicians, and at the height of a severe economic crisis that had officially started in 2008. A central axis of social mobilization was the protest against the lack of "real democracy" (in fact, the organization at the heart of the mobilization was "*Democracia Real Ya*"), and the criticism against the two main national political parties: PP (conservative) and PSOE (socialist).

Consequently, in subsequent analyses we identified two different 'periods' of political change in Spain: before and after the cycle of protests against austerity politics and the institutional crisis that has begun with the 15-M movement [27]. Thus, in this paper, we differentiated between "Before 15-M" (rounds 1–5, of which fieldwork in Spain was conducted between 2002 and 2011), and "After 15-M" (rounds 6 and 7, of which fieldwork in Spain was conducted at the beginning of 2013 and 2015). It is important to note that, although part of the fieldwork for round 5 in Spain was conducted between April and July 2011, during the months in which the 15-M Movement exploded, we must consider this round as "Pre-15-M". The rationale behind this decision is that, even when great changes in the party system and political attitudes began to be seen in 2011, these changes did not crystallize in Spain until a few years later. In fact, although electoral support for both the conservative and the socialist party backed down electorally in the first period, in the short term it was the socialist party that came out the most injured. Meanwhile, and despite the fall in their electoral share, PP became the government party by the end of 2011.[8]

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[8] The local elections held at that time, on 22 May 2011, the vote share of the PP (37.5%) increased a little compared to the preceding local elections in 2007 (35.6%), while the PSOE suffered important losses, and, in four years, its vote share went down from 34.9% to 27.8% in 2011 [65]. In addition to that, in the general election on 20 November 2011, the PP increased its vote share with respect to the previous elections, going from 39.9% to 44.6% and its leader, Mariano Rajoy, became Prime Minister with an absolute majority.

By differentiating the two moments of the political cycle, we can clearly see the marked changes in the typology of attitudes toward politics (see Figure 6). The number of disengaged individuals hardly changed, but the number of satisfied, and, by much more, the number of conformists, receded, while the number of critically politicized individuals, who previously only represented 14.5% of the population, doubled and later comprised 31.5% of the total population.

This change had important implications. With the worsening of the crisis and the beginning of a new political cycle, there was unprecedented critical politicization in Spain. Spanish political culture, which had been characterized by high disaffection and high detachment towards politics [66], changed in these years in a crucial way. Interestingly, in the context of growing political discontent, the disengaged were not those who increased numerically, as would be expected, but rather the critically politicized. This tendency was also very clearly reproduced among the "crisis generation", as can be seen when we compare cohorts defined by their year of birth (Figure 7).[9] Whereas before the change in the political cycle, young people showed themselves more conformist with the situation, from that moment on, satisfaction sharply dropped, and those who maintain a critical view of the situation increased and even doubled.
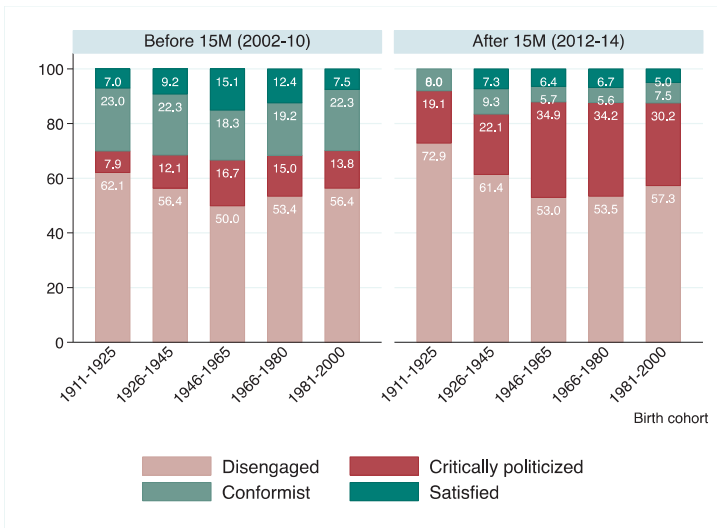
Figure 7. Typology of attitudes towards politics before and after 15-M, by birth cohorts. Birth cohorts: 1911–1925 (greatest generation), 1926–1945 (silent generation), 1946–1965 (baby boomers), 1966–1980 (generation X), and 1981–2000 (millennials). See Note 5. Source: European Social Survey in Spain, rounds 1–7.

Young people, despite their lower demographic weight, have a prominent role in this process of critical politicization described above, in which an increase in dissatisfaction with democracy and mistrust in political actors and institutions is accompanied by a high interest in politics. Figure 8 graphically depicts the predicted probabilities of the interaction between birth cohort and cycle, given that the interpretation of the additive and multiplicative terms of the interaction between the two variables was not straightforward [67]. The estimated odds ratio of the models is included in Table A4 in the Appendix C.

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9   If the variable age group is used, instead of year of birth, the results of the evolution are very similar.
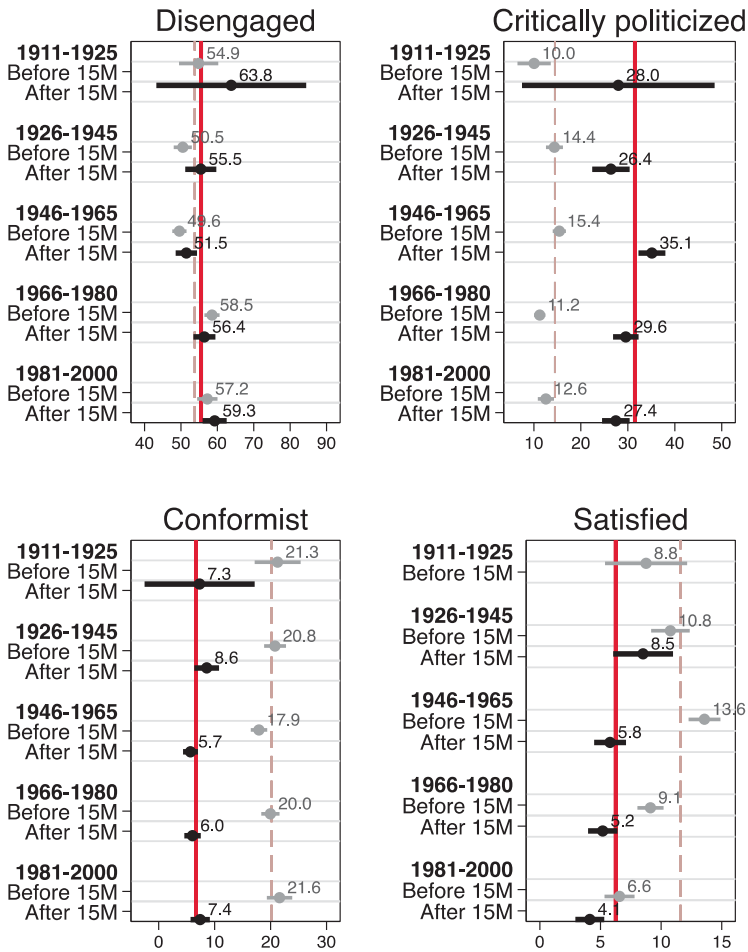
Figure 8. Predicted probabilities of attitudes towards politics by birth cohorts and political cycle. Birth cohorts: 1911–1925 (greatest generation), 1926–1945 (silent generation), 1946–1965 (baby boomers), 1966–1980 (generation X), and 1981–2000 (millennials) See Note 5. Binominal logistic models estimated separately with interaction between age and political cycle. Vertical lines represent average values before (clear dashed line) and after 15-M (strong solid line). The 'Before 15-M' category includes ESS 1–4 (2002–2008) and 'After 15-M' refers to ESS 5–7 (2010–2014), whose fieldwork was conducted from the second quarter of 2011 onwards. Controls: gender, educational attainment, and economic difficulties in household. Weighted data. N = 13,314. Source: European Social Survey in Spain, rounds 1–7.

As can be seen, before the 15-M movement and the subsequent changes in the political landscape in Spain, the proportion of millennials labeled as disengaged was above average. Specifically, around 56.1% of individuals born between 1981 and 2000 fell within this category, while among the total population the figure was just 53.7%. Since 15-M, however, the percentage of disengaged millennials has barely changed and is not significantly different from the population average. Conversely, although the proportion of millennials (born between 1981 and 2000) labeled as critically politicized before (14.4%) and after 15-M (30.2%) is somewhat lower than the average, this is one of the groups where the number of critical individuals has grown the most, only exceeded in increase by those born between 1966 and 1980, i.e., generation X (see relative changes

in Table 2 below). This is in line with previous studies focusing on the Spanish case that shows how, contrary to socialization studies' expectations, it is not youngest cohort, but rather those in their late twenties and thirties at the beginning of the century, who have most profoundly changed their perspectives regarding political institutions and political involvement [44].

Table 2. Relative change in the predicted probabilities of attitudes towards politics after 15-M compared to years before, by birth cohort.

	Disengaged	Critically Politicized	Conformist	Satisfied
1926–1946 (silent generation)	1.08	1.83	0.42	0.78
1946–1965 (baby boomers)	1.06	2.06	0.32	0.42
1966–1980 (generation X)	1.00	2.28	0.29	0.55
1981–2000 (millennials)	1.02	2.09	0.35	0.64

Changes experienced by the greatest generation are not shown because the sample size is very small. Values greater than 1 imply an increase in the number of people classified within that category, while values less than 1 represent a reduction. Values close to 1 mean that the change is almost negligible.

Taken as a whole, the previous data show that the change in the political cycle has been accompanied by a reconfiguration in attitudes towards politics. There has been a decline in the proportion of Spaniards that we label as conformist or satisfied in political terms, while the proportion of disengaged people has barely changed, and the number of individuals critically politicized has grown very significantly. This increase has been particularly noticeable among young people, although, comparatively, they are not the most critical group towards politics. In addition, we have verified how within the group of young people there are differences worthy of mention. It is not in the younger groups where critical politicization has increased the most. That is why it is essential to explore, in more detail below, the different processes of political socialization of young people of different age groups, their feelings towards politics, and their self-perceived most effective ways to influence politics.

6.2. Dissatisfaction with the Political Situation: Profiles and Implications

In this first part of the study, we have underlined the process of critical politicization of a considerable number of young Spaniards. However, this result is double-sided. On the one hand, many young people, instead of moving away from politics, have become critically involved in it. On the other hand, this cannot hide the high degree of dissatisfaction with the evolution of the political system during the Great Recession. Specifically, almost nine out of 10 young people are in one of the two categories that group 'those dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy' and 'those who have low confidence in political institutions' (disengaged and critically politicized). Therefore, it is necessary to delve into the characteristics of this political discontent, which is what we do in the second part of the study.

The first task was to examine the sociodemographic and political profiles of these very dissatisfied young people. A first bivariate analysis of the different available indicators showed that the age and socioeconomic position of the young were the sociodemographic variables that are most associated with youth political discontent: young adults, the unemployed, and those who depend economically on their parents (although they have been emancipated) are the groups with the highest predicted probability of political discontent. If we look at the political indicators, there is no clear association with the level of subjective involvement of young people (political interest and frequency with which they talk about politics). On the other hand, this association does occur in the ideological terrain: 40% of those who locate themselves on the most radical left (1–2) belong to our collective of discontented young people.

To better define these profiles of the most discontented young people, we have estimated a binomial logistic regression model. Firstly, we ran a model focusing on socioeconomic factors such as gender, age group, educational attainment, activity status, or the degree of economic dependence (panel A in Figure 9). Then, we expanded the model by adding political variables such as sentiments

towards politics, interest in politics, 'talk about politics', and the left–right scale of ideological self-placement (panel B in Figure 9). The full coefficients of the model are included in Table A5 in the Appendix C.
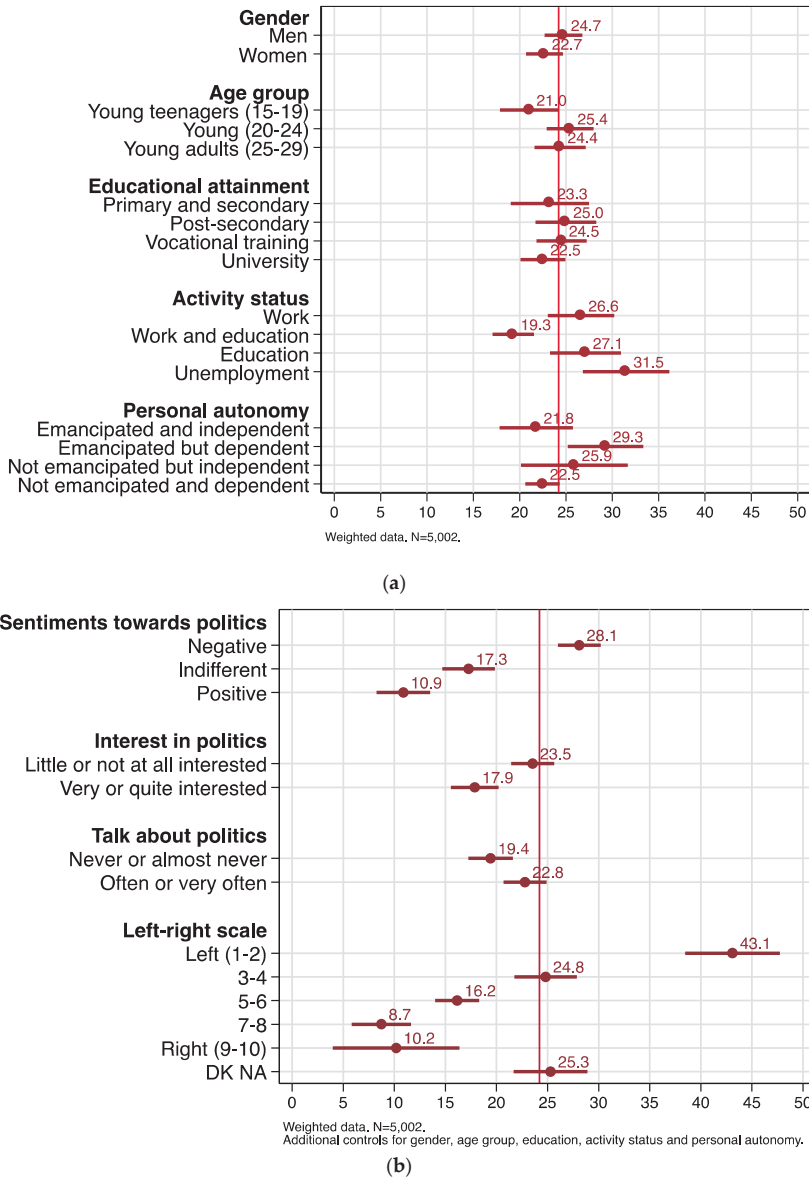

(a)

(b)

Figure 9. Predicted probabilities of political discontent. (**a**) Socioeconomic predictors; (**b**) political predictors. Variable "political discontent" contains information about dissatisfaction with the way in which democracy works in the country as well as mistrust in politicians and political parties. See details on the construction of the variable and the formulation of the questions in the text. Weighted data. Source: Young People in Spain Survey, 2016.

If we first look at the socioeconomic variables, as seen in the following figure, we see that young men seem somewhat more politically disgruntled than women, but the differences in terms of gender are not statistically significant. There are also no significant differences between young people with different educational levels. However, it seems that, ceteris paribus, those who have comparatively lower levels of political discontent are the so-called young teenagers (between 15 and 19 years old).

It should also be noted that the economic and employment situation of a young individual are important determinants of political discontent. Specifically, we look at two different aspects: on the one hand, the relationship with the activity (if they are working, studying, studying and working, or unemployed), and, on the other hand, the degree of personal autonomy. To create this last measure, we have simultaneously taken into account whether the young people were emancipated or not (that is, if they lived on their own or with their families); and if they were economically independent, that is, if they lived mainly from their income, or they depended on other people, usually their own parents.

As can be seen in Figure 9a, there are relevant differences in political discontent according to the relationship with economic activity, especially among those who are unemployed and those who combine work and studies. Controlling for the other analyzed factors, young people who study and work at the same time are less politically disgruntled than the average. On the other hand, and in line with what was pointed out in the previous section, it is the unemployed who clearly have higher levels of political discontent.

In addition, the degree of economic dependence is also an important predictor of political discontent, especially for those who have emancipated themselves from the family home. As shown in Figure 9, predicted probabilities of political discontent increase considerably among young people who, despite having become emancipated, must continue to be economically dependent (29.3%), something that does not happen among those who have already achieved personal autonomy (they have been emancipated and are economically independent). Although, in a more nuanced way, we must also highlight the increase in the likelihood of widespread discontent among those who are economically independent but still live in the family home (25.9%), a situation that sometimes reflects the existence of significant obstacles in achieving personal autonomy.

Taken as a whole, these results show that the political discontent of young people has socioeconomic roots that could be interpreted in terms of frustration of expectations. In this sense, it is not coincidental that, controlling for the other demographic factors, the most politically discontent are young people who want to work but cannot find work (i.e., the unemployed) and those who have emancipated themselves from the family home but are still economically dependent on their families (that is, the emancipated but dependent).

When political variables are introduced into the model, the most remarkable thing is that the feelings of young people towards politics largely explain their dissatisfaction, but also, and in a very marked way, ideological self-location. Specifically, the variable on feelings towards politics, which is a novelty of the 2016 edition of the Young People in Spain Survey, includes rich attitudinal information. For the purposes of this analysis, all the answers have been grouped into three categories: negative feelings (such as distrust, irritation, corruption, theft, disappointment, disgust, or contempt) that represent the majority, specifically 54.1% of young people; feelings of indifference, which represent 29.4% of young people (such as boredom or indifference); and finally positive ones (such as enthusiasm, interest, change, importance, hope for the future), mentioned by 16.0% of young people. Regarding political discontent, and how could it not be otherwise, young people who express more negative feelings towards politics are those who are much more politically disaffected.

Apart from the other factors, ideology is an important predictor of political discontent among young Spaniards. As can be clearly seen in Figure 9b, it is those who are located on more left-wing positions who undoubtedly show much greater political discontent with the situation of democracy in Spain. On the other hand, young people who are ideologically situated in the center and/or on the right are much less politically dissatisfied.

Finally, it is interesting to note the different effect of interest in politics and the frequency with which young people talk about politics, two indicators that measure the subjective involvement of citizens with political issues. As seen in Figure 9b, on the one hand there are young people who talk about or discuss politics more often with their friends, family, or colleagues, and who have a somewhat higher level of political discontent compared to the rest. However, and perhaps surprisingly, political discontent is lower among those who have a greater interest in politics. The fact that political news has become a phenomenon of rapid and spectacular communicative consumption might explain why disgruntled young people talk more about issues that, despite not being of interest to them, are omnipresent and cause irritation and disgust.

In sum, this analysis suggests that the most politically disaffected young Spaniards are those who declare themselves to be on the left, who manifest fundamentally negative feelings towards politics, and who see their future expectations frustrated, either because they want to work but cannot find work (that is, they are unemployed) or because they cannot achieve their longing for personal autonomy, despite having become emancipated.

One of the questions raised in the second stage of this research was whether political discontent among young people could be a factor of erosion of participatory and representative democracy. To answer this question, the degree of political mobilization of these young people, measured through their forms of political participation, and the efficiency attributed to the different forms of participation as an instrument of political influence are explored below. If the aforementioned hypothesis were confirmed, it would be expected that the most disaffected youths would participate in political activities less than other youths and would remain highly skeptical about their ability to influence sociopolitical change.

If we start with the analysis of participation repertoires, the results are very clear. As can be seen in Figure 10, in all cases the most dissatisfied young politically participate in protest actions (demonstrations, strikes), in more institutionalized forms of participation (forming part of parties or contacting politicians), in activities that express commitment to a cause (signing petitions, wearing badges), or in those related to political consumption (carrying out boycott actions or buying certain products), to a greater extent than other young people. That is to say, politically disgruntled young people participate in a greater proportion than those who do not manifest such an explicit rejection of the current democratic situation. The most interesting thing is that this participation is also higher when it comes to voting: 67.3% of the disaffected declare having voted in elections, which is the most frequent form of participation compared to 64.3% of other young people.

This greater degree of political mobilization of 'political discontents' is corroborated through other complementary data. For example, these are the young people who undertake the greatest number of forms of political participation: on average, they carry out four of the 14 presented, compared to 3.4 of those who do not belong to the defined group. Among the discontents, we also find the largest number of activists (23%), defined as those young people who perform seven or more activities, exceeding by five points the average percentage of activists that exist in the whole sample.[10]

Regarding the ways that young people consider most effective to influence collective life, we see that, for all of them, participation in elections as an instrument to promote their own positions is the most effective (Figure 11). This is very evident among the group of young people who do not express strong political discontent, but also among the most politically discontent young people. Among the latter, more than 40% believe that voting is the best option they have to influence change. This inclination towards the electoral route is tempered by the preference that a significant percentage of discontented young people manifest of direct action through protest. Consequently, if they are faced with the dilemma of electoral democracy against direct (or participatory) democracy, young people

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[10]   These analyses are not shown in this text, but are available from the authors upon request.

most dissatisfied with the Spanish political situation tend to be divided between both categories, but with an evident inclination for electoral participation.
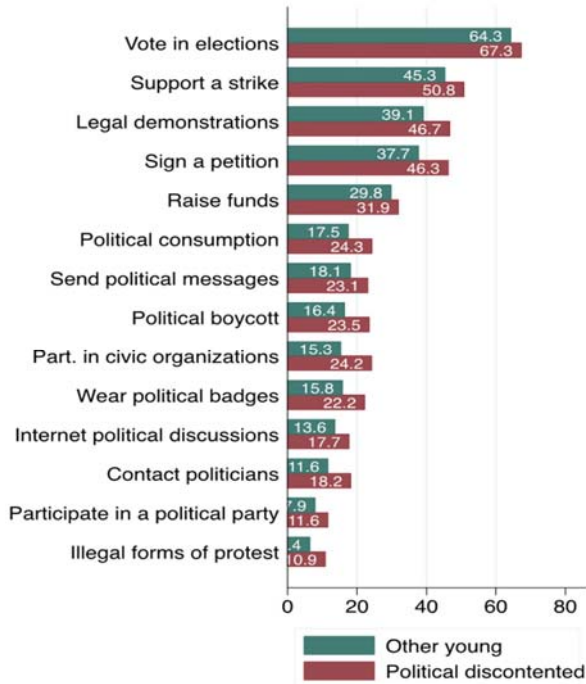

Figure 10. Forms of political participation. Percentage of young people who had participated at least once in each of the following forms of political participation. Question: Regarding the following forms of participation in social and political actions, for each of them please tell me if.: You have participated in the last 12 months; you participated in the more distant past; you have never participated; don´t know/no answer. Source: Young People in Spain Survey, 2016.
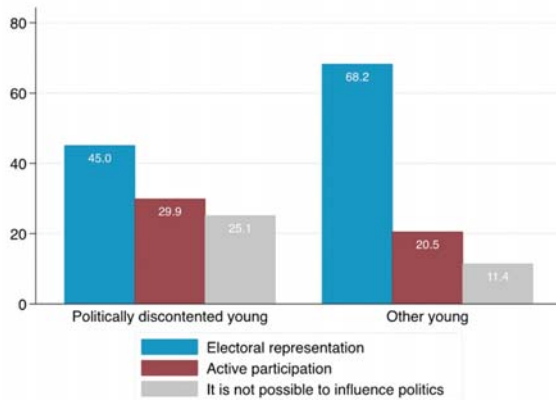
Figure 11. Self-perceived most effective forms of influence in politics. Source: Young People in Spain Survey, 2016.

A final feature to highlight is the increase among the group of disaffected young people of those who are skeptical about the possibility of influencing political change. This skepticism, which manifests itself among one in four discontented young people, would indicate that within this group politically mobilized sectors coexist (the most numerous) with others who are more disconnected from politics, with a low sense of political efficacy and high democratic disaffection.

In sum, the above analysis provides solid evidence to support an optimistic vision regarding the future of representative democracy in Spain and the participation and political involvement of young people. Although some young critics feel disengaged with politics, the truth is that discontent is channeled to a greater extent through participation, both in nonelectoral forms of participation and through elections.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

In this article, we have analyzed the impact of Spain's socioeconomic and institutional crisis during the Great Recession on young people's relationship with politics. The evidence shown suggests that, among broad sectors of the youth, there has been a profound reconfiguration of political attitudes, in which a critical vision towards the functioning of democracy predominates.

For most of Spanish democratic history, the 'youth' had been characterized as a selfless and politically apathetic collective. In these circumstances, given the deterioration in the living conditions of the population and a climate of political and institutional crisis, it would have been foreseeable that the disaffection of the new generations towards democratic politics would have deepened. However, as we have shown, the reaction of the so-called 'crisis generation' has been quite different. Although a very large majority of young people are dissatisfied with the functioning of the political system and do not trust the central institutions of democracy (political parties, politicians, and Parliament), instead of increasing their disengagement, there has been a critical politicization expressed through a greater involvement of young people in politics, which is reflected both in their attitudes and in their behavior. This result would confirm the thesis of a growing body of literature challenging the characterization of young people as politically apathetic, emphasizing, in contrast, new forms of youth political involvement [68,69]. It is necessary to continue deepening in the nature of these new forms of political involvement, in the meanings that young people attribute to the different modes of political participation and how they integrate them into more complex and diversified repertoires of action.

The interesting phenomenon of youth critical politicization can be considered, according to the approach used in this text, a distinctive feature of the 'crisis generation' in Spain, a generational trait. Faced with problems generated by the economic crisis and the political–institutional crisis, young people socialized in this period have reacted by politicizing their discontent, instead of moving further away from democratic politics or rejecting it openly. Critical politicization would, therefore, be the response that this generation constructs in the political sphere to face a very unfavorable context, a response reflected in the change of attitudes toward democratic politics and, above all, which is expressed in the surprising public role of the most mobilized sectors.

In order to go deeper into this politicization of discontent, we have undertaken a specific analysis of the group of young people who are most dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy and who least trust politicians and parties; that is, those who we have called the 'most discontented youth'. This group, in which around one in four young people belong, has a fairly defined profile, both from a socioeconomic and political point of view. According to the bivariate and multivariate analyses carried out, we can conclude that these are basically young adults, ideologically located on the left, who are seeing their future expectations frustrated by the socioeconomic difficulties they face. The most interesting thing about this group, however, is that, despite the problems and the deep discontent that the political situation has produced, it does not lean toward positions of democratic disaffection, but expresses discontent through participation, both in protest actions and at the electoral level.

The implications of these results are important. From the perspective of the political system, the widespread discontent that identifies the crisis generation does not seem to have put the legitimacy of the democratic system at risk, nor increased disengagement with respect to institutional politics. On the contrary, it has introduced an important dose of criticism into the system, oriented towards change. Regarding young people, the implications are several. First, the way in which they have politicized their discontent means claiming in practice their status as active and participatory citizens, who try to influence the development of social and political processes. Second, the generational dimension of this change in young people's political attitudes and behaviors could in the future lead to a transformation in the patterns of political culture prevailing in Spanish society as these young people grow up and become adults.

A final aspect to be highlighted is the contribution of the sociopolitical context in the process of changing the attitudes and political behavior of young Spaniards. The multivariate analysis from the European Social Survey shows the decisive importance that the change in the political cycle, that began in 2011 with the 15-M movement, has had on this process of reconfiguration of the young people–politics relationship. From 2011, which marked a milestone in the recent political history of the country, the number of people satisfied or 'conformist' with the political situation fell very sharply, while the proportion of what we have called the 'critically politicized' doubled. The comparison with other age groups allows us to affirm that it is young adults who have changed their political attitudes the most, with many of them becoming critical citizens and actively involved in the change.

However, the question that subsequent analyses should resolve is whether this situation has been maintained in recent years, in which the political context has undergone some very significant changes. Data from the European Social Survey, as well as the Young People in Spain Survey, in this article go up to 2015, but from then until now there have been some changes. If in 2015 there were an expectation of a new political panorama that the elections held at the end of the year could bring, it would seem that the expectations of change of a large part of the population were quickly frustrated. The forced repetition of elections in 2016, the difficult adaptation to the new multiparty system, the inability of political elites to reach agreements, and the tensions derived from the growing independence movement in Catalonia have introduced new variables to which young people socialized during the crisis have had to respond.

To evaluate this response and those that are given to the continuous changes in the Spanish political context, it would be necessary to extend the timespan of the observations to have evidence less dependent on conjuncture[11]. To really account for it, however, we would need panel data enabling us to follow the same individuals over a certain time period and thus measure the persistence of attitudinal changes and life-cycle effects, so to what extent the new framework of relationship with politics that we have developed in this article has a true generational nature could be corroborated.

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[11] A preliminary revision of the eighth round of ESS results shows that change trends are maintained, but it is necessary to spend more time to know if they are confirmed in the long term.

Appendix A

Table A1. Operationalization of the dimensions included in our typology of attitudes towards politics.

Dimension	Variable in the Questionnaire	Categories Used to Construct the Typology
Regime performance: satisfaction with how democracy works	On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in (country)? Please answer using this card, where 0 means extremely dissatisfied and 10 means extremely satisfied. The question refers to how the democratic system works 'in practice', as opposed to how democracy 'ought' to work.	Low: 0–5 or DK/NA High: 6–10
Regime institutions: trust in national Parliament	Please tell me on a score of 0–10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust. - . . . (country)'s Spanish Parliament	Low: average score ranging between 0 to 4, or DK/NA in the three variables * High: Average score higher than 4 *
Political actors: trust in politicians and political parties	Please tell me on a score of 0–10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust. - . . . politicians? - . . . political parties?	
Interest in politics	How interested would you say you are in politics? Are you . . . (read out) . . . very interested, quite interested, hardly interested, or not at all interested? (Don't know).	Low: hardly interested, not at all interested in politics or DK/NA High: very or quite interested in politics

DK/NA stands for Don´t Know/No Answer. * The correlation between trust in the national Parliament, politicians, and political parties is very high. In spite of that, a small proportion of individuals trust in politicians and distrust in political parties or vice versa. To circumvent this problem, we computed the average score of the three variables of trust in political actors and institutions: trust in Parliament, trust in politicians, and trust in political parties. The STATA code to replicate our typology using the European Social Survey data is available from the authors upon request.

Appendix B

Table A2. Distribution of cases among age groups and year of data collection.

ESS Round (Fieldwork)	Less Than 30	30–44	45–59	60 and More	Total (N)
ESS 1 (2002)	18.7	28.7	19.3	33.3	100% (1717)
ESS 2 (2004)	24.3	29.6	21.4	24.8	100% (1640)
ESS 3 (2006)	23.6	28.1	22.4	25.9	100% (1876)
ESS 4 (2008)	21.8	28.6	21.3	28.3	100% (2572)
ESS 5 (2011)	21.1	29.5	25.5	23.9	100% (1880)
ESS 6 (2013)	16.8	30.3	25.2	27.7	100% (1888)
ESS 7 (2015)	17.7	26.0	27.6	28.7	100% (1925)
Total	20.6	28.7	23.3	27.5	100% (13,498)

Source: European Social Survey in Spain, rounds 1–7.

Table A3. Distribution of cases among birth cohorts and year of data collection.

ESS Round (Fieldwork)	(1911–1925)	(1926–1945)	(1946–1965)	(1966–1980)	(1981–2000)	Total (N)
ESS 1 (2002)	8.3	28.3	31.4	24.2	7.9	100% (1717)
ESS 2 (2004)	4.6	21.2	31.7	29.7	12.8	100% (1640)
ESS 3 (2006)	4.5	20.3	31.0	28.8	15.5	100% (1876)
ESS 4 (2008)	3.2	20.6	29.2	28.9	18.0	100% (2572)
ESS 5 (2011)	1.7	15.1	30.2	30.2	22.9	100% (1880)
ESS 6 (2013)	0.9	15.2	31.1	30.3	22.5	100% (1888)
ESS 7 (2015)	0.5	15.3	30.3	28.0	25.9	100% (1925)
Total	3.3	19.3	30.6	28.6	18.2	100% (13,498)

Source: European Social Survey in Spain, rounds 1–7.

Appendix C

Table A4. Logistic regression estimates for the determinants of attitudes towards politics. Odds ratio.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Disengaged	Critically Politicized	Conformist	Satisfied
Birth cohort (ref. 1911–1925, greatest generation)				
1926–1946 (silent generation)	0.84 [0.101]	1.504 * [0.321]	0.973 [0.133]	1.256 [0.290]
1946–1965 (baby boomers)	0.809 * [0.0953]	1.632 ** [0.341]	0.809 [0.109]	1.635 ** [0.367]
1966–1980 (generation X)	1.162 [0.140]	1.135 [0.239]	0.925 [0.127]	1.045 [0.238]
1981–2000 (millennials)	1.102 [0.138]	1.286 [0.279]	1.021 [0.145]	0.732 [0.176]
Time (ref. Before 15-M)				
After 15-M (2011–2015)	1.452 [0.679]	3.479 ** [1.936]	0.292 [0.219]	0.612 *** [0.112]
Birth cohort * Time				
1926–1945 * After 15-M	0.84 [0.402]	0.614 [0.350]	1.225 [0.939]	1.26 [0.324]
1946–1965 * After 15-M	0.743 [0.352]	0.854 [0.480]	0.945 [0.721]	0.640 ** [0.145]
1966–1980 * After 15-M	0.632 [0.300]	0.952 [0.536]	0.883 [0.675]	0.891 [0.203]
1981–2000 * After 15-M	0.749 [0.357]	0.757 [0.429]	0.994 [0.760]	
Gender (ref. Men)	1.495 *** [0.0563]	0.622 *** [0.0300]	1.145 *** [0.0577]	0.609 *** [0.0376]

Table A4. *Cont.*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Disengaged	**Critically Politicized**	**Conformist**	**Satisfied**
Economic difficulties at household (ref. Good economic situation)	1.453 *** [0.0678]	0.96 [0.0588]	0.616 *** [0.0418]	0.731 *** [0.0645]
Educational attainment (ref. basic education)				
Upper secondary education	0.561 *** [0.0270]	2.138 *** [0.132]	0.805 *** [0.0526]	2.067 *** [0.165]
Tertiary education	0.325 *** [0.0178]	3.448 *** [0.220]	0.652 *** [0.0505]	3.347 *** [0.262]
Observations	13,314	13,314	13,314	13,314

The category 'Before 15-M' includes ESS 1–5 (2002–2010) and 'After 15-M' refers to ESS 6–7 (2012–2014. Standard errors in brackets, *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Source: European Social Survey in Spain, rounds 1–7.

Table A5. Logistic regression estimates of political discontent. Odds ratio.

	(1)	(2)
Gender (ref. Male)	0.893 [0.0723]	0.768 *** [0.0654]
Age (ref. Young teenagers, 15–19 years old)		
Young, 20–24 years old	1.283 ** [0.154]	1.347 ** [0.167]
Young adults, 25–29 years old	1.211 [0.169]	1.273* [0.182]
Educational attainment (ref. Primary and secondary)		
Postsecondary	1.099 [0.159]	1.122 [0.170]
Vocational training	1.072 [0.152]	1.026 [0.154]
University	0.959 [0.139]	1.034 [0.161]
Activity status (ref. Work only)		
Work and education	0.660 *** [0.0889]	0.727 ** [0.102]
Education	1.025 [0.142]	0.958 [0.141]
Unemployment	1.268 * [0.174]	1.318 * [0.188]
Economic independence (ref. Emancipated and independent) Emancipated but dependent	1.485 *** [0.220]	1.435 ** [0.224]
Not emancipated but independent	1.255 [0.221]	1.395 * [0.263]
Not emancipated and independent	1.040 [0.143]	1.068 [0.157]
Sentiments towards politics (ref. Negative)		
Indifferent		0.535 *** [0.0560]

Table A5. *Cont*.

	(1)	(2)
Positive		0.312 *** [0.0455]
Interest in politics (ref. little or not at all interested) Very or quite interested in politics		0.704 *** [0.0756]
Talk about politics (ref. Never or almost never) Often or very often		1.232 ** [0.120]
Left–right ideological scale (ref. Left, 1–2) 3–4		0.441 *** [0.0557]
5–6		0.253 *** [0.0321]
7–8		0.127 *** [0.0267]
Right (9–10)		0.151 *** [0.0542]
DK NA		0.455 *** [0.0652]
Constant	0.324 *** [0.0725]	1.289 [0.339]
Observations	5002	5002

Binomial logistic regression models. Weighted data. Standard errors in brackets. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.
Source: Young People in Spain Survey, 2016.

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Neoliberalism and the Unfolding Patterns of Young People's Political Engagement and Political Participation in Contemporary Britain

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Abstract: Recent trends suggest that young people in Britain are increasingly rejecting electoral politics. However, evidence suggests that British youth are not apolitical, but are becoming ever more sceptical of the ability of electoral politics to make a meaningful contribution to their lives. Why young people are adopting new political behaviour and values, however, is still a point of contention. Some authors have suggested that neoliberalism has influenced these new patterns of political engagement. This article will advance this critique of neoliberalism, giving attention to three different facets of neoliberalism and demonstrate how they combine to reduce young people's expectations of political participation and their perceptions of the legitimacy of political actors. We combine ideational and material critiques to demonstrate how young people's political engagement has been restricted by neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has influenced youth political participation through its critiques of collective democracy, by the subsequent transformations in political practice that it has contributed to, and through the economic marginalisation that has resulted from its shaping of governments' monetary policy. This approach will be conceptually predicated on a definition of neoliberalism which acknowledges both its focus on reducing interventions in the economy, and also its productive capacity to modify society to construct market relations and galvanise competition amongst agents. From this definition, we develop the argument that neoliberal critiques of democracy, the subsequent changes in political practices which respond to these criticisms and the transformation in socioeconomic conditions caused by neoliberalism have coalesced to negatively influence young people's electoral participation.

Keywords: young people; political participation; neoliberalism; democracy

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1. Introduction

During the last three decades, young Britons aged 18–24 have demonstrated a reluctance to engage with formal electoral-oriented politics, such as voting or membership of political parties [1,2]. Turnout at general elections for this generation has significantly reduced since 1992 when 67.3 percent of British youth cast their vote; between 1997 and 2015 youth turnout remained below 55 percent. This trend, however, was reversed at the 2017 General Election with more than 64 percent of young people turning out to vote [3,4]. This turnaround may not be a permanent feature of electoral politics in the United Kingdom (UK), as polls since the 2017 General Election have found that only 54 percent of those aged 18–24 remain certain they will vote in the next general election [5].

Moreover, this generation displays clear dissatisfaction with the current political system, and many admit to having low levels of interest or knowledge about democratic practices and institutions [6]. While conventional wisdom suggests this reluctance to participate may be due to young people's indifference towards politics, a number of scholars, associated with the anti-apathy school [7],

have suggested that the relationship between contemporary youth and formal politics is far more complex. Their studies indicate that far from being apathetic, young people are interested in politics and support democracy [8], but don't trust the motives of politicians [9] and are unhappy with political parties for being remote, hierarchical and centralised [10]. Closely aligned to the anti-apathy thesis is the notion that young people are rejecting formal politics and are channelling their political activities into alternative forms of political engagement [11]. Formal political participation refers to actions such as voting, political party membership and contacting political representatives, whereas alternative participation refers to political activities such as attending demonstrations, signing petitions, political blogging and boycotting or boycotting products. So, while their older contemporaries have maintained engagement with formal politics, today's young people are practising alternative politics. Therefore, it may be more accurate to describe young people's political participation as *changing* compared to older cohorts, rather than simply declining.

Our comprehension of young people's disenchantment with politics is far from complete, however. While existing explanations have provided differing conceptions of how the relationship between young people and politics has transformed in recent years, the question of why younger cohorts are adopting new modes and styles of political behaviour has not been adequately addressed within political science. This forms part of a wider deficiency within the discipline as political science has often neglected to investigate the origins and sources creating the growing resentment towards politics displayed across the spectrum of British society [7,12].

There are two notable exceptions to this omission. The first is the proposition found in postmaterial theory, which claims that in increasingly affluent societies, young people's values will shift away from material concerns and, instead, they will begin to adopt postmaterial values and perform new, non-institutionalised forms of political action [13,14]. A second suggestion is that the neoliberalisation of society has contributed to citizens' increasing levels of cynicism with respect to politics and consequently to the erection of barriers obstructing—in particular—young people's political engagement [12,15–17]. Investigations in youth studies have established the influence neoliberalism has on young people in education [18], social policy [19], poverty [20] and transitions to employment [21]. By way of contrast, the impact of neoliberalism on changing patterns of youth political engagement and political participation have been relatively under examined; one of the primary objectives of this article will be to address this gap in the literature.

Existing accounts have highlighted three strands of neoliberalism which influence youth's changing political participation: Firstly, that the neoliberals' critique of democracy and their insistence on technocratic economic policies has undermined the ability of political actors to respond to the concerns of the citizenry. Secondly, that the disenchantment with politics has occurred due to the influence of neoliberalism on how politics is practised by political parties and political actors and the emergence of a conventional wisdom which has been formed around politicians' motives [17,22]. Thirdly, that the material inequality which has arisen from neoliberal-inspired policy has led to a reduction in young people's ability and motivation to engage with institutionalised politics [23].

Theorists have tended to focus on particular individual strands as separate aspects of neoliberalism, and there is an absence of consideration of the interconnectedness of these three features. This article will address the limits within the current literature by documenting how all three strands of neoliberalism form a matrix which contributes to young people's disengagement with electoral politics. Furthermore, many of the existing discussions surrounding neoliberalism's influence on political disengagement have investigated society as a whole. This article will give particular focus to young people and how they are acutely subject to neoliberalism's effects. Young people are not the only social group to feel the pernicious influence of neoliberalism; people's class [24], gender [25] and ethnicity [26] are also characteristics over which neoliberalism exerts a stratifying effect. Moreover, the influence of neoliberalism on political behaviour is felt across all age cohorts [12,17]. However, youth should also be considered as an important category to investigate the outcomes of neoliberalism because many of these factors are unique to young people as a social group [27,28]. Moreover, as we demonstrate

below, youth have been saturated within neoliberal policies for significant periods of their lives and are displaying different political behaviour to their older contemporaries and previous generations at the same age.

Contemporary British youth have been confronted by a political system which is increasingly removing areas of public interest from democratic consultation in a move towards neoliberal policy implementation [16,17,29]. This is compounded by the internalisation by young people of the claim that political actors are unable to make meaningful change and by political interactions which are becoming increasingly coercive [8,22,29]. In particular, the transition to neoliberal economics has politically disenfranchised young people, through the inequality that has occurred as a consequence of the operation of neoliberal ideology in *practice*—this is particularly evident under current austerity conditions within the context of the ongoing global recession [2,23]. In critically addressing these matters, this article will enable us to offer new insights about how the ideology and practice of neoliberalism in contemporary Britain has contributed to young people's eschewal of electoral politics and changing political behaviour.

2. Young People's Withdrawal from Formal Politics

There is a considerable body of research indicating that young people's presence in formal electoral politics (such as voting and membership of political parties) has recently been in decline [1,6]. The explanations offered for this pattern are varied. For instance, one account identifies that this trend has resulted from an alienation of young people from formal democratic institutions and from professional politicians [30,31]. Elsewhere, it has been suggested that young people are apathetic about politics [32] or they are too "stupid" [33] to realise the benefit of voting. Others have suggested that young people's patterns of political engagement and participation may not necessarily be declining, but instead are changing. For instance, when qualitative investigations have asked young people about their withdrawal from formal electoral politics, their responses suggest that the reality is more complicated than a simple lack of concern or from disinterest. According to Chareka and Sears, young people demonstrate "a fairly sophisticated understanding of voting and its place in the political system" [34] (p. 532). They also exhibit a deep awareness about the political issues that influence their lives [35] and believe that voting is important [36]. In fact, not only do contemporary youth have a good understanding of politics and believe that voting is important, they are also keen supporters of democracy [8].

However, there is a considerable body of evidence which demonstrates that young people are deeply suspicious of the relevance of formal politics to their lives, which is why they often eschew electoral politics. For example, they are sceptical about their ability to influence either politicians or the direction of politics and believe that they are ignored in political discussions [9,37]. They are also disappointed with policies offered by political parties, suggesting that there is little to separate the policy direction of political parties [10] and that such policies are not relevant to young people [27]. Contemporary youth are also disinclined to involve themselves in political party structures as they feel they are hierarchical and centralised, offering little opportunity for them to influence the creation of policy exchange information with political representatives [8,11]. Consequently, there is substantial evidence that young people are now replacing participation in formal politics with engagement with alternative (often more individualistic) forms of political action (boycotting, attending demonstrations, signing petitions) [11,38,39]. Indeed, British youth, when motivated by the prevailing agenda and their inclusion in the debate, are open to political participation. This is evidenced by their relatively high turnouts at the Scottish independence referendum, the European Union (EU) referendum, and the 2017 General Election [4,40,41]. Thus, attempts to explain declining levels of electoral participation by young people as a rejection of political matters does not provide accurate insight into their political behaviour.

Therefore, the evidence suggests that young people, while supporting democratic arrangements and displaying interest in issues that influence their lives, do not trust the current political system or

their political representatives. Consequently, they often choose not to engage with electoral politics because they feel that it does not make a difference to their lives and they feel excluded from political discussions. It is our contention that many of these factors which reduce the appeal of formal electoral politics to young people can be traced to changes resulting from interlinking facets of neoliberalism. Neoliberal critiques of democracy and the subsequent realignment of democracy with consumer principles diminishes the relevance of formal politics to young people. This is augmented by the prevalence of individualism—driven by the hegemony of neoliberalism—which makes collective electoral politics unappealing to young people and leads to their increased engagement with alternative forms of politics [42]. Moreover, the socioeconomic conditions that have arisen due to the transition to neoliberal economics encourage young people's electoral withdrawal from politics [2,23]. Therefore, we shall argue that young people's ability to vote, changes in young people's political preferences, and their lack of voice in political discussions can be traced to neoliberalism, and that it can be suggested that these factors coalesce to diminish younger generations from engaging with formal politics. Before we address young people's changes in political behaviour, we will investigate what neoliberalism is, how it has become so influential and how young people specifically are subject to its authority.

3. Neoliberal Rationality

The developmental journey followed by neoliberalism towards it current hegemonic position as a guide to social and economic practice has not been a uniformly linear one. It has had to adapt to a multitude of diverse institutional, historical, social, political and cultural milieus. Indeed, neoliberalism was not conceived as a cohesive concept due to the apparent dissension amongst its original pioneers. For example, while Hayek felt that *homo economicus* exaggerated the rational capabilities of individuals and believed that there was a role for the state providing it was subordinate to the market, Von Mises, conversely, was committed to the fully rational actor with a priori capabilities of economic calculation and believed that any state intervention was tantamount to socialism [43]. Furthermore, as Munck states, neoliberalism as currently *practised* should be differentiated from ideas that arose from theorists associated with neoliberalism. While the ideas of the latter have certainly influenced the direction of the former, no one neoliberal theorist has had their ideas uniformly converted into economic and social policies [44]. Neoliberalism, therefore, has no specific ontology nor one key thinker; nonetheless, there are certain processes, which influence both society and agents within it, that we can attribute to a process of neoliberalisation [45].

Stedman Jones has defined neoliberalism as "the free-market ideology based on individual liberty and limited government that connected human freedom to the actions of the rational, self-interested actor in a competitive marketplace" [46] (p. 2). However, two different but influential theories have sought to describe the processes of neoliberalism and how these have become dominant in the political, economic and social fields. Firstly, the Marxist version has defined neoliberalism as the reactionary reassertion of classic liberal ideology which has attempted to counter the collectivist social and economic policies of post-war governments. This explanation of neoliberalism stresses the material consequences of neoliberal economic policies through resumption of free trade, balanced budgets, deregulation and upper-class privilege which impoverish the lower classes and increase inequality [47]. Secondly, a Foucauldian variant acknowledges the Marxist materialist explanation but places a greater emphasis on ideational factors and understands neoliberalism as a productive process which constructs the "neoliberal subject" via an epistemological transformation [48,49].

Paralleling the Marxist theorists, Peck has explained that there is a "roll-back" function to neoliberalism which conforms to classical liberal economic principles such as privatisation and deregulation. Furthermore, in line with those who adopt Foucauldian understandings of neoliberalism, Peck has also observed a generative element within neoliberalism which he refers to as the "roll-out" function. The "roll-out" stage, however, refers to neoliberalism's use of the state to construct society around neoliberal objectives. This function creates new notions of how society can be proactively

recalibrated through the marketisation of formerly non-market domains and the creation of competition to guide human activity [45].

The productive roll-out function of neoliberalism was first highlighted by Foucault, whose published lectures on biopolitics have forged new methods for conceptualising how neoliberalism organises human and social action. Foucault stated that rather than a form of ideological control which is exerted externally, neoliberalism is a form of governmentality which has been internalised by individuals who self-regulate and discipline themselves [50]. This process is articulated in the work of Hayek who acknowledged that market rationality is not inherent within the behaviour of the individual and needs, instead, to be galvanised and adjusted through their social experiences. Moreover, mechanisms which facilitate the internalisation of market rationality, such as competition between individuals, do not spontaneously occur within a laissez-faire framework; they must be created through a conscious and active process of societal adjustment [51,52]. Therefore, contemporary society is undergoing a process of rationalisation in which the values and objectives of neoliberalism are artificially introduced into social processes and the subjectivity of individuals. This epistemological transformation has consequently created agents who are guided by notions of entrepreneurialism and economic outcomes, in which the relationship between these neoliberal subjects is coordinated by private concerns, consumerism and the competition for resources.

Governance has become a key aspect of the roll-out function of neoliberalism. While this does not originate in the writings of the pioneering neoliberal thinkers such as Hayek, neoliberalism in *practice* has matured and governance has become an effective tool at managing populations. It manages conduct by forming best practices, founded on the application of the narrow set of neoliberal values, across a diverse range of institutional settings. Subjects must invest in their human capital to meet the requirements of economic growth which, according to neoliberal logic, can only be achieved via adherence to a narrow set of free-market rules. Individuals become sacrificed to the project of economic growth, but do not form the constituent part of a collective as governance conducts and coerces its subjects to find individual solutions to dilemmas. Notions of citizenship and political participation, therefore, are reconstructed under governance as personalised efforts by individuals to advance economic growth via improvement of human capital [53]. As Brown states, under the sway of governance, political participation is no longer about "contestation and deliberation about norms, [as] there is no place for agitated or agonistic citizenship" [53] (p. 8).

The hegemony of neoliberal values, such as governance, balanced budgets and privatisation, has been expedited in Britain by neoliberals' prominent roles in sites of knowledge production, the creation of free-market aligned think-tanks, support from members of the intelligentsia and the uptake of these ideas by major political parties across the ideological spectrum [46]. The increased application of neoliberal logic has augmented the internalisation of market rationality as people are subject to increasing competitive scenarios over scarcer resources which require economic calculation; job opportunities are becoming rarer, work is more insecure, wages are falling or stagnating and obtaining the correct human capital is more complex and time-consuming [48].

While it has been noted that the increasing prevalence of individualism in today's society is also being driven by sources unconnected to neoliberalism [54,55], we suggest that much of young people's displeasure with formal politics is derived from the form of individualism instigated by neoliberal actors and values. Contemporary youth have been socialised in this environment which promotes neoliberalism and produces the "neoliberal subject". As Woodman and Wyn have argued, not only are they subject to the same entrepreneurial environment described above, the "'neoliberal' policy shift has had a number of effects that differentiated this generation from the previous one" [56] (p. 266). Today's young people are expected to improve their human capital by submitting to extended periods in education and perpetual upskilling while becoming increasingly responsible for the costs of skill advancement for a jobs market where competitiveness is burgeoning due to precarious employment [56].

In the UK, many government policies to improve young people's situations have been guided by the logic of neoliberalism. New Labour's *New Deal for Young People*, for instance, placed specific conditions and sanctions on those aged 18–24 who were in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance. Similarly, the coalition of Liberal Democrats and Conservatives instigated a *Youth Contract* which placed extra surveillance on young people who were unemployed for extended periods of time. Such initiatives frame young people as a specific social issue to be resolved, where the focus resides upon deficiencies within agency and problems with the supply of labour not the lack of opportunities or the prevailing socioeconomic conditions [57]. The individualisation of youth is also reflected in the language of recent youth social policies. The 2010–2015 coalition Government's *Positive for Youth* report stated that that its aim was to "develop greater awareness of the evidence that links a number of key personal capabilities (such as confidence and agency, or resilience and determination) to key longer-term outcomes such as those relating to educational attainment and employment" [58] (pp. 83–84). Indeed, the general direction of youth policies in the UK has been towards supply-side solutions, which frame many young people as deviant or in need of upskilling, at the expense of demand-side solutions, which could investigate, amongst other issues, the paucity and quality of available work to young people, the poor pay progression for younger generations, and why youth have been excluded from access to state initiatives that could improve their material situation [2,57].

Furthermore, how academics conceptualise and understand young people has often been driven by the dominance of neoliberal values and has, in turn, propelled the development of neoliberal attributes among youth [19]. For example, the influential field of "positive youth development" seeks to harness the potential of young people by advocating self-advancement and individualistic strategies for improvement. Though this does contain progressive elements for contemporary youth, Sukarieh and Tannock claim that this strategy is founded upon "pulling young people into the workforce, opening up the spheres of education and youth development to market forces and business interests, promoting the ideology of neoliberalism among the young and undermining the traditional entitlements of welfare state provision" [19] (p. 682). Neoliberal subjectivity, therefore, is constructed and reproduced within young people by their exposure to youth and social policies that are grounded in notions of individualism, entrepreneurialism and competitiveness. Indeed, being saturated in neoliberal expectations creates a tacit knowledge among young people about how they should behave, act and choose [28,59].

The process of rationalisation, however, is not the only outcome of neoliberal hegemony for young people. The increasing prevalence of methodological individualism and locating responsibility for success or failure on the choices of the individual, camouflage sources that are outside of young people's control and which mediate the options that are available for them to choose from. While neoliberalism becomes the sole arbitrator of what it is to be a citizen [49], structural factors—such as gender or class—which provide different opportunities or disadvantages to individuals within the category of youth become decoupled from explanations of young people's progression towards fulfilling their role of (neoliberal-defined) citizen [16]. Indeed, young people's choices and preferences concerning such matters as housing or the labour market are limited by the prevailing economic circumstances of the society in which they live; however, explanations which situate these factors within youth's transition to adulthood become concealed behind the neoliberal logic of individual responsibility [59].

To understand neoliberalism and its effect on society, an analysis is required of how its economic rules (such as balanced budgets, reduction in welfare provision and privatisation) structure the opportunities and life-chances of agents in the material realm. This, however, should be combined with an investigation of how the hegemonic neoliberalism constructs compliant economic actors who self-regulate to meet the requirements of neoliberal guidelines. In this section, moreover, we have demonstrated how these two components of neoliberalism influence contemporary youth. Firstly, it appears that neoliberal values have a rationalising effect on young people's epistemology as well as constructing normative classifications of how to gauge success and failure.

Secondly, neoliberal ideology seems to obscure structural factors that impede some young people's ability to navigate to destinations of their own choosing; simultaneously, neoliberal economic rules reduce the financial power of young people which furthers their difficulty in making self-actualising choices. How these material and epistemological components of neoliberalism reduce young people's political participation will be considered below.

4. Diminishing Democracy: Economic Sovereignty

Hay has provided an interesting correlation between neoliberalism and the increasing rejection of institutional politics by people of all ages. He argues that due to the depoliticisation of government functions and the scepticism that politicians can work for the needs of society, people have become cynical of the motives of their elected representatives and believe that the legislature have been stripped of the power to create meaningful change. According to Hay, it is under the auspices of *Public Choice Theory* (PCT) that the citizenry has become rationalised into distrusting politicians and political practices [17].

In this section, we develop Hay's proposition that neoliberal critiques of democracy have influenced how citizens engage with electoral politics. In doing so, we also consider a number of additional aspects of neoliberalism that are critical for investigating youth political engagement, but which are not considered within existing work. Firstly, Hay's definition offers focus with respect to the classic liberal tenets of neoliberalism, although it does not address neoliberalism's roll-out or constructive agenda which provides insight into how free market principles became embedded in the conventional wisdom of society. Secondly, Hay predominantly focuses on PCT, which means that other theories posited by the neoliberals which have influenced our relationship to democracy have not been fully explored. Thirdly, Hay has paid attention to neoliberalism's influence in political disengagement across all ages, whereas we want to specifically highlight how young people's distrust of politicians leads to the former's political disengagement [17]. As we have stated above, neoliberalism as *practised* should be differentiated from the theories of the pioneers of neoliberalism. Our focus in this section will be on some of the key neoliberal thinkers and how they have sought to reimagine democracy—the subsequent sections focus on neoliberalism as currently *practised*.

While the neoliberals were predominantly concerned with reinvigorating liberalism at the expense of government planning and collectivism, they also supplied an overlapping critique of democracy. Increasing democracy would hasten intervention within the economy, intervention in the economy would lead to social ills—because everybody would become poorer, not richer—and interference in the economy would result in totalitarianism. While political freedom and individual liberty flowed naturally from economic freedom, such state-directed economic interventions would result in a subversion of the masses by demagogues who would make unrealistic promises to gain power. Instead, democracy would be far more efficient if pursuing social goods through economic intervention was abandoned and if politics followed the principles of consumerism and the free market [45,60].

The neoliberals' critique of democracy, as we have discussed earlier, is wide-ranging and comprehensive. However, what underpins their attempts to reimagine democracy is their repositioning of economic freedom as more crucial to liberty than political freedom. Attempts to provide social freedom by intervening in the economy are considered undemocratic because they permit small groups of elites, rather than individuals who comprise society, to decide the direction of state planning [61]. Moreover, political freedom is bound to economic freedom, so that efforts to reduce necessity by restricting market forces will lead to political oppression and totalitarianism rather than to emancipation. Friedman also stressed that "economic freedom is [. . .] an indispensable means towards the achievement of political freedom" [61] (p. 8). While Friedman acknowledged that economic freedom does not necessarily translate into political freedom, Hayek claimed that it is more essential for preserving or creating liberty than political freedom. For instance, when Hayek was asked about human rights abuses conducted by the authoritarian Pinochet regime in Chile, he responded

that, "[m]y personal preference leans toward a liberal dictatorship rather than toward a democratic government devoid of liberalism" [62].

As Biebricher suggests, the neoliberals intended that economic freedom would supplant political freedom as the foundation for understanding liberty [60]. More importantly for our analysis, the neoliberals contended that certain aspects of the economy should be beyond democratic mediation as the majority is not in a position to make an appropriate decision about these matters. For Hayek, rules which galvanise and support the free market must be beyond amendment from democratic intervention as an emancipated society may only exist when supported by a spontaneous and free economy [63]. Consequently, the neoliberals were asserting that limitations must be placed on democracy, particularly relating to interventions in the market, and that the economy must follow a one-size-fits-all approach. Thus, a large and important factor in determining people's life course—the creation and allocation of wealth—is no longer a matter for public deliberation.

PCT builds upon these neoliberal critiques of democracy. For instance, James Buchanan [64] claimed that politicians were motivated by self-interest rather than concern for positive public outcomes. He develops this critique from the position that all people are "rational utility-maximisers" regardless of the context or settings in which such decisions take place. Consequently, politicians will govern according to a narrow agenda which is focused on improving their self-worth and power rather than acting in the best interests of society. Buchanan identified three factors which should lead to doubts about politicians' motives and of the capability of democracy to solve social problems. Firstly, no voting system can accurately or fairly reflect individual preferences within collective decision-making. Secondly, governments were likely to promote rent-seeking behaviour by diverting wealth to certain social groups and a proliferation of those in such groups seeking government subsidy in return for votes. Thirdly, that government agents would inefficiently increase the size of their bureaus for prestige and to improve their salary [54].

These criticisms depict politicians as being untrustworthy and unable to act in the public good, and also cast doubt on the ability of democracy to mediate social decisions. PCT is correct to emphasise that politicians and bureaucrats are not benign operatives who uniformly implement programmes for the public good and disregard improving their own position. However, PCT makes the converse, but equally absolute, claim that all public servants uniformly try to increase their self-worth and will behave in the same utility-maximising manner regardless of the environment those decisions are made within. The assertion that all political agents act free from other motives or emotions—such as tradition, altruism or ethics—is difficult to sustain when empirical [65] and theoretical [66] evidence provides a different picture of institutional behaviour. More important for our analysis, however, is that PCT presents the market as the remedy to these institutional failings, as the profit-motive counters rent-seeking behaviour or an unnecessary increase in bureaucracy. The market also allows individual preferences to be satisfied as these are not subject to the distortion experienced within collective decisions. Instead, consumers can signal their rejection of the possibilities offered by refusing to purchase (through voting) any of the available options (political parties). So, not only were the neoliberals providing a critique of democracy, they were also creating a privileged position for their economic ideology.

The impact of these thinkers' critiques on neoliberalism as *practised* should not be underestimated. Friedman and Hayek both advised the British Conservative Party, which instigated full-fledged neoliberal reforms in the UK. Their ideas, in addition to Buchanan's, also influenced the knowledge disseminated by free market British think tanks, such as the Adam Smith Institute and the Institute for Economic Affairs [46]. Consequently, the neoliberals' evaluations of democracy have permeated mainstream consciousness and have increased the discord between young people and electoral politics by forming the widespread opinion that the state and its representatives cannot facilitate positive social change. Diffusion of PCT into mainstream consciousness via academics, think tanks, youth policies and politicians themselves has been an important factor in increasing the scepticism towards political actors across all cohorts [18,67]. However, young people are more likely than their older contemporaries to

express doubts about the current system of government and are particularly critical of the motives of politicians [68].

More specific to young people's criticism of formal politics is that political parties fail to address the policy concerns of the young. We will discuss the socioeconomic status of youth in more detail below, but the positioning by political parties of economic freedom as the foundation of liberty above that of *politica*l freedom has often justified a limiting of democratic intervention within the economy. As a result, there has in recent decades been a broad convergence of the economic priorities and policies of the main political parties in Britain. Studies have revealed that as a consequence of this ongoing process, policies that are directed towards the improvement of young people's economic circumstances are often absent from the rhetoric and policy programmes of political parties [30,31,36]; in this context, the broadly common trajectory of economic policy offered by these parties and their exclusion of young people from policy formation [69] leaves contemporary youth with relatively little scope to express their preference for alternative socioeconomic policies at elections. A recent exception to the pattern of youth electoral abstention was the upsurge in youth turnout at the 2017 UK General Election. The limited currently available evidence suggests that may have in part reflected youth support for the Labour by that party's abandonment of the neoliberal economic consensus in favour of manifesto commitments to improve the economic situation of young people and the poor [70,71]. In general, and aside from that particular election case, if political decisions are continuously restricted by adherence to neoliberal guidelines, and if an environment exists in which politicians are framed as typically untrustworthy, then it is perhaps not surprising that young people will reject electorally oriented representative politics and search elsewhere for methods of meaningful political engagement [72].

5. Depoliticisation and New Forms of Political Practice

Neoliberalism has contributed to the current scepticism young people have with electoral politics by guiding political parties in the UK towards a hierarchical form of democracy where commands from those in the leadership create policy free from interaction with the electorate. Many young people display a preference for direct forms of democracy in which they contribute to policy formation and feel that their opinions are listened to and acted upon [73]. The neoliberal method of governance, where political authorities rely on coercion rather than on the exchange of ideas and information, is likely to reduce the attractiveness of formal politics to those young people who aspire to create policies in concert with their political representatives.

The critiques of democracy by the neoliberals discussed above have certainly influenced neoliberalism in *practice*. By positioning free market principles as the answer to democratic failings, neoliberalism in *practice* has sought to replace sovereign citizens with sovereign consumers. This transition is the result of reforming democracy in favour of governance rather than government. These new techniques of democracy, broadly known as *New Public Management* (NPM), define government representatives as providers of services who are detached from the day-to-day functioning of their political role which is, instead, performed by non-political actors [74]. As such, politicians devolve the provision of services to politically autonomous agents (such as Quangos), while simultaneously resisting any collective requests of the electorate that seek reform of public provision outside of pre-established boundaries [60,74]. For the neoliberals, the majoritarian system of voting leads to decisions being imposed on a minority who didn't vote for them and risks individual preferences becoming eclipsed by the bargaining and concessions needed for democratic decision-making.

If the collective nature of such a democratic system forces individuals into conformity, then a mechanism is required to realise the predilections of each of the participants. The market is advocated by the neoliberals as the instrument to transmit individual inclinations accurately and to protect the liberty of each participant. Therefore, neoliberalism in *practice* has attempted to privilege individual liberty over collective political action by remoulding the concept of citizenship. A sovereign consumer, unlike a sovereign citizen, is not restricted in their behaviour or value-preferences as they purchase

what they desire without needing to deliberate with other political agents. In practice, implementing the NPM approaches may paradoxically exacerbate the problems that the neoliberals identified with democracy; individuals are likely to see a reduction in their choices of public services, and the market—like bureaucracies—is likely to stifle the potential of imagining new policies by limiting potential democratic outcomes to those that already exist [60].

Indeed, efforts to encourage young people to engage with formal politics via the introduction of youth councils and the evolution of party youth wings is hampered by the consumer approach to democracy [69,75]. Young people's experiences of youth councils replicate the centralised and hierarchical aspects they dislike within electoral participation. Rather than being active collaborators within these forums, young people are treated as consumers to be consulted and are excluded from active participation within major decisions that affect their lives. Youth councils, therefore, may not be vehicles for social change or improving young people's inclusivity, but, instead, provide legitimation to politicians and political parties by signalling their (superficial) engagement with youth opinions [75]. Similarly, youth wings of political parties, despite rhetoric to the contrary, reproduce the notion that citizenship represents responsibility to other citizens and the duty to vote rather than encouraging active engagement with policy creation. While many young people favour active citizenship, political parties have been reluctant to broaden democracy, preferring that youth wings provide a consultative environment without mechanisms to create or influence change [69].

It would seem that the advance of consumer sovereignty further intensifies the disdain many young people feel towards formal politics. As politicians internalise neoliberal guidelines, there follows a shift in their position from governing to the oversight of services delivery; this is accompanied by a growing homogeneity between political parties and by policy convergence. Appearance and managerial qualities have begun to supersede policy and the function of representatives is being increasingly limited to the efficient provision of services to sovereign consumers [74]. The gravitation of political parties towards the political centre has occurred due to reductions in traditional ideological identification and by parties attempting to maximise their vote share by attracting median voters [76]. Yet the convergence of UK political parties towards the centre also fulfils the function of enforcing quasi-constitutional status for neoliberal economic rules that are free from democratic intervention. Burnham characterises this depoliticisation as a "technocratic form of governance" which drives "acceptance of rules rather than discretion, particularly in the area of monetary policy" [77] (p. 129). Young people, however, have been critical of the uniform policies offered by political parties and have cited the increasing similarity of political parties as a reason for avoiding electoral participation. Moreover, contemporary youth have stated that political parties don't offer policies which consider the needs of young people [8,39], and this is likely to continue in a political system which consistently prioritises the median voter and economic technocracy.

The adoption of a consumer approach to democracy and politics is also having a detrimental effect on rates of formal political participation because of the relationship it introduces between the electorate and politicians. While alternative forms of political engagement have been recognised as forming an important and positive feature of young people's political repertoires, such transitions to new forms of politics are driven by the increasing individualisation within late modernity [54,55]. For Hay and Stoker, this is problematic, as a furthering of individualism by neoliberalism, due to a consumer approach to politics, is leading to disenchantment within the political process. The individualistic tendencies encouraged by neoliberalism which attempt to negate the cooperative foundations of deliberation that are necessary in politics is creating dissatisfaction amongst citizens as they fail to recognise that democracy is about making collective decisions which will not satisfy all interested parties [67]. As Hay and Stoker suggest, "[politics] is rarely an experience of self-actualisation and more often an experience of accepting second-best" [67] (p. 234). If young people are being are being socialised into believing that politics is a transaction based on individual choice in which a consumer's desires are met, then the reality of democracy in which agents must traverse complex topics without any guarantee of satisfaction with the result, may become a frustrating experience.

However, neoliberalism may be sowing the seed of its own destruction by encouragement of individualistic approaches to political participation [22]. Citizens, particularly young people, are now finding a contradiction between the individualism encouraged by neoliberalism and how formal politics is organised under neoliberal ideology. This is why Bang has stated that "neoliberalism is virtually committing suicide by attempting to erase the politics of ideas" and "control the practices of network politics" [22] (p. 440). Neoliberalism's subservience to powerful interests and use of hierarchical policy exchange would therefore seem to be anathema to agents who, under neoliberal ideology, have been encouraged to believe that sovereignty resides in the individual. Bang, therefore, has identified how neoliberalism in *practice* contributes towards disillusionment with politics, but also how it undermines its own legitimacy.

Bang, who analyses people from all age cohorts (rather than focusing specifically on young people), states that the paradoxes of neoliberal governance have led to increasing concerns around the legitimacy of contemporary political practices. This is because politics and government become oppressive under the influence of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is dependent on maintaining its hegemony by threatening, sanctioning and coercing agents into acceptance of its authority. People may accept these commands because of the threats which accompany them, rather than because they consent to the legitimacy of current politics. For Bang, these threats are the hierarchical commands which are forced upon society by the neoliberal political structure; they negate deliberation between the citizenry and their representatives and they undermine the legitimacy of neoliberalism in the eyes of the citizenry [22].

As a consequence, it is claimed by Bang that people are becoming cynical about the ability of governments to resolve contemporary risks and difficulties, such as global warming. Nor are agents satisfied that the market or technological advances can overcome these problems. New forms of political action are driven by the individualism inherent in the roll-out of neoliberalism, but, concurrently, are constrained by the coercive approach of neoliberal politics. The lack of autonomy that is granted towards these new political repertoires augments the corrosion of trust manifested in people's increasing avoidance of formal politics. Agents are becoming increasingly aware that they do not contribute towards the creation of policy and that their views are superseded by the instrumental politics of latent groups who operate in what Bang terms the "backstage" of politics. In essence, these backstage operators, whose ability to lobby governments far outweighs the ability of the public to pressurise their representatives, have instrumental demands which do not align with the citizenry's concerns and which often exacerbate the difficulties that people are most concerned with [22].

Bang's suggestions find support when reviewing young people's concerns with formal politics. Evidence suggests that a majority of British youth, though offering support to the ideals of democracy, felt that they are unable to influence governments and that elections do not really change anything. Furthermore, young people are often reluctant to engage with major political parties because they appear remote, centralised and hierarchical [9,37]. If politics is constrained and directed by 'backstage' actors at the expense of young people, then it is likely that the political process will become even less appealing. Indeed, the surge in youth voting at the 2017 General Election was partially due to the personable style of campaigning adopted by the leader of the Labour Party which sought to directly engage with voters. In contrast, the Conservative campaign—which, in the neoliberal mould, relied on coercive commands from a centralised and hierarchical political apparatus—largely served to repel many young people [78,79]. The coercive nature of political exchange between representatives and the citizenry under neoliberalism has encouraged the feeling amongst young people that politics is a hierarchical interaction in which they are expected to be compliant subjects rather than active participants. Evidence suggests that due to the influence of neoliberalism, young people are increasingly displaying individualistic political values and behaviour which favour a more direct and reflexive relationship to politics [42]; the constraints on policy exchange means they are looking beyond institutionalised participation which is subordinate to the wishes of powerful lobbyists,

and are becoming attracted to newer forms of engagement which allow youth to realise their political preferences [80].

New Public Management, the turn to consumer citizenship and the influence of "backstage operators" are all forms of depoliticisation, in which political decisions are removed from the public sphere and inserted into the private sphere. As many young people's preference is for a more direct form of democracy [11], depoliticisation of formal politics and its subsequent limiting of political interactions encourages youth to search for new sites to realise their political value and behaviour. Indeed, the manner in which politics is conducted has undergone significant changes under neoliberal hegemony and, consequently, many young people have revised their attitudes towards engagement. Bang's descriptions of the malign effects that neoliberalism has on the practice of politics provides invaluable insights into why young people dislike politics. The legitimacy of governments is often undermined by the coercive and hierarchical approach neoliberalism adopts to policy exchange. Young people, furthermore, are increasingly favouring direct and egalitarian forms of political action which are at odds with a political system that relies on deference to backstage operators. While all age cohorts are disadvantaged by a political system which privileges those who are able to command more political influence due to their large resources, young people's increasing preference for closer interaction magnifies the constraints on policy which is formed from the bottom up. Moreover, if large potential areas of public concern are depoliticised and free from democratic debate, many young people whose preference is for closer forms of political collaboration may become less motivated to engage. As neoliberal governments do not facilitate a greater association between citizenry and their representatives, some young people have started to engage with alternative forms of political action to realise their aspirations.

6. Economic Disadvantage and Political Disenfranchisement

The implementation of neoliberal policies—which are predicated on the free market, non-redistribution of wealth and a reduced role for the state—are also a significant dynamic which contribute to patterns of youth political engagement. The adoption of neoliberalism by mainstream political parties in the UK has led to significant restructuring of the economic system which has reversed the increasing economic equality witnessed during the early postwar decades. Since 1979, social and economic inequalities have risen significantly [81] and have had a particularly disproportionate and negative effect on young people [82]. Moreover, the consolidation of wealth to a limited minority has meant that the wealthy are in control of the political agenda. As Birch et al. state, "[t]he experience of recent decades has left the impression that the rich can pressure governments by threatening to take their wealth elsewhere" [23] (p. 4), which supports Bang's concern about backstage operators. This final section will demonstrate in more detail how this youth generation have lost out under neoliberal economic policy. It will also establish how the subsequent stratifying effects impact on young people both in terms of increasing their likelihood to abstain at future electoral contests and of leading them to question their role as citizens.

The changes to monetary policy which arose from the transition to neoliberal economics have seen certain social groups in the UK experience a decrease in income. The increase in the size of the British economy during this period has not meant that all citizens have seen a proportionate increase in their income or living standards; in reality, some groups have been subject to significant economic marginalisation [23]. This has been particularly evident for young people following the implementation of governmental austerity policies since 2010, reflecting a neoliberal response to the global economic crisis. In particular, analyses reveal that the 16 to 24 year-old group has suffered more than any other group from cuts in social spending in welfare and investment in public services [23]. However, young people were suffering from stagnating wages before the financial crisis and it is becoming increasingly likely that poor pay progression is now an enduring structural feature of the British economy, rather than a cyclical phase. Indeed, the average starting wage of those aged 17–20 have, since the early 1990s, been far lower than previous generations [83]. The housing

market in Britain, driven by neoliberal reforms, is also contributing to young people's economic marginalisation. For today's young people, social housing is harder to achieve than previously and home-ownership is dominated by older age cohorts. Consequently, young people are having to live in privately rented accommodation which is both more expensive and insecure compared to previous decades due to neoliberal housing reforms and deregulation [84]. Young people's worsening socioeconomic environment, therefore, is driven by neoliberalism in *practice* and decreases their likelihood of voting [2].

While it is true that politicians—whose potential policies are generally limited by economic realities—will rationally target social groups which are more likely to vote, this has the counter-effect of neglecting non-voting groups such as the poor, ethnic minority communities and especially young people. As politicians prioritise social groups most likely to vote, the needs of non-voting groups are often overlooked, furthering their resentment of politics and making them even less likely to vote. Thus, political inequality leads to economic inequality through the targeting of government spending; in turn, this increases political inequality as social groups, who are effectively ignored in political discussions, see little importance or value in voting. It is claimed that this disproportionate generational impact and the spiral of economic and political marginalisation has contributed towards decreasing levels of political participation amongst British youth [23,30].

The changes in many young people's economic situation has created a destabilising effect on the transition from youth to adulthood. Markers of adulthood, such as home ownership, stable employment and settled locality, have become increasingly problematic for young people to achieve. Reductions in wages and benefits for young people are compounded by the move to post-industrial forms of production under neoliberalism, which are typified by low wages and a lack of job security [2,27]. Consequently, young people are experiencing a delay in their life cycle compared to previous generations [85]. This influences young people's political participation in two ways. First, agents are more likely to engage when they feel they have a personal stake in policy proposals. For instance, a homeowner will be more concerned with changes to interest rates than a person who does not possess their own home. Second, individuals are more likely to become aware of, and engage with, political issues if they traverse settings in which concerns with social issues are shared with others. So, for instance, a settled homeowner is more likely to become involved in local and community political action and a parent more likely to be recruited into action over education [85]. While the life cycle effect has often been accompanied by the claim that young people are choosing to delay the transition to adulthood, it would be more accurate to understand these difficulties as arising from exogenous socioeconomic changes which young people are required to comply with [86].

The inequality which neoliberal polices have engendered also contributes to decreasing levels of young people's political engagement. Material inequality is particularly pronounced for young people and the resulting economic stratification forms a barrier to participation for some of those young people. Inequality reduces political participation for those who are less affluent amongst all age cohorts. Societies which have large disparities of wealth create political environments in which very rich individuals tend to dominate at the expense of those with lower incomes [87,88]. Indeed, contemporary working-class British youth are less interested in political affairs, have less confidence in their own political knowledge, are more critical of the value of elections and offer less support to democracy than their middle-class counterparts [8]. Inequality reduces political participation amongst the less wealthy because they have less access to resources or networks which facilitate or encourage engagement, they hold less influence over the direction of politics relative to those who are wealthier and they are more likely to suffer the consequences of unequal societies (such as poor health) [89]. Not only do neoliberal policies create inequality which leads to declining levels of participation, the move to replace sovereign citizens with sovereign consumers intensifies such inequalities by predicating political influence on economic power. The transition to consumer sovereignty erases the formal equality of citizen sovereignty by introducing the stratifying effect of private capital into democratic principles, which contributes to young people's disenfranchisement.

Worryingly for young people, redistributive polices which would reverse concentrations of wealth and political power are unlikely to appear if political influence is limited to those who will gain little from more egalitarian access to participation.

While thus far we have examined how neoliberal ideas have influenced the material reality of young people which subsequently leads to their scepticism over politics, it is important to understand how the contradictions between their economic conditions and notions of citizenship have influenced the ideas that young people have towards democracy. Under neoliberal hegemony, responsibility for success or failure resides within the individual and it is regarded that any form of dependency could be prevented if the agent had made the correct choice [16]. Moreover, Western societies promote a form of citizenship which should include engagement with institutionalised forms of politics. As we have seen, however, due to the increasingly difficult financial environment which young people are subjected to, they find it hard to be active citizens and have little choice in their predicament. Young people have become increasingly aware of the paradox between the expectations which surround them and the tools available to them to achieve these expectations [16,42]. Indeed, over a quarter of young people in the UK do not feel in control of their lives, a third believe that their standards of living will be worse than their parents and over 40 percent are sceptical about their ability to gain secure employment and home ownership [90].

This escalates the tension between young people and electoral politics as the former are condemned for not participating nor contributing to positive social outcomes, while experiencing neglect from their representatives and a reduction in opportunities which galvanise political engagement. The reflexivity available to young people in post-industrial societies has often been overemphasised at the expense of understanding the limits to which young people can act freely. As Furlong and Cartmel explain, "although the collective foundations of social life have become more obscure, they continue to provide powerful frameworks which constrain young people's experiences and life chances" [59] (p. 138). While young people may be adopting new patterns of political behaviour, the claim that they are making this choice free from coercion neglects to consider the changes in socioeconomic conditions due to neoliberal restructuring which restrict or remove the options available to them.

The shifts in the socioeconomic conditions within neoliberal societies and the resulting inequalities have created barriers to young people's political participation. Inequality has an adverse influence on the political participation of those who are in the lower wage brackets amongst all age cohorts. Young people are disproportionality represented in lower income groups due to life cycle effects and governmental decisions about budget allocations. On the one hand, young people's exposure to spending cuts is partially the result of their low electoral turnout and of the behaviour of politicians who rationally target resources at those who will provide their parties with votes and political power. On the other hand, the removal of state support from contemporary youth and a transfer of such support to older generations undermines the formal equality of politics. It essentially disenfranchises young people by increasing their disadvantage compared to their older contemporaries. So, while young people are disadvantaged compared to the older generations in contemporary society, they are also facing more difficult circumstances than their older contemporaries were confronted with when they themselves were young and beginning adulthood—current older generations had previously received state support and had easier access to markers of adulthood when in their youth. As we can see, the material situation that neoliberalism creates effectively discourages some young people from participating. It is also possible, however, to see how the paradox between the normative and moral judgements which neoliberalism encourages about individual failure and the increased likelihood of an individual failing because of neoliberal economic policy encourages declining participation. This opens young people to question the value of their role as citizens or the necessity of engaging with politics. Indeed, it may be further evidence of the inter-connectedness of neoliberal rationalisation and the effects of neoliberal-influenced socioeconomic changes on rates of young people's political engagement.

7. Conclusions

It would seem that neoliberalism has a particularly strong impact on young people's political behaviour and why many of them seem to feel estranged from formal electoral politics. We have sought to establish how this occurs through various and different facets of neoliberalism. The remoulding of democracy to make it compatible with neoliberalism, the subsequent change that neoliberal logic imposed on political practice, and the inequality arising from neoliberal economic policy each have demonstrable negative outcomes on the relationship between young people and institutional political engagement. Furthermore, it would be mistaken to try and understand the effects of each component we have discussed in isolation; it is only through their interdependency that we can understand how each influences youth political participation. The neoliberal critique of democracy and its prominence in mainstream consciousness have been an important element in creating dissatisfaction with contemporary politics; however, the reductions in state support and deepening inequality for young people is also a significant driver of this scepticism. Moreover, their precarious material reality combined with the dominant neoliberal value judgements over failure and avoiding dependency provide contradictory experiences of citizenship for young people. If we are to understand how neoliberalism influences young people's patterns of institutional political participation, we must attempt to understand how neoliberalism rationalises individuals into certain patterns of thought, how neoliberal values modify democracy, and how socioeconomic changes arising from neoliberalism mediate access to political participation. While there are other competing claims in understanding young people's increasing rejection of electoral politics, we have presented important reasons to suggest that neoliberalism should be included in this discussion.

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Towards a Conceptualization of Young People's Political Engagement: A Qualitative Focus Group Study

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Abstract: Disenchantment with politics and low electoral turnout does not mean young people are not engaged with politics. However, our understanding of what being 'politically engaged' entails is somewhat challenged by the lack of consensus concerning the definition of this particular concept. Furthermore, existing conceptualizations of political engagement and participation (offline and online) often center on a limited set of political action items, failing to realize that a person can be politically engaged but not participate in political actions. Despite attempts to understand how young people themselves define politics, there are insufficient youth specific explanations of what being politically engaged means. In the present study, focus groups including young people (18–24 years) were conducted to examine understandings of political engagement. Participants were also asked to group a set of items they considered most accurately assessed this construct. Using the results, a conceptualization is proposed taking into account young people's definitions of political engagement; this suggests that young people consider political engagement to have emotional and cognitive dimensions but also to be conceptually distinct from political participation.

Keywords: political engagement; political participation; young people; focus groups

1. Introduction

Political participation and political engagement are considered to be necessary conditions for democracy to function effectively [1]. However, research into political engagement has received increased attention across established democracies, not least because of what is considered to be an ongoing disconnect between citizens and their states (e.g., [2–6]). Young people are frequently singled out as a problematic group, displaying low levels of electoral turnout, a lack of trust in democratic institutions and signs of skepticism and cynicism regarding politicians and political parties [7]. While activities associated with traditional politics have declined, young people have also found interest in political issues [8] and alternative forms of political participation [9].

Nevertheless, the conventional image that prevails is that young people are politically 'disinterested' or even 'apathetic' when compared with older generations [10]. In her paper about differences in political participation between young and old people, Quintelier [11] identified three reasons for these characterizations of youth and the perceived political participation gap between younger and older people. Firstly, due to life cycle and generational effects; secondly, the attractiveness of new forms of participation has caused younger people to divert from traditional forms of political participation as practiced by older generations (such as voting); and thirdly, that there is a difference in

the way young people embrace politically related conceptions compared to older people. Of these, the third reason is the most relevant for the context of this paper given that it is important to highlight that avoiding such definitional discrepancies is critical in social research. It is not sufficient in itself for a researcher to offer a definition of the investigated topic but also for that definition to be used and accepted by the surveyed population. Researchers should be careful that the acts that they consider to represent political engagement are likewise considered as political engagement acts by a younger audience. For example, Parry and colleagues [12] identified a huge discrepancy between the definitions of politics espoused by older and younger people, a finding that has also been suggested in other studies (e.g., [13,14]).

Some researchers have already identified how young people think about and engage in politics—leading to the emergence of significant paradigm controversies concerning differences between political 'participation' and 'engagement' (e.g., [15–18]). Following debates on young people's apparent lack of political engagement, there has been discussion concerning the validity and reliability of the instruments used in such research. For instance, one position claims existing measures used to assess young people's engagement need refinement in order to capture the full range of behaviors that being engaged entails (e.g., [2,6,8]). According to Albacete [2], properly validated measures of youth political engagement are lacking. Consequently, wider research assessing the youth political engagement construct may be susceptible to usage of inconsistent criteria that lack statistical/psychometric validity. Such practices may result in biased statistical conclusions, since the main outcome would be assessed improperly. Furthermore, answering questions concerning young citizens' political engagement requires coherence between the concept which implies a broader repertoire of actions (than the existing standardized measures) that citizens can get involved in—and its assessment. To address this, it is essential to develop an instrument to adequately assess the political engagement construct among contemporary youth [19].

However, before developing such a scale, there are specific aspects that should be taken into account to adequately assess political engagement among young people. Firstly, the instrument should allow the assessment of the latent concept of political engagement, the broad number of forms it can take, the different levels of intensity and difficulty those activities entail, and its dimensionality. It should also take into account recent developments in the youth repertoire of political actions. Finally, it should allow the equivalent assessment of political engagement in several countries and over time [2]. Given that evidence from the UK and Western Europe suggests that young people are not politically apathetic but have their own views about political issues and engage in democratic politics through a variety of modes of participation [20–22], their understandings have to be explored in order to better understand the ways in which they engage in politics. Moreover, White and colleagues [23] also argue that "without clear understanding of how young people conceptualize political interest and engagement, it is difficult to know how they interpret such questions or the reasons for their responses" (p. 1). The authors note that many young people are engaged in activities which may illustrate political engagement to the researcher but which young people themselves do not consider to be representing that construct—thus incurring a problem of under-reporting of political engagement among young people.

The purposes of this paper are twofold. Firstly, to propose a specific definition of young people's political engagement—since before developing measures to evaluate such a concept, there is a need to clarify its definition [24]. Also, the present paper aims to understand whether (and if so, how) the definitions of political engagement and political participation emerging from this study of young people differ from those found elsewhere in the literature. Previous studies have investigated what political participation means to Spanish students [25], understandings of citizenship among Turkish and Roma youth [26], young people's perspectives on what politics means to them [27] and which behaviors Swedish young people associate with political engagement [17]. However, there are no studies conducted in Britain or Portugal that specifically consider young people's conceptual definitions of *political engagement*.

The second aim is to provide qualitative insights into how young people perceive political engagement. What does being 'engaged' in politics mean to them? Would they consider engagement and participation in politics to be the same, or are they perceived differently? First, this paper provides an overview of the existing conceptualizations of political engagement and political participation and the distinctions between these two concepts. Second, the results from a series of four focus groups with young people aged 18–24 years are presented and the findings offer an original contribution to advance the assessment of young people's political engagement.

2. Conceptual Definitions of Political Engagement and Political Participation

Any advance in understanding young people's political engagement requires clarity on what conceptual approach to use. However, the literature displays a lack of agreement on how best to define political engagement and how to distinguish it from related concepts such as political participation [16]. For instance, while these concepts relate to different phenomena, the distinctiveness of each is left wanting [1,28]. In order to gain a clear understanding of the key features of—and how to assess—young people's political engagement, it is important to critically examine the differences between political engagement and political participation.

2.1. Political Participation

When Verba, Nie and Kim [29] defined political participation in *The Civic Culture*, they referred to "legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take" (p. 1). A similar characterization is offered by Parry, Moyser and Day [12] in their British study, while Brady [30] claimed political participation should first-and-foremost be considered as manifested and observable actions or activities in which people voluntarily participate. These definitions all relate to actions taken by citizens for purposes of influencing governments. They are reflected in more recent conceptualizations [1,31] as the "involvement of citizens (in the broader sense including public subjects like organizations, groups, etc.) in political processes, decision making ceremonies, as well as citizens influence on the formation of political systems and institutions, their operation, drafting political decision" ([31], p. 206).

Additionally, alternative typologies of political participation have been developed. Verba and Nie [32] listed four types of participation, including voting, participating in campaign activity, contacting public officials and participating in cooperative or communal activities. Using Verba and Nie's work, Teorell, Torcal and Montero [33] proposed a similar yet broader typology encompassing five activities (electoral participation, consumer participation, party-based activity, protest activity and contact activity). Such typologies are not without critics. Ekman and Amnå [16] contend they are somewhat limited in that they fail to consider latent—or 'pre-political'—political participation forms such as being a member of charity organizations, or watching the news on television. They claim pre-political behavior is crucial for understanding new forms of political behavior and of the prospects for future political participation. Barrett and Zani [1] argue political participation can take many different forms. In addition to conventional methods such as voting, *non*-conventional forms may involve signing petitions, participating in political demonstrations, writing political blogs and daubing political graffiti on buildings [2,16,34].

Recent political participation typologies tend to be broader in scope and definition. As young people are increasingly abstaining from traditional forms of politics (e.g., electoral participation), a gradual transformation of political participation modes appears to be taking place [35] and authors distinguish between conventional/formal/traditional forms of political participation and non-conventional/informal/alternative forms, as well as between latent and manifest forms of political participation (e.g., [15,36]). Rather than indicating a steady withdrawal from political life, these new participation modes reflect a new type of critical citizen [37] who still supports basic democratic values but is skeptical of conventional systems of representation and mediation and prefers participation in more horizontal and autonomous ways [38,39].

2.2. Political Engagement

Although often synonymous with political participation, political engagement can be distinguished from that concept in a number of ways. Carreras [40] differentiates between cognitive and active political engagement. Here, *cognitive* political engagement refers to a citizen's psychological attachment to the political system, including whether they are politically interested, seek political information, and identify with a particular political party. On the other hand, *active* political engagement manifests itself in a higher probability of contacting politicians, attending political party meetings, and participating in town public meetings. In their study of adolescents' political engagement attitudes, Eckstein, Noack and Gniewosz [41] emphasized an attitudinal dimension including responses to items such as '*somebody who complains about political parties should join a party to change it*' and '*we should participate more in politics to influence political decisions*' (p. 494).

Recently, McCartney and colleagues [42] have conceptualized political engagement as a specific type of civic engagement, which they postulate as a means of participating in and seeking to influence the life of, a community. Political engagement refers more explicitly to politically-oriented activities that seek a direct impact on political issues, systems and structures. As an example, they contrast "participating in a community recycling program" with "working to enact community laws regarding recycling" ([42], p. 14). Both demonstrate civic engagement but only the latter indicates political engagement. Another definition of political engagement was presented in the "*European Processes Influencing Democratic Ownership and Participation*" (PIDOP) project. Here, Barrett [43] contended that engagement could be considered as a precondition to participation and suggested that a state of engagement encompasses behaviors but also includes a psychological dimension where individuals' cognitions and emotions are also taken into account. Thus, assuming that political engagement involves participatory behaviors which are directed towards the polity, someone may also have interest in, pay attention to and have knowledge, opinions or feelings concerning political matters without necessarily participating in any overt actions towards the polity. In other words, individuals may be cognitively or emotionally engaged without necessarily being behaviorally engaged. For example, cognitive engagement can be demonstrated via levels of political or civic knowledge, or levels of attention to media sources such as newspapers, news on the Internet and the extent to which an individual discusses politics or civic affairs with family or friends; emotional engagement may be demonstrated by the intensity of feelings about political or civic matters.

Following Barrett's [43] conceptualization of political engagement, Emler [44] proposed that political engagement should be regarded as a developmental process, the central element of which is some driver to pay attention to politics. In a discussion concerning the essence of being a political actor in a multicultural society, Emler offered the view that the two prime candidates for the motivational role of being politically engaged are interest in politics and a sense of civic duty and that these can work either in combination or as alternatives. Attentiveness to what is happening in the political arena or active information searching (as indicated by such activities as reading articles about politics in newspapers, reading literature produced by political parties, listening to broadcasts specifically about politics and discussing politics with others), in its turn underpins the extent to which individuals may become politically informed. Political information—how much people know about politics—then provides the basis on which opinions are formed or judgements are made. Opinions in their turn may then become organized into more integrated, overarching structures. The author proposes that such structures are in effect the bases for the more stable political identities and therefore for someone to become a political actor.

Discussions of political participation and political engagement also take place in *online* environments. Different terms are used such as 'e-participation' [45] or 'digitally networked' participation [46]—although most authors simply characterize these as online participation and engagement (e.g., [47–49]). Typically, online definitions are adapted from offline definitions (e.g., [50]), including searching for online political information, contacting politicians via the Internet [51], or petitioning online [52]. However, some regard such online activity as lacking political substance

and for instance, the term 'slacktivism' has been coined when referring to political participation and engagement online. Christensen [53] succinctly defined slacktivism as the "political activities that have no impact on real-life political outcomes but only serve to increase the feel-good factor of the participants" (p. 1). Furthermore, slacktivism has also been used to denote politically ineffective online actions, therefore having a negative connotation [54].

3. Towards a Conceptualization of Youth Political Engagement

This paper has identified and critically examined existing conceptualizations of (offline and online) political dis/engagement and political non/participation and examined the extent to which they overlap and differ. This serves as context for the construction of a scientific definition of young people's political engagement which we aim to achieve through the remainder of this paper. Since the target population is youth and the political engagement conceptualizations identified in this critical examination of the literature were drawn predominantly for the general adult population, there is a need to develop a conceptual definition of political engagement that takes into account young people's perceptions of political engagement. Moreover, a 'bottom-up' youth-led approach was chosen, because it involves young people defining their own approach to political engagement and gives them some freedom regarding the ways in which they view this particular phenomenon [55]. Nevertheless, Coles also suggests that research should be conducted that takes into account young people's views if the aim is a deeper involvement of young people with politics [56].

Following the point made in the Introduction and considering that young people and adults perceive reality differently [57] and have different conceptions of what politics means [12], it is important to systematically identify and understand the implications that a conceptual misunderstanding might have for future research; of equal importance is to reach conclusions that are as representative as possible of young people's patterns of political engagement. The purpose is to gain a deeper, more nuanced and valid understanding of young people's political engagement than currently exists—one which fully articulates the breadth and different dimensions of their political engagement in the context of their current disillusionment with democratic politics [14,39,58].

4. Research Design

In this study, we explore youth perspectives on what it means to be politically engaged via three key research questions:

- What are young people's general perceptions of political engagement and how do these contrast with their characterization of political participation, both in theory and in practice?
- Are young people's definitions of political engagement different from existing definitions of this concept?
- What behaviors and actions do young people regard as political engagement indicators?

The present sample includes young people living in Britain and Portugal. These countries were selected for study because they represent two European democracies with similar and very low recent levels of election turnout (Portugal, 55.8% in 2015; United Kingdom (UK), 68.7% in 2017 [59]) and both display similar patterns of contemporary youth political engagement [60][1]. Moreover, in a study on political participation of young people in the European Union, Sloam [63] concluded that Portugal and Britain were also two of the countries where young people's turnout to vote is below the EU15 average and have also very low levels of participation in politics in general. Using data from the European

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[1]   There is no recent evidence of specific youth election turnout published in Portugal due to the data privacy legislation in that country [61]. However, survey data from 2013 suggests that both Portugal and the UK have some of the lowest youth election turnout rates when asked, "*During the last 3 years, did you vote in any political election at the local, regional or national level? If you were, at that time, not eligible to vote, please say so*" [62].

Social Survey (ESS) from 2000 to 2002, Albacete [2], found that the average levels of young people's institutional political participation is the same for both Portugal and Britain. Similarly, Fieldhouse, Tranmer and Russell [64] reported that the ESS estimate percentages for the general election's turnout of both Portugal and the UK was respectively 75.9 and 73.2 (using data from 2002 to 2003) for the overall population. Regarding young people between 18 and 24 years old, Fieldhouse and colleagues estimated that the percentages were 47 for Portugal and 31.6 for the UK [64]. Moreover, it has been reported that the patterns of engagement with and participation in politics are relatively similar across West-European countries (e.g., [65]). Despite these similarities, some evident differences have been noted regarding young people's political engagement in both Portugal and Britain [60]. The present analyses permit a nuanced understanding of whether there are particular differences in terms of how young people from broadly similar European countries perceive political engagement, or whether their understandings are similar. Moreover, it is important to highlight that although two different countries were used in this research, there was no underlying intention to offer a comparison between each. Instead, the rationale for conducting the research in these different countries was to demonstrate that the data had value beyond one country case rather than being unique and particular to one specific cultural context.

This is an exploratory rather than a hypothesis-driven study. Focus-group methodology was chosen to investigate meanings, ideas, beliefs, and values, allowing deeper examination of youth perceptions concerning political engagement (e.g., [66]). The groups were conducted both offline in-person (Britain) and online (Portugal).

4.1. Participant Recruitment

Eighteen young people aged between 18 and 24 years participated in the study. Four focus groups of mixed gender were conducted during October and November 2016, two with British-based young people (N = 8) while the other two included Portuguese youth (N = 10)[2]. The sizes of the focus groups ranged from three to five participants.

The research participants were recruited using a two-step process. For the British and Portuguese focus groups, an email explaining the aims and purpose of the research was sent to university colleagues and each were asked to help find people who met the sampling requirements (of being British or Portuguese aged 18 to 24 years and that both genders should be evenly distributed across the groups). Willing participants were then screened for eligibility and were asked to identify participants to take part in the research. Requests for volunteers were also posted on social media (i.e., *Facebook* and *Twitter*). This snowball sampling strategy [68], is commonly used across qualitative studies in the field of political engagement and political participation (e.g., [69]) and in particular allows researchers to increase the diversity of the participants [68]. This approach uses a set of initial participants who nominate other participants who are eligible to participate from their social networks [70]. Furthermore, although age and an equal gender distribution were taken as characteristics that the sample should meet, no other characteristics were required. Due to the exploratory nature of this paper, other characteristics were not taken into account, since the objective was not to compare the different participants' answers according to their characteristics but to understand if a pattern concerning their understanding of political engagement could be identified across youth.

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[2] For this study the authors were satisfied with 18 participants, given that after every focus group, the definitions of political engagement given by young people were analyzed and reached the point where the second focus group conducted for each country did not add much beyond the findings from the first focus group for each country (that is, that theoretical and data saturation had been achieved). Moreover, as Carlsen and Glenton [67] have noted, focus groups should be the unit of analysis in focus group studies, meaning that the sample size should refer to number of groups and not to the total number of participants in a study. Additionally, it has been recommended that focus groups should range from two to five groups per category of participants [67]. Since participants belonged to two different nationality categories (British and Portuguese) and two focus groups for each of these categories was conducted, the present study met the methodological requirements previously specified by Carlsen and Glenton.

4.2. Materials and Procedure

Of the four focus groups conducted, two (British) were carried out in person and the remaining two (Portuguese) were carried out online. All the four group interviews lasted approximately one hour and were each facilitated by the first author. The offline focus groups were conducted on university campus, given that all the participants were students from the same university. With the participants' permission, the group interviews were audio recorded and the researcher-moderator also recorded notes to capture key themes and additional data such as body language and other aspects of the discussions that would otherwise remain lost if relying solely on audio equipment. Group interviews conducted online were synchronous and were conducted using the chat tool available on *Facebook*. Due to the popularity, affordability, and ease of access of this particular online social platform, researchers are increasingly utilizing this approach to conduct studies in a variety of different areas of study (e.g., [71–75]). However, given the different nature of the focus groups conducted (i.e., offline and online), a few considerations were taken into account before implementing them. A study conducted by Brüggen and Willens [76] concluded that it was methodologically feasible to use these different approaches within the same study and to do so with confidence. The authors critically compared online focus groups and offline focus groups with respect to their depth, breadth, efficiency, group dynamics, non-verbal impressions and respondent attitudes. Their findings demonstrated a high degree of similarity between the online and offline focus groups in terms of each of the characteristics analyzed. The experience gained from conducting online and offline focus groups in our study—and further details on the differences and implications identified—are discussed later in this paper.

A single semi-structured discussion guide was developed to ensure consistency in the areas of discussion addressed for each focus-group. This guide enabled the exploration of participants' perceptions of political engagement as well as comparison of the responses between the groups. The questions were theoretically-based and guided by the discussion outlined above concerning conceptual comparisons of political engagement and political participation. Following procedures suggested by Krueger and Casey [77], each group discussion began with a general question that explored participants' views on the importance for discussing the topic of young people's political engagement. This was followed by items designed to address the three research questions, including their experiences of politics and what meanings they ascribed to politics. Following this, images shared on *Twitter* were presented to evoke Brexit (since it was a topical issue at the time that the focus groups were conducted) as well as notions of solidarity, which were designed to encourage participants to think about political engagement in its wider sense and to discuss how they conceptualized political engagement.

Each participant was then asked to write down three to five behaviors they perceived to be political engagement and these were then discussed in the group. This was a completely open exercise and no prompts were given to participants—they were allowed to offer any political engagement items that they considered important. Following this, each participant was presented with a list of 100 items that are commonly used within the literature to assess the politically related constructs of political engagement and political participation (such as political self-efficacy or civic engagement). They were asked to select a total of 20 items that they considered to represent the most complete set of activities and behaviors concerning young people's political engagement. Through this process, each participant developed a scale assessing the concept. Finally, the group collectively discussed their choices and each participant was then asked to share their thoughts and opinions on the value and appropriateness of the political engagement scales generated during the focus group.

4.3. Data Analysis

The British-based (in-person) focus groups were transcribed from audio, while the nature of the online focus groups with the Portuguese youth was such that the transcripts were automatically captured by the online social platform used for the discussions. All data in Portuguese were translated to English. Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis following the approach of

Corbin and Strauss [78]. The coding process encompassed three stages that allowed for the uncovering of different dimensions of information and meaning at every stage of research.

The first step involved open-coding of the data to identify the properties and formation of a number of emergent concepts. Each concept or category were treated as a 'code'—an empirical element with a specific value. The second stage used was 'axial coding.' After identifying a number of codes, the associations between those codes were identified. The third step involved 'selective coding' that permitted confirmation of the existence of any emergent relationships from the first and second stages by examining the categories created and data that were included and omitted. This process of coding led to the formation of four key themes comprising: (i) the importance of the topic of young people's political engagement; (ii) attitudes and opinions toward voting (Brexit); (iii) political engagement—actions and behaviors; and (iv) defining political engagement.

Commonalities and differences amongst participants' views were noted concerning the role of politics in young people's lives, their general perceptions for engaging and participating in politics and their motivations. Furthermore, in order to ensure the quality of this analytical process, investigator and theoretical triangulation was taken into account [79]. Direct quotes were also used to provide illustrations of the concepts, as voiced through the experiences and attitudes of the focus group participants.

5. Results

Due to the aims of this paper (to propose a definition of young people's political engagement and to provide qualitative insights into how young people perceive political engagement), results are organized according to only two of the key themes identified: (i) *political engagement—actions and behaviors,* and (ii) *defining political engagement.* However, Table 1 includes all the four key themes and respective sub-themes that emerged from the data.

Table 1. Key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the focus groups analysis.

Key Themes	Sub-Themes
Importance of the topic of young people's political engagement	Politics is not a platform for young people to be involved; Ambiguity on what political engagement means; Difficult to find information about politics; Young people's political engagement happening online; Poor citizenship education at schools; Biased political news shared by the media; Need to simplify/explain political jargon.
Voting: Attitudes and opinions toward Brexit	Impact of voting for Brexit; Wearing a badge as a platform to induce political discussions; Posting and sharing political information on social networking sites.
Political engagement actions and behaviors	Voting as a poor indicator of political engagement.
Defining political engagement	Engagement versus participation.

Theme 1. *Political engagement—actions and behaviors.*

Participants were asked to write three to five actions, behaviors, or ideas they consider as demonstrating political engagement and then to share responses with the others in the focus group, using their own words. Examples suggested by participants as illustrative of the concept resulted in two distinct categories, political engagement and political participation. Examples of political engagement included understanding politics and politicians, being involved in an organization, asking questions about world events, choosing sources of media they relied upon, showing interest in political news, sharing political opinions and attending political debates. In terms of political participation,

actions included attending rallies, protesting (offline or online), fundraising and donating to parties, signing petitions, being an activist, voting and artistic performance. Initially, some participants raised voting as a political engagement item. However, after discussion, the general consensus was that voting was not as good a political engagement indicator as they had initially thought. They claimed it may be a purely expressive act without necessarily reflecting any knowledge about politics, or that voters had read party manifestos:

> "*A lot of people vote without knowing what they are doing, the impact it could have*" P6 (British).

> "*A lot of young people that I know voted but they did not know why they were voting for, some of them voted because their parents told them to*" P9 (Portuguese).

Participants' opinions diverged when asked whether or not the wearing of safety pins and the sharing of such actions via photos uploaded to social media (to express solidarity with non-UK citizens resident in Britain in the context of the vote for Brexit) indicated political engagement. Some participants stated that such young people could not be considered politically engaged because they were merely following trends and shadowing the actions of others without necessarily understanding the precise meaning of such actions. Other participants stated that such people could not be considered politically engaged because such actions simply reflected social influence—they observed other people posting a particular photo and wanted to do the same but that in doing so they were not expressing any intention to challenge or change xenophobic behaviors. Some participants disagreed, claiming that such actions signified an interest in and a following of, the news and current political events. Similarly, others considered such people to be politically engaged, since wearing a safety pin indicated awareness of what was happening in politics and of actively seeking to effect change, even if this involved a relatively small act. However, focus group participants also acknowledged that because such actions do not contribute to election outcomes, such displays are considered as of little consequence by those in power. Nonetheless, participants also recognized that with the rise of social media platforms, additional opportunities for political engagement are emerging and such 'symbolic' actions may represent a significant political action for those who perform them (such as sharing a video with political content or adding a frame to one's personal *Facebook* profile-image to signify support for a particular cause).

Following this, all participants were asked to choose 20 items from an offered list of 100 items. After collectively analyzing the items, participants then identified the most selected items (selected by at least three participants). Table 2 summarizes the 16 most selected items that were chosen by at least three participants in each of the four focus groups. These include understanding or holding political or civic values, discussing politics with family and friends, and paying attention to political events. On reflection while discussing these items, the key finding that emerged for these young citizens was that the concepts of political participation and political engagement entailed different actions and behaviors and were therefore considered by the participants to be different concepts. Furthermore, there were no evident differences between the items or activities selected by British and Portuguese young people.

Table 2. Items selected by British and Portuguese young people.

Selected Items	BR (%)	PT (%)
Looking for political information	3 (37.5)	6 (60)
Sending an email to a political organization	3 (37.5)	3 (30)
Voted	5 (62.5)	8 (80)
Discussed politics with friends/family	4 (50)	7 (70)
Engage in strike activity	5 (62.5)	5 (50)
Joined a political organization	5 (62.5)	5 (50)
Actively campaigned for a political organization	3 (37.5)	5 (50)
Paying attention to what is going on in politics	3 (37.5)	5 (50)
When having doubts about political issues, I ask questions and get involved in debates about politics	3 (37.5)	7 (70)
I usually watch political debates (e.g., television, Facebook, YouTube)	3 (37.5)	5 (50)
Use the means you have as a citizen to critically monitor the actions of your political representatives	3 (37.5)	4 (40)
Membership of a political party	4 (50)	6 (60)
Take part in protests, demonstrations, marches	3 (37.5)	4 (40)
Membership of a political lobbying and campaigning organizations	3 (37.5)	3 (30)
Signing petitions	3 (37.5)	4 (40)
Understanding or holding political or civic values	3 (37.5)	8 (80)

BR: Britain; BR (%): Number or participants, from a total of 8, who selected a certain item, with the respective percentage in parentheses; PT: Portugal; PT (%): Number of participants, from a total of 10, who selected a certain item, with the respective percentage in parentheses.

Theme 2. *Defining political engagement*

When asked whether or not there is any distinction between political participation and political engagement, participants concluded that: (i) if individuals are politically participating they are normally considered as politically engaged but there were exceptions (such as voting without being engaged); and (ii) higher levels of enthusiasm and engagement lead to more participation. Other participants saw political participation as more conventional, electorally-oriented action as opposed to more passive and symbolic engagement methods (e.g., listening to the news). Analysis of all political engagement definitions offered by the young participants (using their own words, see Table 3), demonstrated the most recurrent ideas across political engagement definitions: (i) looking for information and being informed, (ii) being conscious, (iii) being involved, (iv) having an opinion, (v) being interested in political issues, (vi) being proactive and (vii) standing for one's beliefs:

> "*Because you can participate, by voting for example, without being engaged and then you vote without being informed . . . because your parents told you to vote*" P11 (Portuguese).

> "*If you are politically participating you are engaged but you can be engaged but not participate*" P6 (British).

Table 3. Young people's own definitions of political engagement.[3]

Focus Group Identification		Participant	Definition of Political Engagement
British young people	Focus group 1	1	Is choosing yourself to be politically active and not having your parents or anybody else influencing you and just actually making an effect and doing your thing.
		2	Do anything that you can do to make a change even if you feel alone or insecure, because you have the power to be informed and engage yourself.
		3	It is about looking for information and then deciding your opinion and sharing that with people and making discussions about political issues, because we can talk about it, the thing is finding information and process that information and share it with our friends, colleagues.
		4	It's finding out information for yourself and doing it because you want to and not because thought you have to … discussing it and sharing it and do your best to figure out things, gather all the information that you need for you to make decisions.
		5	I think it is being pro-active, doing things your own, taking your own initiatives and going towards information, listening to debates, taking your time and effort.
	Focus group 2	6	Taking an active interest in political matters and topics but not necessarily acting on this interest.
		7	Is when you show interest in any level of politics and political engagement has several levels in it and participation can be one of them.
		8	Engagement shows your interest in politics without official form of acts. It can be passive and more personal than participation.
		9	Is being interested in what's happening nowadays, being politically interested and that could be done in different ways but we should always keep in mind that we should get out of our comfort zones.
		10	It requires a compromise with what we stand for what we believe in. We don't need necessarily to participate but to be conscious of what is happening in politics.
	Focus group 3	11	Being politically engaged is being involved in politics and be clear about what we believe in and about our political opinions.
		12	Involvement/interest/willingness to participate in constructive political debates, get out of your comfort zone and show your position about political issues.
Portuguese young people		13	To be politically engaged we have to know the current political paradigm in which we find ourselves and be part of it through actions that actually impact on it.
		14	Being politically engaged is expression your opinion about political questions, having interest and questions about politics and creating debates about them.
		15	All actions we do in our daily routine that affect politics could be considered as political engagement, from the small acts to the more relevant ones, such as voting.
	Focus group 4	16	Is being proactive in politics, conscious and informed about political issues … We need to know how to intervene and how to have impact.
		17	Is related to political, economic and social charisma with which a citizen can interact and learn from it. A politically engaged citizen should be someone with knowledge, ideas and opinions could help improve or change the political reality.
		18	Is related to the interest about political issues, standing for a position and a point of view and try to reach an agreement about diverse political questions. Being politically engaged is being politically conscious.

6. Discussion

Our study provided insights into how young people themselves (in different national contexts, in Britain and Portugal) perceived political engagement, contributing towards a broader definition of young people's political engagement. There were no evident differences between young people from Britain and Portugal with respect to their perceptions of political engagement. The items selected and definitions created to illustrate political engagement were similar, regardless of participants' country of origin. This poses the question whether this phenomenon of political engagement is generalizable or not across all national youth cohorts. For example, in a study of what political participation means to Spanish students, Sant [25] found that although young people were skeptical of the value of conventional electorally-oriented politics, they were able to articulate distinctions between such traditional forms of political participation and new alternative forms. In the present study, young people distinguished between what political participation is and what they understand it to be and how they contrast this with their understandings of political engagement.

All participants differentiated states of political engagement and political participation, which leads to the open debate about how to conceptualize political engagement and political participation (e.g., [16,18,34,46]). Is political engagement the same as political participation? In the present study, the eighteen participants across the four focus groups naturally differentiated between a state of engagement and participation and also suggested that political engagement seems to operate at a number of different levels. This reflects Emler's [44] notion that political engagement should be regarded as a developmental process, where the attention paid to politics seems to be the starting point. Furthermore, during the focus group discussions, the political engagement definitions offered by the young participants incorporated the ideas of being involved in and having knowledge of and opinions about politics. This confirms Barrett's [43] findings that political engagement comprises different psychological dimensions.

Across each of the four focus groups, participants acknowledged the value of Internet and social media platforms as options to engage politically, although they did not distinguish between the reality and veracity of online and offline actions such as sharing a video with political content on *Facebook* or signing petitions. In their opinion, each indicated political engagement. Although this finding fits with Christensen's definition of slacktivism (that online political activities have no impact on real-life political outcomes but instead serve only to increase the feel-good factor of the participants), it also challenges the negative connotation of slacktivism offered within some of the literature (e.g., [53,54,80,81]).

Previous studies have demonstrated young people associate politics with values and ideology, with political engagement perceived to be taking a position, having values and fighting for them [17]. However, when describing what they themselves understood political engagement to be, participants in our study evoked ideas such as looking for information and being informed, being conscious, being involved, having one's own opinions, showing interest in political issues, being proactive and standing-up for one's beliefs. Furthermore, participants did not refer to voting when discussing the main political engagement indicators—similar to other studies [17,82]. Recent evidence suggests that nowadays, young people prefer to engage with NGOs rather than with political parties because such organizations allow them to support particular issues they care about while not having to align to an entire package of political items [83]. This may explain why, in the present study, some of the items commonly chosen by young people as indicators of political engagement were linked to the community (e.g., promoting information and mobilization in the community to sustain political programs they believed in).

Regarding the different online and offline approaches taken in the present study, there are a number of implications that need to be highlighted. The use of both online and offline focus groups

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[3] The items are presented precisely as written by participants without any grammatical changes by the authors.

enabled participants to provide deep reflections about the questions they were asked. The only aspect where the present study might have lost something by adopting these different approaches was that any non-verbal impressions were not observable in the online focus groups. However, this was counterbalanced by the fact that online communication is more anonymous, which may have facilitated respondents in being more honest in their views. The degree to which all aspects of the research questions were addressed in both online and offline focus groups was very good. Despite the different approaches, relevant data and similar findings were obtained in both settings. Concerning the group dynamics, it was interesting to note that participants from the online focus groups tended to interact more than was the case in the offline groups and they were particularly active in engaging in conversation and debate with others in their particular online group.

Proposing a Definition of Young People's Political Engagement

When analyzing young people's definitions of political engagement (Table 3) the most recurrent ideas were: looking for information and being informed, being conscious, being involved, having an opinion, being interested in political issues, being proactive, and standing for one's beliefs. The majority of these ideas were also identified by Barrett [43] in his definition of political engagement, that involved paying attention to and having knowledge, opinions or feelings concerning political matters. We therefore propose an update of Barrett's definition of political engagement to include some of the notions emerging from our focus groups with young people.

To map such a definition of political engagement that takes into account young people's realities and conceptions, we propose that political engagement should be defined as *having interest in, paying attention to, having knowledge or opinions about, being conscious of, proactive about and constantly informed about politics*. This engagement can happen both online and offline, since young people do not distinguish between these two realities. Furthermore, political engagement is understood as a psychological process that includes a cognitive and an emotional dimension. The *cognitive* dimension is defined as people's investment and willingness to exert the necessary efforts for the comprehension and mastering of complex ideas and of difficult skills related to political issues. Examples of cognitive political engagement actions might include searching for political information online, signing a petition online or offline, being interested in political agendas and watching political debates. The *emotional* dimension of political engagement reflects both the positive and negative reactions to politicians' actions and instructions, other people's opinions about politics, perceptions of party belonging, and beliefs about the value of politics. Examples of emotional political engagement may include posting/sharing one's own political thoughts or comments on social media for others to read, wearing or displaying a symbol or a sign representing support for a political cause, or holding and/or displaying feelings about political or civic matters.

This proposed definition was developed by taking into account the existing literature in the field of political engagement as well as the perceptions concerning political engagement held by young people generated through empirical observations through our focus group study. Further investigation is needed to explore whether or not this definition of political engagement may be extrapolated for young people in general.

7. Conclusions

Although our study is the first to qualitatively investigate young people's understandings of what it means to be specifically politically engaged (in both the British and the Portuguese context), it is not without limitations. Firstly, the exploratory nature of the research does not permit the drawing of any definitive conclusions. Secondly, all data were self-report and subject to well-known biases (recall bias, social desirability bias, etc.), and thirdly the participants were self-selected. However, the paper sought to develop a proposed definition of youth political engagement that is rooted in young people's own perceptions of what it means to be engaged. Such an approach ultimately enables those in the field to examine distinct conceptualizations systematically and consistently.

In terms of the actions and behaviors chosen by young people to define political engagement (Table 2) and the definitions they offered (Table 3), a common pattern emerged independently of participant nationality. This pattern closely reflects the conceptions of political engagement followed in both Barrett and also Emler [15,44]. As a consequence, close attention has been given to their work throughout the present paper. Moreover, since the existing conceptualizations of different politically-related constructs (including political participation and political engagement) have usually been developed for entire all-age populations, this research contributes to the literature by considering the behaviors that specifically *young* people understand as illustrating political engagement. Young adult participants consider political engagement to be related to cognitive and emotional dimensions and the concept of political participation related with a behavioral (active) dimension. This strengthens the argument that when researching young people, political engagement and political participation should be considered as discrete concepts and therefore operationalized as independent concepts.

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Article

Young People Engaging in Volunteering: Questioning a Generational Trend in an Individualized Society

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Abstract: Today young people experience a world that is being significantly changed by large-scale transformations in education and labour markets. Youth, as a generation, is most affected by those changes, since they are more likely to reshape their ways of living in response to the conditions they face, which inevitably produce inequalities in their lives. Volunteering is one of their responses. This paper aims to discuss the generational motivations and attitudes of a group of 11 European young people to participate in a European Voluntary Service project during a period of one year. The data was collected through an ethnographic methodological approach conducted between 2013 and 2014 in a Youth Centre in northern Portugal. Results clearly indicate that young people have an instrumental relationship with volunteering, which is mainly focused on the individual benefits that they believe they will acquire in their personal and professional life. Volunteering emerges as an opportunity to escape and to overcome the persisting challenges and constraints posed by our society; namely unemployment and precariousness, both of which are on the rise amongst young generations around the world.

Keywords: civic participation; youth volunteering; generations; individualization; individualism

1. Introduction

In recent decades, young people have been represented as being at risk of exclusion from civic and political participation, being labelled as apathetic, antisocial and absorbed in themselves. This representation has been justified by factors such as the low levels of trust and interest in politicians and conventional political institutions, low electoral participation and little knowledge of contemporary political processes [1–4]. However, although young people experience dissatisfaction with traditional forms of political participation and formal political structures, there is an increasing body of evidence which suggests that the participatory culture of younger generations has changed. Young people seem to prefer more informal or unconventional forms of civic and political participation that best suit their interests and needs. Their participation is generally divorced from any political affiliation and from the electoral politics of the formal democratic system, though it may still be political [5–12]. Given this new portrait which is emerging, civic participation is now more broadly defined, overcoming the barriers of the formal political space in a way which includes engagement in volunteering, social movements and local organizations [13].

In the last two decades, the number of people who engage in voluntary activities has increased significantly, leading to increased academic interest in this subject [14]. In 2015, around one in four (25%) young people across the EU were involved in some kind of voluntary activity [15]. Volunteering is a planned, pro-social and sustained behaviour that benefits others and occurs over time and within an organizational environment [16]. It is therefore an expression of values like altruism, solidarity, generosity and social responsibility. In the context of youth transitions, Holdsworth and Brewis [17]

have noted that the individual and social transformative potential of volunteering has been stressed, being an opportunity for young people to develop skills, enhance employability profiles, and contribute to the 'social good'. It is not by chance that, in recent decades, the European Union has emphasized the need to foster youth volunteering. Indeed, volunteering is a cornerstone of the EU strategy to help young people address the challenges they face nowadays. One of these examples is the European Voluntary Service (EVS), an operational action of the Youth in Action program created by the European Commission in 1998, in which the eleven young volunteers of this study participated during one year. EVS enables young people aged between 18 and 30 years old to live from two months to one year in a foreign country within or outside the European Union. The main aims of EVS are to promote active citizenship and solidarity among young people, as well as enhancing their employability by offering a true learning experience which contributes greatly to the development of both their personal and professional skills [15,18]. Therefore, youth volunteering emerges as a social phenomenon which is very relevant today, and which is worthwhile to be studied.

As an object of study, volunteering has received particular attention from Sociology and Psychology. From a psychological perspective, research tends to be concerned with the understanding of the volunteers' motivations, seeking to identify the personality traits that distinguish volunteers from non-volunteers. On the other hand, sociological perspectives aim to understand the social profile of volunteers, the meanings volunteers give to their activities and how they volunteer [19]. In the contemporary debate about volunteering, there is a widespread belief that the nature of volunteering is undergoing an intergenerational transformation mainly due the structural processes such as individualization [20–24]. Individualization is a concept proposed by Ulrich Beck [25], which refers to a macro-sociological phenomenon imposed on the individual by modern institutions, whose guidelines compel the self-organization of people's biographies [26]. This means that each person assumes an increasing responsibility for making choices and shaping their own future.

Hustinx and Lammertyn [20,23], sociologists who investigate the phenomenon of volunteering, created the notion of "reflexive volunteering" to conceptualize the idea that volunteering is becoming less collective and more reflexive or individualistic. They argue that in our individualized society, volunteers, whether adults or young people, tend to adopt more self-centred dispositions. In Hustinx's words "new volunteers strive for both solidarity and personal development, selecting activities that maximise the personal benefits: self-realisation, social contacts, work experience and personal autonomy" [21] (p. 64). Hustinx [22], created the concept of "institutionally individualized volunteering" to claim that the decision to volunteer and the nature of volunteers' commitment seems to be dependent on individual desires and preferences. That is, there is a shift from highly-committed involvement toward more episodic, dynamic and self-oriented types of participation "with frequent entries and withdrawals depending on individual biographical needs and conditions" [24] (p. 238).

Corroborating this perspective, several studies report instrumental motivations to join a volunteer experience; that is, volunteers are not necessarily altruistic and are rarely willing to offer their services for no personal gain [27–33]. For instance, Bocsi and other researchers [33] argue that while the traditional motivations of volunteering are based on altruistic values and on the importance of helping the community, nowadays volunteers are prompted by multiple "modern" motivations. These motivations include career development, personal growth, work experience, developing skills, getting a job more easily, making friends, meeting people with similar interests, and taking part in a useful leisure activity.

Regarding the literature on youth volunteering, some studies suggest that young people's motivations to volunteer are complex and subject to change over time [34–36]. For instance, Gage and Thapa [35] note that while altruism—the desire to benefit others or contribute to the community—may be the first motivation that leads young people to volunteer, their continuance in volunteering tends to depend more on personal motivations. This is contradicted by other findings which suggest that instead of altruism, young people are mainly motivated by personal and professional reasons. According to this perspective, young people are more likely to get involved in volunteering in order to gain new skills that may lead them to new or better employment opportunities [17,22,31,37–40]. For instance,

Handy and other colleagues [37] argue that in the United States and Canada, where volunteering represents a strong positive signal for employers, younger generations, especially the career-oriented volunteers, are more inclined to volunteer. They argue that in those countries there is a new type of volunteering among higher education students, which can be termed "career-related résumé-building volunteering". This means that career-oriented volunteers do voluntary work because they can add this experience to their CVs. However, altruistic values are also important to them. But what justifies these new and apparent contradictory motivations and dispositions?

According to Mannheim [41] youth, as a generation, is a heterogeneous group positioned within the same historical and sociocultural context, but is nevertheless likely to be characterised by shared dispositions, modes of feeling, action, or a common consciousness. Therefore, in the context of volunteering and generations, it seemed interesting to pose the following question: what did change among the meanings and motivations attributed by young people to their voluntary service?

Our principal conclusions corroborate the generational trend around youth volunteering: today young people get involved in volunteering mainly for self-oriented motivations, related with self-knowledge, self-development and self-gratification. The European Voluntary Service is seen by young people as a recreational opportunity to escape unemployment and precariousness as well as a learning opportunity to acquire skills useful for their personal and professional life. This disposition is strongly influenced by our individualized society and by the demands imposed by the current educational system and labour market.

2. Materials and Methods

This paper draws on qualitative research undertaken with a group of 11 young Europeans, who participated for one year (2013–2014) in a European Voluntary Service (EVS) project in a Youth Centre, the receiving organization, located in northern Portugal. The aim of this study is to understand the young people's meanings and commitments on their voluntary experience. The eleven volunteers were divided in two projects. In the project "Meeting the Community" they had to go during the week to four local institutions, whose users were vulnerable people (that is to say, people with mental illnesses and disabilities, children living in an orphanage and the elderly). The role of the volunteers was mainly to support staff in various tasks and they could also develop new activities. In the project "For a better world", they had to be in a Fair Trade shop, selling products and helping the Youth Centre to promote the Fair Trade movement. These two projects had one coordinator from the Youth Centre who had a meeting every week with the two groups of volunteers in order to talk about their voluntary work and also to propose some tasks they could do—whether individually or collectively. However, the volunteers were not evaluated. Besides, it shall be mentioned that in the first month of EVS, the volunteers received some training related with their voluntary service. For instance, they had lessons to learn Portuguese in order to better work with the local institutions.

Regarding the characteristics of the study participants, they had some common traits: all came from the same middle class socio-economic background and all were graduates with the exception of Lasse and Javier who had attended secondary school but had not gone on to higher education. Furthermore, before starting the EVS project some of them were unemployed and others had precarious employment. We present below their fictitious names, their respective ages as well as the countries from which they came from (Table 1).

Table 1. Young volunteers' ages and home countries.

Project "Meeting the Community"						Project "For a Better World"				
Chiara	Réka	Larissa	Maarit	Lasse	Jack	Ewelina	Lauma	Jelena	Giulia	Javier
Italy	Hungary	Greece	Finland	Denmark	Slovenia	Poland	Latvia	Serbia	Italy	Spain
30	24	23	20	25	28	28	27	29	26	25

In terms of our methodology, we chose an ethnographic approach because it allows us to have greater proximity to, and involvement with, the group under investigation; participant observation and the writing of field notes (FN) being the main instruments of data collection [42]. We accompanied the volunteers every day in their voluntary service locations, and were with them in the youth centre, where they used to be. The fieldwork was carried out over a period of four months, ending at the time of data saturation. During this period of time, we also did individual semi-structured interviews (I) to each one of the eleven volunteers in order to enrich our field notes; specifically as far as the motivations and meanings given to volunteering are concerned. Regarding the data analysis, we opted for using content analysis to analyse the data collected through participant observation and interviews. The validity and authenticity of the results were safeguarded by several procedures. Initially, we made several careful readings familiarise ourselves with the data. Later, our data passed through a process of open coding; being examined and coded in eleven broad categories which emerged from the data. Subsequently, we identified the most meaningful data and divided each category into more specific sub-categories so that each statement could be coded differently by different coders.

Finally, regarding the limitations of this study, we recognize that it would be better if we had more time available for the collection of data. Even though we spent four months in the field, it would be interesting to follow the "trajectories of meanings" developed by the participants throughout their volunteer service during one year, in an online or offline setting. This would possibly enable us to draw some comparisons regarding how this voluntary experience changed their initial motivations and meanings. On the other hand, although the sample size only encompassed 11 participants, the sound knowledge achieved can be used to derive a number of conclusions, as we shall see.

3. Results

3.1. Volunteering As An Escape to Unemployment and Precariousness

Nowadays young people share common generational conditions. In various countries, they spend longer time in education and consequently take longer to establish themselves in the labour market; experiencing new forms of dependence on their families or the state for a longer time than the previous generation [43]. Furthermore, young peoples' often expensive investment in education has yielded ever less profitable results for them; with secure professional employment elusive for many [44]. During the past three decades, young people have been the hardest hit by the economic and social transformation across Europe, being victims of rising unemployment rates and job insecurity, as well as the flexibility of labour relations and wage exploitation which are characteristic features of Neo-Liberal capitalism and the recent experiments in 'austerity' [45,46]. As a result, young people today juggle study and work over extended periods of time and as they suffer extreme difficulty of personal autonomy. Their various transitions—to working life, independent living and family formation—no longer follow a linear path. On the contrary, young people's trajectories may be marked by back and forth movements between family, school, work and unemployment [47]. Thus, as we could prove in young people's discourses, these generational conditions bestow a new "flavour" to their voluntary experiences.

Swinging on the tightrope of unemployment or temporary jobs, the volunteers of this study decided to embark in an EVS project to escape their own vulnerable condition of unemployed or underemployed. The following volunteers echo this common trend:

Jack—After college I thought, okay, if I do not get job it is good think about volunteering (FN).
Javier—I am mechanic but I was unemployed and knowing that it is difficult to stay in my country because of the crisis I decided to come to this experience of a year. (I)
Lauma—In Latvia I lost my job, I was not officially unemployed but was doing temporary jobs from time to time, nothing permanent. As I had nothing to do, why not? (I)

3.2. Volunteering As An Opportunity for Skills Development and Curriculum Enrichment

In today's 'knowledge society' there is an expectation that to adjust to a global, rapidly changing, order, individuals have to be entrepreneurs of their own lives and must continually strive to be more efficient, fast, inventive and continuously self-actualizing [48]. As the transversal or softs skills such as adaptability, versatility, flexibility and creativity are increasingly valued and required in modern labour markets, to succeed requires acquire more individualised skills, communication skills and social capital [49,50]. Moreover, as a result of individualization, demands are put on young people to not to blame failure on structural conditions but to see this as a result of their own "underdeveloped entrepreneurial spirit" [51]. Thus, the acquisition of skills is increasingly viewed as the responsibility of the individual.

This being the case, at a time wherein young people are pressed to compose their own empowerment strategies, making an "active" use of their individual agency to find or invent their own style of life, the individual capacity to overcome uncertainty takes on added importance [52,53]. Moreover, given that in current educational pathways "the acquisition of academic degrees alone is not sufficient to ensure that workers' skills fit well with job requirements" [54] (p. 78), learning is no longer limited to a diploma or an institution. Thus, as a way to deal with increasingly individualised biographies and to correspond to the educational and labour market demands, the European young people of this study consider volunteering as a strategic context for learning and developing useful and valuable skills for curriculum enrichment and professional future. Larissa, Lauma, Chiara and Jack illustrate this orientation as follows:

> Larissa—I did not want to stay longer to work in the bar. I wanted to do something to improve my skills. At first I was looking for volunteering at schools and so could learn as a teacher, because in Greece I only had three months of practical work as a teacher in graduating and currently there are no job opportunities as a teacher. (I)
>
> Lauma—We're here also looking for job opportunities, because here you can take the risk to do what you want to improve your skills and you're not responsible for anything. You can try, if you have no success it's bad but life goes on. (I)
>
> Chiara—As I am a tour guide I mainly wanted to improve my English skills and learn Portuguese, because nowadays it is economically important, for example, for the Brazilian economy. (I)
>
> Jack—The economic situation is not good, getting a job is difficult. And as I did not want to stay at home to send e-mails waiting for something fall from the sky I thought about the chances I had. Either I am at home doing nothing, that is, looking for a job, or I will do something to have an international experience, to try to learn a new language, and also to work as a team. Other things that you do not learn at school, at university (...). All these possibilities can enhance the likelihood of having employment. So as I wanted to learn I found this opportunity excellent. In addition to learning I could be helpful to others. There are few programs as this one. (I)

In this last testimony, although Jack expects, foremost, to have personal benefits from his voluntary service, his attitudes of solidarity and altruism are not eclipsed. He expresses what Beck [55] conceptualised as a "cooperative or altruistic individualism", because he wants to fulfil a double purpose: to do something that benefits one's own interests, as well as care for the interests of the ones that are being helped. "Be useful to others" is the cherry on top of the cake.

3.3. Volunteering As An Opportunity to Travel and Meet People from Other Cultures

In the following volunteers' discourses, volunteering also emerges as an enticing possibility to go abroad and know people from other cultures.

> Larissa—I wanted to go abroad to study or to do EVS, as this is an experience that allows you to meet people from different cultures and to work together with them for a year. (I)

Giulia—I wanted to do an experience abroad for a year. I had just gone abroad for a month on vacation. So I wanted to see how I could work in a place that is not of my origin, to be in relationships with different cultures and different ways of seeing and doing things, and enhance skills, such as learning Portuguese and have the experience of organizing things. (I)

Chiara—I'm always looking for a way to travel abroad without paying and to know new cultures. And a friend of mine told me that there was the possibility to travel with all expenses paid through volunteering. (I)

Today young people live in an increasing multicultural and connected world. Therefore, they are attracted by mobility opportunities that offer possibilities to get to know and interact with people from other cultures. As we have concluded in a previous article [56], given that EVS implies to work together with young people with different nationalities, volunteering is taken as a learning and recreational experience that offers relational and intercultural benefits. This disposition also reflects a generational trend identified by Musick and Wilson [57], who argue that young people volunteering across Europe are mainly interested in the experience of travel, taking part in leisure activities, exposure to cultural diversity and in developing their skills.

3.4. Young People's Attitudes: Tensions between Cooperation and Competition

Today young people live in an individualised society which has erected the individual as the focus of all investments, which has led to the weakening of the social ties and commitments between an "I" and another "We" [58]. It is a society marked by an individualistic culture that calls individuals to be autonomous, encouraging people to maximize their personal benefits [59]. The term "individualism" was coined by Alexis de Tocqueville in 1830 to describe the social isolation that rendered the bourgeois gentleman in American society. America was considered to be a society of individuals centred in themselves, concerned to answer two central questions: What can I get for myself? What can I profit from this? [60]. Somech [61] (p. 163) sums up this concept perfectly: "individualistic cultures emphasize self-sufficiency, autonomy, control and priority of personal goals, which may or may not be consistent with the group's goals". In this sense, the imperative is to produce forms of subjectivity, self-expression and self-recreation. Thus, the considerations of the common good are less relevant and the mandatory exhortations to live for each other or to devote to an end more than themselves no longer have social resonance.

Considering this portrait where young people are immersed in an "individualistic culture", there has emerged a need to understand the relationship amongst the group of volunteers, because they had to work together in some activities. In what follows, we see how the volunteers are confronted with the difficulty of how to be a "team", since they are predisposed to act more individually than cooperatively.

Larissa—I like when we communicate our ideas among us. We are a group project but we work more individually.

Chiara—I can propose projects in groups, but if I don't see any enthusiasm I go forward with my individual project.

Larissa—We are failing as a team. We do not spend time together. We have to talk more . . .

Coordinator—You are privileged, you just have to be more like a team, to discuss, to have fun with each other. When I come here the atmosphere is low. I do not see enthusiastic and energetic people. Try to find motivation.

Lasse—The problem is that people put individual interests first rather than those of the group. Often I do not like being here at the office because I do not like the tension that I feel. It seems that people want to do things alone and want personal achievements. But I think the victory must be collective.

Jack—If I'm ever hearing "Oh I do not want to do it, I'm tired" ... but then say "let's go to the party. "I am here not to party but to learn the language and work together with the others.

Réka —We must learn to be a team. (FN 18 December)

In the next testimony, Lasse confesses how the volunteers work together, corroborating the problem discussed above:

Lasse—I do not like the way we work in this group. Till January nobody worked together. Everyone worked for themselves. I do not mean that I did the right thing, I tried to work with the others, but at some point I stopped too because you cannot force people to do something they clearly do not want to do. I told them this a couple of times. It seemed that there was a competition between them to see which one was the best worker. It seemed that was to cultivate the individual glory, like, Oh I've been so well. I did this, this, this and this. For me it is more important to say: We did this, this, this and this ... for me it is a "we". It was always like that. It's much more fun to work with people than working against people. (...) So this group takes me a lot of energy and effort to try to make us into one group because they are still very individualistic in the way they work. (I)

In conclusion, volunteers experienced a tension between the desire for withdraw to their own individual interests, on the one hand, and the necessity to cooperate and act collectively as a group, on the other. For instance, Lasse recognized that some volunteers used to have competitive attitudes instead of a cooperative attitude. The competitive attitude is typical of the individualistic culture focused on the individual where, against public interest, "people desperately search for self-fulfilment and try to minimizes as much as possible interpersonal obstacles to the attainment of their egocentric designs" [48] (p. 3). Moreover, the individualist and competitive behaviour shown by volunteers mirror an individualistic ethic without obligations or commitments requirements, which can lead to political agency to be replaced by a narcissistic consciousness [62]. In Lipovetsky's words, "as the everyday culture ceased to be irrigated by hyperbolic imperatives of duty and went on to be so for the welfare and the dynamics of subjective rights, we stopped recognizing the obligation to engage into something beyond ourselves" [63] (p. 17). Therefore, an individualistic orientation to act may contribute to a search for differentiation or distinction; distancing individuals from cooperation.

4. Discussion

Given that the construction of the meaning of volunteering has received inadequate attention until recently [64], the overall goal of this study was to broaden the discussion about how volunteering is experienced by young people. One the one hand, we aimed to problematize the subjective meanings, dispositions, and modes of action of young generation. On the other hand, we intended to rethink the extent to which European young people are influenced by the generational conditions they face in the western individualized society.

Our empirical findings have clearly shown that the motivations of the European young people to engage in voluntary service were mainly focused on their own needs and interests. This disposition reflects an intergenerational trend toward a more reflexive and individualised form of volunteering characterised by self-interest rather than altruism. As the recent literature suggests, nowadays the willingness to volunteer seems to increasingly depend on personal interests and needs rather than on traditional values such as service to others and a sense of civic duty to the community [16,19,20,29,31]. The young volunteers of this study decided to get involved in this voluntary experience mainly to escape unemployment and precariousness, since some of them were unemployed and others were doing precarious works. Nevertheless, it ought to be mentioned that Jack is one of the volunteers who assumes an altruistic motivation to participate in the EVS project; that is, he consciously wants to help others. Given that EVS programs gives priority to unemployed candidates, we can reasonably conclude that the unemployed status of our sample volunteers may have instigated their will to become volunteers in the first place. On other hand, given that none of the volunteers of the study had previous voluntary experiences (with the exception of Larissa and Jack who had participated in short-term voluntary activities) we can also assume that they were not driven by prior experiences in volunteering.

Furthermore, volunteering is seen by the European young people as an opportunity to prepare for that which has been called the "extended present" [65]; namely to develop skills that would be beneficial for their professional and personal life. These findings are in tune with other studies on youth volunteering which claim that young people are likely to volunteer mainly for their own personal interest, expecting to gain work experience and skills that may be useful for their curriculum and future career [17,22,31,37–40]. Such motives can be also a response to the rhetoric of the lifelong learning paradigm that emphasizes the importance for citizens to continuously update and enhance their skills, in order to quickly respond and adjust to fast changing labour market. Moreover, the career-building motives found among young people can be a message to the employers that the individual is career conscious and more suitable for the position than others who have not done volunteer work [33].

Thus, as other studies on youth volunteering suggest [37,40], volunteering is valued by young people because it allows the acquisition of social and cultural capital which can be converted into material capital. On the one hand, the concept of social capital refers to the "resource to action" acquired through social relationships and interactions between individuals [66]. On the other hand, the concept of cultural capital, developed by Bourdieu and Passeron [67], refers to powerful social and cultural resources such as attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, and behaviours that may be used, for instance, as a basis to access to resources or employment. Therefore, in the context of this EVS experience, meeting new people, increasing social networks, working collectively, and gaining new knowledge and skills are seen as gains that can provide young people with advantages in the labour market, in particular as far as getting a job is concerned.

Moreover, through young's people accounts regarding the reasons for their volunteering, it is interesting to note that civic and political concerns are absent. They do not volunteer to fight for a specific cause or a collective project or purpose. On the contrary, volunteering is valued because it is a recreational way to go abroad, travel, and get to know a country and other cultures without major expenses. These findings echo previous studies [31,57], which affirm that mobility and time-off from other commitments seem to be powerful motivators.

Finally, as far as the relationships among the group of volunteers is concerned, instead of behaving cooperatively, they behave more individually; chasing their own interests. This attitude mirrors our paradoxical social order characterized by high degrees of individualization and individualism, which is often inconsistent with the dependency webs in which individuals inevitably find themselves [68]. Summing up, this volunteer experience appears as a context where we can see how our individualised and individualistic society, along with the changes in education and labour market, have largely impacted on young people; or more precisely, their interests, attitudes and values. After all, young people increasingly have to decide more for themselves; thus expressing a desire to be something by and for themselves.

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Article

Political Consumerism as a Neoliberal Response to Youth Political Disengagement

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Abstract: Recent trends indicate diminishing public engagement with formal electoral politics in many advanced liberal democracies, especially among the younger generations. However, evidence also suggests that there has been a simultaneous interest by many young citizens in political consumerism. In large part, this interest is shaped as a response to the individualisation and strict 'economism' driven by the underlying forces of neoliberalism. Disenfranchised and disillusioned by the seeming incapacity of the purely political sphere to respond to their individualised claims, and having internalised the neoliberal critique of democracy, these young empowered citizen-consumers often search for the 'political' within the bounds of the marketplace and are increasingly attracted to consumerist methods of political participation, such as boycotting and buycotting. Given the susceptibility of political consumerism to a neoliberal modus operandi, the lack of available literature problematising its emergence as a response to neoliberal principles is somewhat surprising. The present article will address this gap by connecting the declining levels of electoral participation among younger generations in post-crisis Europe to the rise of political consumerism within the neoliberal ideological hegemony of the 'marketopoly'. We distinguish between two antithetical, but complimentary effects. Firstly, the internalised neoliberal critique of democracy emphasises the 'push' out of the public into the commercial sphere. Secondly, the emerging individualisation of modern 'liquid' politics advanced by the postmaterialist sensitivities of young people's previously affluent socialisation call attention to the existence of a parallel 'pull' effect into the 'marketopoly', as a habitus of youth political participation. In both cases, the reorganisation of political participation as consumption, and the re-styling of young citizens as 'empowered' consumers, delineates political consumerism as an efficacious response to their political disengagement in an increasingly marketised world.

Keywords: Neoliberalism; Political Participation; Postmaterialism; Political Consumerism; Young people

1. Introduction

Youth politics has gained momentum as an academic field across several social sciences disciplines since the turn of the new millennium [1–8]. Prominent within this field is the controversy over the term 'youth political apathy' [9–12], especially since the declining electoral participation of young people is being perceived as a continuous hindrance for the future and proper functioning of several democracies around the globe. Moreover, political scientists point out that the perceived loss of confidence and social ties, especially for the young generations, does not remain limited to the political arena but permeates all aspects of civil-society [13]. While it is easy to accuse the young of being part of a selfish, apathetic, and predominately materialistic generation, recent research has instead indicated that young people continue to demonstrate a strong desire to partake in democratic life, but this desire is met with social and contextual obstacles [10]. Hence, a significant part of recent academic research has been oriented towards identifying the individual and collective factors which may be constituting the social

characteristics of political youth (dis)engagement [1,10,14,15]. The term political (dis)engagement indicates the engagement—or lack thereof—of citizens with political institutions [16], processes, and decision-making [17]. Political participation stands as one particular expression of political engagement, which is defined as "those legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take" [18] (p. 1). Political participation may be expressed in several ways, both conventional and non-conventional. Conventional political participation includes voting, election campaigning, or donating to a political party. Alternatively, non-conventional political participation occurs primarily outside of the electoral arena, and varies from signing petitions and participating in protests to daubing political graffiti [16].

The decline of trust in traditional political institutions [13] has often been identified as a primary factor behind the corresponding emergence of alternative socio-political arenas, within which political consumerism holds a central position. Research across different disciplines and theoretical traditions has identified a process of 'politicisation of consumption' [19], according to which, consumption patterns are increasingly related to civic values, pointing to a possible levelling out of the dividing lines between citizens and consumers. Inglehart's postmaterialism thesis [20–22] provides an influential and complimentary interpretation, placing emphasis on the reorientation of individual and civic values which has led in turn to a widening of the available repertoire of political action. In such a context, political consumerism (which consists of buycotting and boycotting products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons) has been proposed as a relatively new form of political participation [23], which moves away from the traditional definitions of electoral participation by harnessing individual consumer power and directing it towards collective public issues. In this way, it blurs the boundaries between the conventional notions of citizen and consumer.

A sizeable body of work has been dedicated to the study of the determinants of political consumerism in the last decade, much of which focuses on the individual level, within a single country [24–27]. However, another strand of literature draws on comparative research that stresses the significance of the existing socio-structural contexts both as opportunities for, and hindrances to, political consumerism [28–32]. The common ground of this strand is that the individual and collective motivations underpinning political consumerist decisions do not emerge in a vacuum. Instead, they are determined by the prevailing characteristics of the societies in which they take place [33]. Working within this tradition and drawing on Anthony Downs' '*An Economic Theory of Democracy*' [34], scholars [35] proceed to emphasise the role of the hegemonic ideology in each society as a determinant of political consumerism, and present evidence which suggests that political consumerist behaviour has been significantly affected by the spread of neoliberalism and neoliberal politics, both on ideological [36] and social policy grounds [37].

The present paper seeks to disentangle these dynamics by distinguishing between two antithetical, but complimentary effects in post-crisis Europe. Drawing from Crouch's '*Post-Democracy*' [38], we propose that on the one hand, the emergence of neoliberal economics has significantly contributed to the political disengagement of young people, enabling us to identify a series of 'push' factors away from traditional political domains. Indeed, Hay [39] correlates neoliberalism with an increased rejection of institutional politics. The spread of neoliberalism has socialised the young generations in a socio-political context where electoral democracy loses prominence and politicians are faced with increased scepticism [36]. Whereas Crouch [38] stresses the 'push' out of the public and into the commercial sphere, we will call attention to the 'pull' factors activated primarily by the tenacity of the neoliberal doctrine with regard to the power of the free market. The neoliberal emphasis on consumerist principles, coupled with the increased individualisation of late modernity [40,41], has instigated a consumer-based approach to politics, especially among the younger generations; this has fostered the emergence of alternative forms of political engagement which use the market as an arena of socio-political fermentation. Prominent among these new types of individualistic and consumer-based participatory forms stands the notion of political consumerism. Through the practice of politicising the personal, political consumerism constitutes a form of political participation whereby individuals harness the power of

their personal choices to trigger collective political change [42,43]. By doing so, it manages to reconcile the individualistic tendencies of the neoliberal market-based economy with the collective appeal of the empowered citizen-consumer [10,44], which neoliberalism itself has brought forward.

This being the case, political consumerism, demonstrating acute reflexivity to the spirit of the times, contests the neoliberal market-based democratic paradigm that brought it into existence, and may thus be considered as a response to the apathy and individualisation effects of neoliberalism itself. We will commence our analysis in the following section by laying out the grounds for the emergence of the neoliberal rationale, and how by shaping the convergence of the previously distant notions of citizen and consumer, it gave rise to a set of 'push' factors away from traditional political engagement.

2. The Neoliberal Rationale

The term neoliberalism was first coined during a meeting in Paris in 1938. Among the attendees were Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek, who came to be two of the most prominent representatives of the ideology [45]. Due to its historical multilinearity, there is no consensus with respect to a single working definition of neoliberalism. Existing understandings, however, present the concept by focusing on the degree of state intervention within the classical, laissez-faire liberal paradigm [46]. Harvey thus defines neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" [46] (p. 18). The range of available definitions stress a process of reconstitution of the power of the state through, and interplay between, the tools of privatisation, finance, and market forces. State interventions in the economy are diminished, while the onus of the state as the primary caretaker of its citizens' welfare is similarly reduced [46].

The neoliberal principles were initially delineated in Hayek's '*The Road to Serfdom*', first published in 1944 [47]. Neoliberalism, with its emphasis on affirming free markets, is remodelling "every human need or desire in a profitable enterprise" [48] (p. 28) and thus is " ... reducing all forms of life to economic ones" [49] (p. 11). It perceives competition as the distinctive property of human relations, and therefore it defines citizens primarily as consumers, whose democratic resolution is best exercised by buying and selling within a deregulated global market. Any attempt to limit market competition is thus perceived as detrimental to liberty, and therefore taxing or any kind of government regulations should be minimised. Collective bargaining and trade unions are deemed as market distortions which hamper the restoration of a natural hierarchy. In turn, inequality is considered as a virtuous premium for the generation of wealth, which is destined to trickle-down to all members of the economy. In contrast, any egalitarian effort is not only counter-productive, but also morally repugnant, since the free market will grant everyone what they deserve according to their individual contribution to the economy.

Peck [50] distinguishes between the 'roll-back' and the 'roll-out' effects of neoliberalism. The former refers to the institutional, laissez-faire economic principles of neoliberal reasoning, such as the deregulation and privatisation of the state. The latter, however, refers to the attempt of neoliberalism to harness the existing social forces and to remould them around its own objectives, either by accentuating competition as an inherent force of human nature, or by the marketisation of previously non-market social domains. This double assault of neoliberal rationality on both the existing institutional and social constructs has been exemplified in the work of Foucault [51], who describes neoliberalism not as an externally-induced form of ideological control, but instead as a highly internalised form of self-regulation and self-discipline. Likewise, Hayek [47] accepts that the competitive rationality of neoliberalism does not reflect any inherent nature of the individual. Instead, he asserts the need of market rationality to be instilled in individuals through an active and conscious adjustment process of their social experiences [47]. Therefore, the society as a whole has to undergo a process of internalisation of the neoliberal values. As a result, entrepreneurism, consumerism, the scarcity hypothesis, and the corresponding competition of resources that follows it have been

internalised to such an extent by neoliberal subjects that these processes and phenomena combine to define people's political identity and behaviour [52]. Moreover, the adoption of the neoliberal rationale by think-tanks, academia, and political parties across the ideological spectrum further intensifies its internalisation by individuals who become increasingly competitive for scarce employment and insecure jobs, falling wages and increasing price levels [53]. So ubiquitous has the roll-out process of neoliberalism been that it is hardly recognised as a distinct ideology. Instead it is often portrayed as merely descriptive of a natural force, similar to gravity or a biological law reflecting the intrinsic human nature, neglecting to recall that we are referring to a "philosophy that arose as a conscious attempt to reshape human life and shift the locus of power" [45] (p. 3).

Neoliberalism and Political (Dis)Engagement

The present and ongoing global economic crisis, with its detrimental residue in the purely economic sphere, has revealed the deceptive paradoxes behind the dominant neoliberal economic order [54]. However, for the first time in many years, it has also opened the discussion on tracing realistic alternatives that do not genuflect to a hegemonic free-market ethic. Perhaps the most negative effect of this neoliberal hegemony is not the economic impact it has instigated, but the political one. As the responsive power of the state is significantly diminished, so is the capacity of the citizens to influence their livelihoods through electoral participation. The neoliberal doctrine proposes the market as an alternative arena in which citizens may exercise individual choice through their spending behaviour. However, just as wealth and income are not equally distributed among the constituents of a democracy [55], neither is the citizen's ability to influence the decisions pertaining to their community [49].

Such is the ideological hegemony that neoliberalism has achieved, that global political leaders often accede to neoliberal technocratic solutions for addressing economic and social problems [49]. A prominent example is the reliance of European Union (EU) leaders on the strict enforcement of austerity measures as a response to the ongoing economic crisis in several European democracies; this is despite evidence that the crisis itself was brought forward by neoliberal policies, and that the impact of austerity programmes seems to be aggravating it [56]. Furthermore, these decisions are usually determined not by the EU's democratic institutions, but by technocrats operating behind closed doors [49], pointing towards what Habermas would refer to as "a dismantling of democracy" within the EU [57]. Consequently, the resulting disempowerment, especially among the lower- and middle-income cohorts and the young, turns into disenfranchisement, as more parties of the traditional right—but progressively also of the former left—accede to the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism.

Published work in the area has identified three distinct paths through which neoliberalism may negatively affect the propensity of young people to engage with formal politics, 'pushing' them away from participating in traditional democratic deliberation processes [38]. Firstly, the neoliberal insistence on the importance of economic policies over purely political responses has rendered political actors unable to respond to the demands of their constituency [37]. Secondly, and as a consequence of the above, the neoliberal critique of democracy itself has made the constituents highly suspicious of the motives of politicians [39]. Finally, the electoral inequality that has resulted from the proliferation of the neoliberal ideology has acted as an additional barrier to the franchise and the subjective understanding of citizenship [58], limiting both young people's capacity, as well as their motivation, to engage with electoral politics.

Hart and Henn [36] discern an interconnectedness of these strands, which, when combined and reinforced by its roll-out process, form a neoliberal matrix that discourages young people's electoral participation. More specifically, the rules that safeguard the free-market principles should be untouched by democratic deliberation. As such, technocratic limitations should be enforced on democracy, especially when it comes to market interventions, since only through the free market is social emancipation possible. It follows, therefore, that politicians are increasingly bound to the technocratic parameters of a free-market logic, irrespective of the mandate of their constituency.

Building upon this logic, James Buchanan [59] expanded the neoliberal critique of democracy. Armed with the assumption of rational, utility-maximising agents, Buchanan claims that politicians are bound to govern in favour of their own narrow interests rather than those of their constituents. Buchanan's critique of the capacity of democracy itself to respond to social problems is threefold. Firstly, collective decision-making is unable to satisfy individual preferences. Secondly, and following from the previous argument, the same politicians are likely to support increased state control, in order to maintain their own power, and to increase their influence and salaries. These criticisms point back to a principal-agent problem: "Agents are supposed to represent the interests of their principals, but in fact they tend to put their own interests ahead of the interests of those whom they are supposed to represent" [60]. Thirdly, profit-maximising politicians are likely to favour certain social groups in return for votes. The political parties are therefore prone to converge towards the ideological centre [34], in search of maximising their share of the constituency by ideologically approaching the median voter, making these parties especially inelastic to the demands of the underrepresented youth [61,62]. This last argument may also explain why young people tend to refrain from voting, even though they may exhibit a deep awareness about political issues [63], they may believe that voting is important [64], and they are persevering supporters of democracy in principle [65]. It is therefore only when the salient issues on the political agenda particularly pertain to them that they will exhibit a significantly higher predisposition to voting. This is evidenced by the recent surge in young voters' turnout in Britain (at the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, the 2016 UK European Union (EU) referendum, and the 2017 General Election [66–68]) and across the EU [69], when the prevailing political agenda could no longer afford to exclude them from the debate.

The above critique portrays politicians as not only unable to influence political outcomes within a technocratic economic environment, but also as inherently selfish (and as such, untrustworthy) and thus unable to represent the mandate of their constituency. In the contemporary European political context, this is reflected in recent empirical research [65] which suggests that young people are disengaged with electoral politics because the latter is "... hierarchical and remote, the province of self-serving elitists with little interest in their lives" [70]. The consumer logic that has permeated the neoliberal subject allows for expressing their support or rejection of the available options by deliberately 'purchasing' among the available options of politicians and political parties [34]. However, this will inevitably be expressed by increased disengagement from electoral politics if the interests of the young voters continue to be underrepresented in the political debate, in favour of the median voter.

As the neoliberal critique of democracy continues, only the existence of a free market permits individual preferences to be adequately expressed and satisfied, undistorted by a collective decision-making process. The adoption of free-market principles as a response to the failures of democracy to reflect individual preferences via a majoritarian decision-making system calls for the conviction that our understanding of citizenship as represented by the sovereign citizen should be replaced by a shift towards the sovereign consumer. This consumer-oriented democracy, or 'marketopoly' as Lekakis [35] terms it, may more adequately reflect the individual preferences within the market as a highly decentralised framework of political action, and thus increasingly 'pull' the underrepresented young people to operate within it. Political expression becomes in this way a commercialised product, and the widespread diffusion of the neoliberal creed heralds the birth of the 'citizen-consumer', and the end of traditional understandings of citizenship [71].

The limitations imposed by neoliberalism on civic life stem from the concession that "traditional domains of civic activity are marginalised by uncontrolled market forces" [72] (p. 61). However, these same market forces allow for the expression of the 'political' within the domain of the marketplace. The following sections will attempt to trace these 'pull' factors exerted by the marketplace which make it conducive to market-oriented means of political participation.

3. Consumption and Citizenship: Towards an Empowered Citizen-Consumer

In the previous section, we examined how the neoliberal paradigm has shaped the convergence of the previously distant notions of citizen and consumer. Cohen [73] emphasises the dichotomous role between the identities of citizens and consumers. The former are defined as individuals who have the obligation to fulfil certain civil duties in connection to the government, in order to guarantee their rights and privileges. By way of contrast, consumers are instead perceived as merely preoccupied with satisfying their private material needs and desires. Schudson [74], however, emphasises the complementarity of the roles of the citizen and the consumer, since, as he argues, consumer choices have the potential to be political, and have often historically been so. As such, consumer choices are no less an "inferior form of human activity compared to voting at the polling place or otherwise exercising citizenship" [74] (p. 237). A recent position has identified the consumer as a moral agent, with specific consumption patterns intended as a means to a political end [75] (p. 240). With the numerous boycotting campaigns organised by the people of the Puerta del Sol and Sydagma Square in 2011, and of activists for animal rights, ecosystems, fair and solidarity trade, among others, civic values such as citizens' rights, equity, ethics, sustainability, and social responsibility have been related with increasing frequency to consumerism. This signals the possibility of an eventual collapse of the borders between the previously unrelated notions of 'citizenship' and 'consumerism' [76].

Having thus established the emergence of the neoliberal citizen-consumer above, we will proceed by identifying the 'pull' factors that may allure young neoliberal subjects into alternative forms of political participation within the market context. In doing so, we will consider the arrival of the 'empowered citizen-consumer' by reinventing the role of the consumer as no longer a mere passive appeaser of one's material needs, but as an integral agent of political responsibility within a neoliberal socio-political context. Central within this assertion stands the neoliberal axiom that democracy would be more efficient if it was organised according to consumerist and free-market guidelines [36,50], which in turn is based on the neoliberal emphasis of economic over political freedom as the foundation of liberty [77]. In fact, Friedman [78] posed that economic freedom is indispensable in achieving political freedom, whereas Hayek [47] considered economic freedom essential in creating and preserving liberty.

The supporting literature in this area may be derived from several previously unrelated academic disciplines. Emerging Marketing theories have started to emphasise the weight of competition and consumer choice in a digital, global, and de-regulated market economy, thereby shifting the power balance in favour of consumers. Kotler et al. [79] identify overcapacity as the main problem for businesses: "Customers are scarce, not products. Demand, not supply, is the problem. Overcapacity leads to hyper competition, with too many goods chasing too few customers. And most goods and services lack differentiation. The result: dog-eat-dog pricing and mounting business failures" [79] (p. ix).

Dickinson and Svenson [80] argue that in modern affluent societies most people have what they need and much of what they want. Hence, people will demonstrate a finite willingness to consume, and so the old economic tools of price and volume manipulation will no longer suffice to ensure sustainable profits to the producer. For a number of years, producers relied almost exclusively on increasing the production volumes and cutting down prices, based on the assumption of infinite consumer needs and wants. However, the more the markets satisfy consumers' materialist needs and the more they appease their postmaterialist wants, the more ethical and even aesthetical considerations of sustainable consumption will come into play.

This '*Beautiful Corporations*' thesis [80] is rooted in the premise of " . . . empowered consumers investing citizenship considerations into their everyday purchase decisions" [81] (p. 119). The argument, therefore, is that consumers have become more empowered in relation to the producers, and thus their consumption patterns will demonstrate a wider social awareness with regard to their impact on the public sphere [81], a position which in turn closely aligns with Inglehart's [20,22] postmaterialist thesis. The shift from materialism to postmaterialism in young people's value orientations has been a widely influential and empirically supported determinant of the rise of non-electoral politics [82].

Inglehart's [20–22] postmaterialist thesis posits that increasing material security has resulted in a shift in people's value orientations which enables them to place more emphasis on concerns related to self-expression, human rights, and environmental issues [83]. Moreover, previous research indicates that political consumerism is primarily a tool of young postmaterialists, who are distrustful of political institutions [84]. The relevance of postmaterialist value preferences to political consumerism thus becomes pertinent. Firstly, buycotting and boycotting, as an expression of political action, are consistent with the lifestyle and the non-conventional participation methods that are popular among the postmaterialist cohorts [83]. Secondly, instead of consuming merely to satisfy one's material needs, the political consumer adds ethical, social, environmental, and political—hence, postmaterialist—considerations to the product of choice. Thirdly, the historical shift from materialist to postmaterialist preferences may justify the perceived increase of political consumerism in recent decades.

Hence, postmaterialist consumers, having satisfied their purely materialist needs and being empowered with a plethora of consumer choices, will become less susceptible to simple advertisement wiles and sales promotions. Instead, they will seek to position themselves within a postmaterialist political field which draws heavily from the principles of the marketplace. Given the shift from the scarcity of goods to the scarcity of consumers, the customer is placed "at the beginning rather than the end of the production-consumption cycle" [85] (p. 7), and will be empowered to such an extent that, for Kotler et al. [79] (pp. 36–37), he or she will be transformed to a 'prosumer'—able to influence the production process itself. The prosumer is now able to afford consumption patterns which place " . . . emphasis on liberation, the freedom to construct identities, and the ability of consumers to empower themselves through the deliberate orchestration of commodity meanings" [86] (p. 8). Consequently, the emergence of a postmaterialist critical mass has only recently rendered possible what Kotler describes as a "democracy of goods" [79] (p. 9).

Despite the robust theoretical evidence in favour of postmaterialist value preferences as a defining factor behind political consumerism, the available empirical evidence remains inconclusive, if not contradictory. Copeland [82] finds that there is a strong causal link between postmaterialist values and engagement with political consumerism. In contrast, Baek [87] finds that although political consumers place more emphasis on environmental issues and education, there exist no significant correlations with respect to abortion, racial discrimination, or taxation. Conversely, Andersen and Tobiasen [88] find no evidence of correlation between postmaterialism and political consumerism.

The inconclusive nature of the postmaterialist thesis with respect to its application to the emergence of political consumerism calls for a shift of focus from value preferences to more contextual factors, such as neoliberalism. Political consumerism may indeed be understood as an expression of the value preferences of young postmaterialists. However, political consumerism has the potential to traverse the use of the market as merely a commercial arena, and to transform it into a habitus instilled with political meaning, where everyday consumption practices can be interpreted as a direct result of a more general shift of participatory processes towards identity-based pursuits, lifestyle participation, and individualism, and therefore as expressions of citizenship of late modernity. The following section will thus define political consumerism, and trace the 'pull' factors behind it, in the postmodernist literature.

3.1. Political Consumerism

Political consumerism is formally defined as the " . . . consumer choice of producers and products on the basis of attitudes and values of personal and family well-being as well as ethical or political assessment of business and government practice" [89] (p. xiv), and is expressed by two types of activities: consumer boycotts and buycotts. By engaging in boycotts, people "challenge companies to change objectionable or undesirable business practices by tarnishing their reputation or bottom lines" [90] (p. 174). Correspondingly, by engaging in buycotts, people "purchase specific products or brands deliberately to reward companies for desirable behaviour" [90] (p. 174). Even though boycotts

and buycotts lead to contrasting business outcomes, the literature on political consumerism has often examined them as analogous, both on theoretical and empirical grounds. Nevertheless, they have each gained momentum as forms of political engagement in the last decades, especially among the young.

Even after the outbreak of the financial crisis, political consumerism remains at the forefront of political action. Latest figures for the value of all ethical purchases in the UK recorded an 8.5% growth during 2015 to an impressive £38 billion of overall value, whereas consumers' ethical spending in their local community surged by 11.7% [91]. These figures exhibit a continuous growth trend for the thirteenth consecutive year, reflecting the persisting appeal of political consumerism, despite the outbreak of the crisis. Similarly, and as a result of these increasing consumption trends, on the production side several corporations are responding by developing corporate social responsibility schemes which seek to monetise the increasing demand for political agency and moral responsibility of the production [92].

Newman and Bartels [42] find that young people from 16 to 30 years of age are particularly more likely than their older contemporaries to partake in political consumerism, and that unlike conventional political participation such as voting in elections, political consumerism is likely to decrease with age. Elsewhere, Gotlieb and Wells [93] find a strong positive relationship between engagement in political consumerism at a young age and the development of those civic competencies necessary for the engagement in institutional politics as adults. However, Wicks, Morimoto, and Maxwell [94] demonstrate that the predictors of adult political consumerism do not necessarily coincide with those of youth political consumerism. Despite these findings, studies on youth political consumerism remain somewhat limited [95].

In any case, the perceived rise of political consumerism offers an example of the changing political practices of citizens in late modernity. Scholars of late-modernity posit that the perceived growth of political consumerist practices follows as a direct result of a more general shift of participatory processes towards identity-based pursuits, lifestyle participation, individualism, and postmaterialist value orientations [22,41,96]. The following section will therefore trace the 'pull' factors of political consumerism considered within the relevant postmodern literature.

3.1.1. Political Consumerism and Postmodernism

As Nonomura [95] has suggested, scholars of late modernity contend that the traditional sociodemographic indicators of participation, such as social class, are progressively losing prominence in favour of a wider motivational shift towards what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim [97] have referred to as 'self-politics', or what Giddens [96] has termed 'life-politics'. Attempting to respond to the increasingly restrained options for democratic agency in the face of neoliberal capitalism, it is argued that the postmodern citizen-consumer will resort to the politicisation of leisure and consumption as a means to assert their political agency and self-actualisation [95]. Referring to the work of Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti [89], Nonomura suggests that "the growth of political consumerism reflects the growing understanding among citizens—especially young people—of 'the politics behind products' and the 'complex social and normative context' (i.e., late capitalism, neoliberalism, economic globalisation) in which production and day-to-day consumption occurs" [95] (p. 236). Consequently, political consumerism becomes a neoliberal response of political participation based on 'individualised responsibility taking' [31] (p. 2).

Political consumerism therefore has been proposed as an emerging form of political participation [31] which departs from the traditional definitions of citizenship, by inserting the individual consumer power into collective public issues, blurring the boundaries between the conventional notions of citizen and consumer. Political consumerism, through the practice of politicising the personal, constitutes a form of individualised lifestyle politics, whereby individuals harness the power of their personal choices to achieve political change [42,43]. In doing so, it conflates the political and economic sphere to the point that to separate them serves less of a purpose than to actually assume that they affect each other.

Findings from Stolle et al. [84] indicate that political consumerism is primarily a tool of those who are distrustful of political institutions, and expresses an essentially individualistic form of civic

action, reiterating the 'push' element of the neoliberal critique of democracy. But despite its essentially individualistic nature, political consumerism has also a dormant collective appeal. Micheletti [98], building on the works of Beck and of Giddens [96,97] on reflexive modernity, interprets this interplay between the individual and the collective appeal of political consumerism on the grounds of the increasing interconnectedness of the private and public arenas of postmodern societies. The political consumers therefore, are convinced that their individual consumer choices will have collective political consequences, so that each person partakes in "global responsibility taking" [98] (p. 2). From a postmodern perspective, " ... individuals can feel themselves to be authors of global political acts" [98] (p. 2). The proximity of the individual and the collective interplay therefore render political consumerism especially appealing to the postmodern citizen-consumer.

For these postmodern citizen-consumers, the market becomes a political arena in which their individual values are reflected in the contents of their shopping basket, whilst their 'votes' are 'cast' at the checkout [99] (p. 46). Consequently, the consumer becomes a political agent and a carrier of political responsibility. Although the demands of political consumerists are still contingent on institutional political deliberation spaces, "when aggregated, these individual choices have the potential to transcend the actions of individuals to form political movements that may, in turn, challenge political and economic powers" [33] (p. 471). By capturing the public imagination, they may put new items on the institutional political agendas and thus deliberate on a significantly more far-reaching range of policy-issues and concerns than they might otherwise have done. Consequently, policies that might have previously been unthinkable may become a reality [82].

Therefore, political consumerism qualifies as a response to the individualisation of the neoliberal creed, since it obscures the distinctions between the private and public realms [82] and is explicitly directed to the market instead of the state. Moreover, political consumerist practices are to a large extent self-directed, and information is disseminated through informal peer-to-peer networks [100] instead of being coordinated by formal political institutions, or driven by large-scale elite communication [82]. Sassatelli [75] (p. 188) stresses that, in the words of Beck [41], "If modernity is a democracy oriented to producers, late modernity is a democracy oriented to consumers: a pragmatic and cosmopolitan democracy where the sleepy giant of the 'sovereign citizen-consumer' is becoming a counterweight to big transnational corporations". Borrowing from a Marxist critique of capitalism, the question of whether neoliberalism contains the seeds of its own destruction by nurturing the emergence of the 'sovereign citizen-consumer' is yet to be answered.

Political consumerism has been widely examined as a market-oriented form of political participation within a postmodern context. It is exactly this postmodern appeal of political consumerism that renders it especially appealing to the young citizen-consumers of late modernity. However, given the susceptibility of political consumerism to a neoliberal modus operandi, the lack of available literature problematising its emergence as a response to neoliberal principles is somewhat surprising. The following section will thus address this gap, by establishing political consumerism as a form of economic voting within a neoliberal economic context.

3.1.2. Political Consumerism as Economic Voting

To the political consumer, the marketplace is being approximated to a democracy in which the citizen-consumers vote according to their purchasing power, each time they engage in the purchasing of a product or a service. In a similar vein, Nava [101] stipulates that political consumerism offers people access to an alternative form of democratic participation. Contrary to the typical model of electoral politics in which citizens' participation opportunities are restricted to periodical contests involving voting for candidates/representatives, engaging in acts of political consumerism presents additional benefits of frequency and immediacy. On the one hand, people register and reiterate their political support or opposition to a certain production process on a daily basis via their daily purchasing decisions. On the other hand, consistent with the notion of the prosumer introduced above,

they will support certain production processes (and penalise others) directly through the facilitation of the marketplace rather than through the mediation of their elected representatives.

Nevertheless, it has been argued that the politics of consumption are inextricably dependent on neoliberal doctrines. With its emphasis on rationality, competition, and striving for burgeoning economic expansion, neoliberalism ceases to be yet another position on the ideological spectrum. Instead, it has been described as a form of non-politics [102], the only rational and viable way forward. Neoliberalism thus has accelerated an unequivocal shift from the power of the state to that of the market. Political consumerism therefore poses as a contentious alternative to the neoliberal hegemony by augmenting its individualistic contestations with ethical, political, and collective considerations. The present section will thus investigate the appeal of political consumerism in relation to the market-based ideology of the neoliberal paradigm. The concept of the 'marketopoly' [56] (p. 57) is indispensable for such an analysis.

'Marketopoly' indicates the market itself as the *par excellence* habitus of political participation. As Lekakis states, "Marketopoly marks the reign of the market in presenting an opportunity for the capture of citizenship in its facilitation in the Marketplace" [35] (p. 57), and as such necessitates and presupposes a market-based ideology as the foundation of its politics of consumption. Neoliberalism provides the perfect ideological narrative for its emergence, by casting the shadow of the economic over political citizenship. The guiding elements of the marketopoly, namely, capacity and rationality, have been internalised by individuals to such a degree that they became the regulating principles of society as a whole. Similarly, the prevalent notion of freedom is equated to freedom of the market, devoid of any social, environmental, or ethical considerations. As a result, the classical notions of citizenship as participation are therefore re-forged into a commodified interpretation of citizenship.

In light of the above, the assumption that economic voting may substitute for political voting has been heavily contested. Bauman [103] diagnosed the 'consumerist syndrome' as an illness of liquid modernity, whereas Root [104] (p. 71) positions consumer-citizenship as the 'soft focus of kitsch', offering a poor imitation of formal electoral political participation. Instead, the emergence of consumer-citizenship has been heralded by the proponents of political consumerism as an oppositional force positioned against the marketisation of political life, by comparing consumers to economic voters. The 'new consumer', socialised in market choice, poses as the democratic response to the commercialisation of civic action. However, such choice is restricted by the prevalence of economic over political freedom as dictated by their internalisation of the principles of the marketopoly.

This realisation renders political consumerism a form of political participation which is inescapably bound by the rationality of the marketopoly. It denotes the penetration of the neoliberal rationale in the contemporary forms of civic participation, resulting in turn in the commodification of participation itself. Although the ability to resist commodification should be salient within the various forms of activism and political action [105], political consumerism is particularly susceptible to it since, by definition, it adheres to the doctrines of the marketopoly. For Barber, "Commodification is the mode by which a consumer society reproduces itself, working overtime to create uniform monopolies of taste and behaviour (. . .) To commodify is thus to colonise" [106] (p. 247). The process of commodification for Barber is therefore reminiscent of Peck's [50] 'roll-out' effects of neoliberalism, which in a similar way seek to colonise all domains of social life by reducing them to their economic counterparts and remoulding them in its image [107]. The roll-out effect of neoliberalism therefore becomes especially intrusive, as it does not merely presuppose the existence of an economism in every domain of social life, but instead assumes as its primary aim the establishment, propagation, and institutionalisation of such economism. In doing so, it commodifies—and thus colonises—citizenship by transposing its enactment from the political arena to that of the marketopoly.

These criticisms tend to present individual citizen-consumers as unavoidably shaped by the neoliberal dictum, as this has taken form in the marketopoly. As such, they tend to neglect on the one hand the collective precondition of political consumerism introduced above, and on the other, the capacity of the empowered citizen-consumer (prosumer) to influence the production process

and the environment where this takes place. Consequently, they tend to understate the elements of resistance in the practice of political consumption. Contrary to the increased concern about diminishing political participation rates—especially among young people—political consumerism provides the platform to resist, or at least to offset, the impact of the bourgeoning doctrines of neoliberalism [107]. In a romanticized metaphor, the ancient Athenian Agora—literally 'the Market'—finds its postmodern equivalent as a locus of political fermentation.

4. Conclusions

As voting turnout demonstrates declining trends, scholars of political participation have started to examine the increased prevalence of political participation beyond the vote as a significant potential avenue for alternative civic and political engagement [108]. The present article draws from the assertion of the existence of a neoliberal ideological hegemony of the marketopoly, so as to associate the declining levels of electoral engagement among younger generations in post-crisis Europe with the rise of political consumerism. We discern two contrasting—albeit complimentary—effects: On the one hand, the internalised neoliberal critique of democracy stresses the 'push' effect of the public into the commercial sphere. In parallel to the 'push' effect, which effectively disengages young people from the traditional political field, the emerging individualisation of modern 'liquid' politics advanced by the post-materialist sensitivities of their previously affluent socialisation call attention to the existence of a simultaneous 'pull' effect into the marketopoly, as a habitus of youth political participation in post-crisis Europe.

We have considered the ways through which neoliberalism has 'pushed' young citizens away from politics. The neoliberal critique of democracy portrays politicians as not only unable to influence political outcomes within a technocratic economic environment, but also as inherently selfish and, as such, not sufficiently trustworthy to represent the mandate of their constituency. Henn and Oldfield [109] trace the reasons behind young people's electoral disengagement in contemporary Britain and locate these as significantly centred on the remote and hierarchical formal democratic institutions and on the self-serving approach of elitist politicians. Nevertheless, the same research reveals that contrary to popular belief, young people are not apathetic, and would in fact be interested in participating in decisions that pertain to them should they be able to shape political discussion in ways that address their concerns and hopes. Instead, they have found themselves in a marginalised position within the traditional political sphere, and feel disillusioned and incapacitated to actualise their interests within the existing political arena. Consequently, many young people have sought and found the 'political' within the context of the marketopoly, and have thus adopted it as the *par excellence* domain where they may express their postmaterialist and postmodern concerns as citizen-consumers.

In such a context [110], we have identified and problematised four separate but interconnected 'pull' factors that render political consumerism particularly appealing. Firstly, the ability of the citizen-consumer to customise the products to fit their individual requirements; secondly, the ability to tailor the prices according to their budget; thirdly, the availability of information and ease of communication with regard to their purchasing decisions; and finally, the trust in the market environment. The first two factors are related to the consumer's ability to influence the production process, reflecting the argument of Kotler et al. [79] set out above in relation to the emergence of the prosumer. The third is linked to the collective appeal of political consumerism [33], which harnesses the individual consumer's power into collective public issues. Despite its essentially individualistic nature, political consumerism conveys strong collective underpinnings. For instance, Zukin et al. [100] (p. 79) report that citizens participate in acts of political consumerism "because it's a good thing to do", emphasising an ethical individualistic tendency. However, Micheletti and Stolle [111] also identify 'social solidarity' as a determinant for political consumerism, drawing political consumerism as a form of 'individualised-collective action', which does not perpetuate the cleavage between individualistic and collective action, but rather reconciles the two. In any case, both determinants draw a picture of an empowered, primarily postmaterialist [90,103] citizen-consumer who, having been socialised under

material conditions of relative affluence, will place emphasis on ethical and solidarity considerations behind their purchasing behaviour. Finally, the fourth factor of trust in the market environment reiterates the internalised neoliberal doctrines of the neoliberal subject in line with the discussion above, as these have been consolidated by its roll-out process.

The decline of electoral participation does not designate the end of citizenship, but merely its transformation and diffusion into alternative fields. As a form of political participation that operates within the marketopoly, political consumerism is susceptible to the neoliberal mentality. Yet, as the definitions of political participation are expanding to include individualised or lifestyle forms of engagement, so is the concept of citizenship. Armed with postmaterialist considerations, the emergence of the empowered citizen-consumer as a by-product of the neoliberal roll-out process provides consumerism with the necessary elements of citizenship, and enables citizen-consumers to appraise or penalise market forces.

We posit that, contrary to the increased concern about diminishing political engagement, especially among the younger generations, political consumerism provides a framework for responding to the individualisation and strict 'economism' of the neoliberal tenets. Disenfranchised and disillusioned by the capacity of the purely political sphere to respond to their individualised claims, and having internalised the neoliberal critique of democracy, the young empowered citizen-consumers demonstrate noteworthy reflexivity to the spirit of the times. It is thus not surprising that the citizen-consumer, equipped with the freedom provided by postmodern liquid politics, driven by postmaterialist sensitivities but simultaneously instilled with the internalised conviction in favour of the seemingly ubiquitous market, will inevitably seek the 'political' within the bounds of the marketplace. It may therefore be argued that if neoliberalism perceives competition as the primary characteristic of human interaction and as such it reinvents citizens as consumers, political consumerism responds by redefining consumers as citizens.

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Still Troubled: Tunisia's Youth During and Since the Revolution of 2011

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Abstract: This paper presents evidence from interviews in 2015–2016 with a nationally representative sample of Tunisia's 15–29 year olds. We focus on the sample's political participation and orientations during the revolution of 2011 and subsequently. We find that just 6.6 percent of those aged 15–24 at the time played any direct part in the 'events of 2011'. Political engagement then and subsequently is shown to have been influenced most strongly by a university education and growing up in a politically engaged family. In 2015–2016, young people were overwhelmingly pro-democracy, supported equal opportunities and status for the sexes, and endorsed values of self-expression, but attached equal importance to economic security and betterment, felt that their country's traditions should be maintained and respected, and were personally religious, though three-quarters wanted religion to be kept out of politics and government. Although Tunisia is the sole Arab Spring country to emerge with a still functioning (in 2017) multi-party democracy, we find that in 2015–2016, the majority of young people did not trust their elected politicians. Our survey findings suggest explanations for the paradox between young Tunisians' overwhelming support for democracy alongside intense disappointment with the outcomes.

Keywords: Arab Spring; politics; Tunisia; youth

1. Introduction

Why revisit the Arab Spring? First, because many questions about these 'events of 2011' remain unanswered, and the passage of time and additional evidence now available enable these questions to be addressed. Second, because the answers have relevance beyond idle curiosity about what happened in 2011. Our own new evidence is from a survey conducted during late 2015 and early 2016 among a nationally representative sample of 2000 15–29 year olds in Tunisia, the country where the wave of uprisings in 2011 began and the sole country where the protests to regime change and to the country's transformation into a multi-party democracy, where governments now change depending on election results. Yet, we found that in 2015–2016, young people's trust in politicians (always low) had declined further. These findings were unexpected. Our evidence indicates possible answers, but these are just hypotheses that need to be explored thoroughly in further research.

1.1. Some Knowns

Some questions about 'the events of 2011' have been answered either by recent history or research evidence gathered at the time or during the intervening years. In 2011, it was plausible to anticipate a North Africa and Middle East repeat of 'the events of 1989' and what followed, though this was

always unlikely because the 2011 protests were in countries with no histories of communism from which to depart and that were already consumer market economies.

We now know that the events of 2011 did not signal the birth and mobilisation of a new political generation in North Africa and the Middle East. We now know that the prominence of young people in the protests owed more to the demography of the countries than the over-representation of the young, and that all age groups were present and all their voices could be heard amid the protests in Tunis and Cairo [1,2]. Surveys have not produced evidence of change over time or differences by age in political orientations that a new political generation would create [3,4]. It appears that the most recent new political generations in North Africa were formed in the 1970s and continue to recruit new cohorts of young people. In the 1970s, these new cohorts became the countries' post-independence generation. The liberators of the countries were in power, and new incoming youth and adult cohorts were dissatisfied with the outcomes [5–7]. Arguably, this dissatisfaction can only have intensified over time, and by 2011, a greatly enlarged new political generation could have swept the region's incumbent political elites aside for ever, but unlike in Eastern Europe in 1989, this has not happened during or since 2011, even in Tunisia.

We already know about the 'condition of young people' throughout the Arab Mediterranean region in 2011. We know about the demographic surge (the swollen size of youth cohorts), the high levels of unemployment, and the even more widespread informal employment. We know about the pressure on housing [8–12]. These conditions have awaited increasingly urbanised and well-educated young people. In some countries, by 2011, university-educated young adults were at greatest risk of unemployment [13,14]. Our new evidence confirms these features of the condition of youth. There have been no changes since 2011, except further deterioration in young people's job prospects in some countries, especially those in which tourism had become a significant business sector (see [15]).

However, we also know that 'conditions' or 'structure' can never be a sufficient explanation of outcomes. Actors' motivations, informed by their own definitions of their situations, always need to be part of an explanation. In the case of the events of 2011, our best evidence is from research that was conducted close to the events. Most of this evidence is from Tunisia and Egypt, and more specifically from Tunis and Cairo, the places where protestors succeeded in toppling incumbent rulers. We know that the protestors were angry, outraged by the repression that they were experiencing, and the manner in which all dissent was being brutally suppressed. They were outraged by the widening inequalities in countries where the regimes' neo-liberal policies had made them darlings of international financial institutions, enriching the rulers and their crony capitalist cadres while impoverishing swaths of their populations, degrading public services, and stripping the people of dignity [16–24]. We know all this, yet important questions remain unanswered. Hence the seemingly never ending attempts (of which this paper is one) to 'frame the debate' about the true significance of the events of 2011 (see [25]).

1.2. Knowledge Gaps

Our fresh evidence can address some previously unanswered questions, namely:

- The socio-demographic profile of the young people who were involved in the protests, and whether they can be treated as a cross-section of their age group;
- Whether they had similar or different political orientations from peers who did not join the protests. Were they speaking and acting for their age group?
- Was there a disconnect between participating in protests in 2011 on the one hand and voting in subsequent elections and involvement in conventional politics on the other?
- How many protestors in 2011 sustained their political activity over the next five years, up to the time of our survey in 2015–2016?

We can set answers to these questions in the context of the overall socio-political orientations of Tunisia's youth in 2015–2016, including their trust in politicians and political institutions, their religiosity, their evaluations of multi-party democracy vis-à-vis alternative political systems, and

whether they were abandoning traditional and security values in favour of rational and self-expression values, which is the global modernising trend identified in successive World Values Surveys [26–30]. Our research also gathered the young people's opinions about how their country had changed since 2011. First, however, we must describe our research, address our starting questions about the events of 2011, and then progress to the respondents' circumstances and socio-political orientations in 2015–2016.

1.3. The Investigation

Our evidence is from an interview survey during the winter of 2015–2016 with a nationally representative sample of Tunisia's 15–29 year olds using a fully structured questionnaire which was available in Arabic, French and English. A representative sample of households from all regions of the country was approached, and all resident 15–29 year olds became the sample. All interviews were conducted by a same-sex interviewer. Interviews were not audio-recorded because the questionnaire was fully structured. Respondents were divided into those living in rural and urban settlements. Age, sex and marital status were recorded together with information on the housing that respondents occupied, and their mothers' and fathers' education and occupations. The respondents' own educational attainments, current positions and prior experiences in the labour market were recorded. We then addressed a series of questions about each respondent's political actions (if any) during and since 2010–2011 together with their socio-political orientations. Details of these questions will be given as the findings are presented. For some purposes, namely all analyses that involves political actions in 2010–2011, we use results only from respondents aged 20–29 at the time of the survey, thus excluding those who were not yet age 15 in 2010–2011.

We commence below with exactly who took part in the actions that led to the revolution that involved the flight of Tunisia's President Ben Ali on 14 January 2011. We will show that exactly who took part, and their own and other young Tunisians' subsequent political biographies, may form part, but only a part, of a comprehensive explanation of the widespread dissatisfaction in 2015–2016 with the outcomes of the events of 2011.

2. Youth and the Events of 2011 in Tunisia

The Protestors

Who were the young Tunisian activists who set their president fleeing, and forced the incumbent regime to concede contested elections to an assembly that created a new democratic constitution? Not only this, they set in motion the wave of protests that spread across North Africa and into the Middle-East. We asked whether respondents had taken part in each of a series of 'actions' in the period leading to and surrounding the flight of President Ben Ali. These actions were:

- Participating in party political meetings and other activities;
- Making a donation to a party or association;
- Collecting signatures or signing a petition;
- Participating in night watches to protect a neighbourhood;
- Participating, attending, or helping in a demonstration;
- Joining a strike;
- Using forms of violent action for social or political ends;
- Participating in election campaigns;
- Political participation via the internet.

Respondents answered on a six-point scale with a range from every day to never.

As explained above, we restrict our analysis here to members of our sample who were age 20–29 in 2015–2016, that is, those aged 15–24 in 2010–2011. Out of the 1367 20–29 year olds in the sample, just 90 had taken part in any of the above actions in 2010–2011—just 6.6 percent, which was fewer than we had expected. Only 1.5 percent had been cyberactivists, and 2.4 percent had taken part in

a demonstration. The action that had involved most respondents had been night watches (4.4 percent). It seems that it was the actions of a rather small proportion of the age group, and probably an even smaller proportion of the entire Tunisia adult population, that won relatively free elections, sparked the protests that spread across the region that became known as the Arab Spring, and created North Africa's as yet sole democracy.

We also asked whether respondents had taken part in the same list of actions during the last year, 2015–2016, five years on from the revolution. Slightly more (6.7 percent) had been involved in at least one of these activities. What was different about 2010–2011? Our hypotheses are as follows. First, in 2010–2011, most acted at the same time and in the same place, during December 2010 to January 2011 and mainly in Tunis. Second, in 2011, the protestors persisted and refused to disperse in the face of police charges, brutal assaults, arrests, gunfire, and fatalities. Third and crucially, by mid-January, Ben Ali's security forces and colleagues in the regime had decided that the president was expendable and advised him to flee, temporarily and able to return, though this was never to be. If autocrats retain the support of colleagues and their security forces, they can hold on until protestors disperse or fight if a protest movement acquires arms (as in Syria post-2011).

The events of December 2010–January 2011 in Tunis show that it is possible for a small proportion of a population who assemble together to feel, and to appear to others, that they are 'the people'. We will see below that the motivations and orientations of the protestors did indeed represent the aspirations of many more inactive peers, the overwhelming majority of their age group. Some who did not join the crowds contributed to the revolution with sounds, images, and lyrics that conveyed the revolution's mood [31,32]. The activists would have been aware of and sustained by the moral, social, and material support that was given at the time. Those who died, including the street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi who self-immolated on 17 December 2010 during a confrontation with a policewoman and whose death on 4 January 2011 sparked the protests that led to Tunisia's revolution, have become revered figures in the country's history.

More males than females were involved in 'the events of 2010–2011' (10.1 percent and 3.3 percent). There was little difference in participation rates between those living in urban and rural areas (6.9 percent and 6.0 percent) or between those from middle class families, measured by mothers' and fathers' education and occupations, and the rest (6.5 percent and 6.6 percent). However, those involved in the events of 2010–2011 were the more likely to have become university graduates by 2015–2016 (8.2 percent versus 5.7 percent), and in 2015–2016, a higher proportion of those in permanent, full-time official jobs had been activists five years previously (10.8 percent) than those in 2015–2016, who were in informal employment (5.3 percent) or unemployed (6.2 percent). The protestors in 2010–2011 were then, and in 2015–2016 were still, on relatively advantaged life course trajectories.

Roughly a half of our respondents who had taken part in the actions in 2010–2011 had not been involved in similar actions in 2015–2016, while 3.5 percent had acted in 2015–2016 but not in 2010–2011. Just 3.1 percent had been activists in both years. They will probably have joined Tunisia's long-term grassroots political activists. Needless to say, there are additional ways in which citizens can become politically engaged. For example, they may join tenants, environmentalist, women's, and other civil society associations. We collected relevant data that show that it tended to be the same individuals who were involved in all the various ways. Here, we concentrate on those who were politically active, narrowly defined, because it was the street protests and related actions in 2010–2011 that led to Tunisia's political revolution. The proportion of the age group that was directly involved in these 'events of 2011' is small, but perhaps not surprisingly small because elected representatives in Western-type democracies are normally drawn from similarly small pools of long-term activists. Other citizens in democracies are not required to participate except in occasional elections.

3. Young Tunisians' Political Activities and Orientations in 2015–2016: Activists and Non-Activists in 2010–2011

We now ask whether the activists in 2010–2011 differed from the rest of their age group not socio-demographically, but in their subsequent political activities and socio-political orientations in 2015–2016. As regards orientations, we find only slight differences, but these consistently portray the activists as the more conservative group. They were the more religious, the less supportive of sex equality, more supportive of traditional and security values, and had more trust in their country's politicians, but they were also the more supportive of self-expression values. The differences in political activities prove much wider. The activists of 2010–2011 had subsequently become far more likely than others in their age group to engage in all types of 'normal' political action, especially joining a political party, and this was even more especially the case among activists who had been reared in politically engaged families. Young people from these families were also more conservative than their peers in all the ways mentioned above.

Table 1 divides the sample into the 90 respondents who were personally and directly involved in the events of 2011 and the rest. The 2011 activists proved more likely than their peers to have taken part subsequently in all the 'normal' political actions. These findings refute previous suggestions (for example by Honwana, 2013 [20]) that the activists in 2011 were rejecting normal politics in favour of alternative ways of doing democracy.

Table 1. Political participation, 20–29 year olds in 2015–2016.

	Participated in the 'Events of 2011' %	Did Not Participate %
Belong to a political party as sympathiser, participant, donor or volunteer	22	4
Using or have used activists political blogs or websites	28	13
Political party to which feel close	29	14
Always or often vote when elections called	37	26
Voted in last election	53	29
Follow political news every day or often	53	36

Respondents who expressed some degree of support for any political party in 2015–2016 were most likely to name either Nidaa Tounes (43.1 percent) or Ennahdha (27.8 percent) the current and former post-2011 government-forming parties. The support of the remaining 29 percent was scattered between a large number of much smaller parties. However, just over 14 percent of the total sample named any favoured party. This is just one indication of the fragility of democracy in post-2011 Tunisia.

Since being an activist in 2011 predicted all forms of subsequent, normal political activity, it will be no surprise that similar socio-demographic variables predicted political activity in both 2011 and subsequently. The answers regarding subsequent political activity are the same irrespective of the measure of political engagement–voting in elections, feeling close to a particular political party, following political news, and all the other indicators in Table 1. Those who were politically engaged in 2015–2016 tended to be male, living in urban rather than rural areas, older rather than younger, with a pronounced leap in activity between late-teens and early-20s, married rather than single, and living independently rather than with their parents. However, there are two eye-catching predictors. The first is various indicators of social class: the classes of families of origin measured by mothers' and fathers' occupations and education (which did not predict involvement in the events of 2011) and especially whether respondents had progressed through university. For example, 64 percent of university graduates compared with 23 percent from the remainder of 25–29-year-old respondents had voted in the last election. Compared with participants in the events of 2010–2011 (where our numbers are much smaller), in subsequent political activity, gender differences are narrower, while differences on all indicators of social class are much wider.

The other eye-catching predictor of all forms of political engagement is whether respondents had been brought-up in politically engaged families. This was measured with a question about whether respondents spoke with their mothers and fathers about national political affairs regularly,

often, sometimes, or never. On our measure, speaking with either the mother or father or both about politics often or regularly, 929 (67 percent of the 20–29 year olds) were from politically engaged families. This was related to respondents having been activists in 2010–2011 (7.6 percent compared with 4.3 percent from politically non-engaged families). Both a politically engaged family background and participation in the 2010–2011 events were independently related to our various measures of post-2011 political activity, including voting regularly in elections and belonging to a political party (see Table 2). The latter was far most common (53 percent) among those who had been activists in 2010–2011 and who were not from politically engaged families. However, there were only 19 such 2010–2011 activists in our sample, of whom 10 were political party members in 2015–2016. Party membership was also more common among those from politically engaged families who had been activists in 2011 (15 percent) than among the other groups in Table 2 (three and four percent).

Table 2. Family political engagement, and young people's political activity in 2010–2011 and subsequently.

	Percentages Voting Regularly	Member of a Political Party
Politically engaged family Participated in 2011	53%	15%
Politically engaged family Did not participate in 2011	45%	4%
Non-politically engaged family Participated in 2011	37%	53%
Non-politically engaged family Did not participate in 2011	31%	3%

We allowed respondents to describe themselves as 'members' of a political party by being sympathisers, participating in party-organised events, donating, or volunteering. Membership of a political party does not have the same meaning across North Africa as in the relatively mature democracies of Western Europe and North America. In North Africa, as in the new democracies of East-Central Europe and the former Soviet Union, most political parties are top-down creations. They have been formed by caucuses of politicians who then mobilise support rather than built upward. Members of the public can 'join' by doing something in addition to voting for the party, like donating, volunteering to undertaking some activity or even just attending meetings. They may thereby become part of one of the pools from which it is possible to be recruited into a 'political class' from which candidates are selected for placement on party election lists or appointed to jobs on the recommendation of a senior party member, thereby being co-opted into the political class.

We could very likely strengthen the link between a politically engaged home background and grown-up children's political participation by tightening our criteria for classifying families as politically engaged. We did not ask whether the respondents' parents were political party members or held political jobs. Had we done so, links with their children's political activism and non-activism might well have emerged as even stronger. However, this would have required a much larger sample to yield adequate numbers of activists from politically engaged families in 2011. Between their parents and our respondents coming of age, there had been a revolution in Tunisia's political system—from autocracy to democracy. Despite this immense change, there was still a powerful tendency for political engagement to be inherited, transmitted inter-generationally through families.

Respondents in our survey were asked to rate three political systems: autocracy (a system led by a strong group that depends neither on parliament nor elections), technocracy (where experts and not a government decide on what is best for the country), and democracy (a regime in which representatives depend on and are accountable to the citizens). Democracy was by far the most popular choice among both activists and non-activists in 2010–2011, though majorities of both also rated technocracy as very good or acceptable (see Table 3). Democracy was clearly their preferred political system. On this, protestors in 2010–2011 spoke for their age group.

<p align="center">**Table 3.** Views on different political systems, 20–29 year olds.</p>

	Participated in 2011	Non-Participant in 2011
Autocracy	%	%
Very good	10	6
Acceptable	6	4
Bad	21	16
Very bad	63	74
Technocracy		
Very good	30	42
Acceptable	24	32
Bad	24	13
Very bad	21	13
Democracy		
Very good	72	79
Acceptable	16	16
Bad	9	4
Very bad	3	2

Respondents were asked a series of questions measuring their attitudes toward sex equality, government measures to promote sex equality, their religiosity, their support for traditional and security values, self-expression values, and about their levels of trust in 23 groups and institutions. The mean scores on these scales are given in Table 4. Here, the sample is again divided between 2011 activists and non-activists and according to whether or not they were from politically engaged families. There were only 19 respondents from non-engaged families who had been activists in 2011, so findings from this group are best disregarded. Comparisons between those from politically engaged and other families should be confined to the young people who were not activists in 2011. Comparisons between the activists and others should be confined to those from politically engaged families.

<p align="center">**Table 4.** Political orientations: mean scores, 20–29 year olds.</p>

	Political Family, Participated in 2011	Political Family, Did Not Participate in 2011	Non-Political Family, Participated in 2011	Non-Political Family, Did Not Participate in 2011
Sex equality	2.48	2.27	2.33	2.21
Government promoting sex equality	1.66	1.65	1.66	1.55
Religiosity	2.00	2.11	2.50	2.19
Traditional and security values	2.09	2.28	2.48	2.41
Self-expression values	2.43	2.50	2.76	2.61
Trust	3.56	3.33	4.09	3.87
N =	71	858	19	419

There were 13 statements on sex equality. Examples are: 'The same upbringing should be given to boys and girls', and 'Men and women should have the same job opportunities and receive the same salaries'. Respondents answered by totally agreeing, agreeing, disagreeing, or totally disagreeing. The mean scores in Table 4 are calculated from these answers. The mid-point in the scale is 2.5. Lower scores indicate support for sex equality. The results show slightly more support than opposition to sex equality in all the groups in Table 4. All the means are beneath the mid-point on the scale. Unsurprisingly, females tended to be stronger supporters of sex equality than males. The young activists of 2011 and those from politically engaged families proved somewhat less enthusiastic about sex equality than others in their age group.

The sample was also generally in favour of government promotion of sex equality. They were asked to agree absolutely, to some extent, or not at all with government efforts in the labour market, education, political participation, and family matters. Low scores in Table 4 indicate support for government efforts. All the groups had means of 1.66 or 1.65 (less than the mid-point of 2), except those from politically non-engaged families who were not activists in 2011, who had a mean of 1.55. They were the strongest supporters of government initiatives to promote sex equality.

The sample was asked how important they regarded religion in 15 life domains including dress, appearance, food, place of work, and marriage. Answers were on a five-point scale with a range from 'very important' to 'not important at all'. Low scores in Table 4 indicate high levels of religiosity. Generally, young people were highly religious, and the most religious were from politically engaged families and especially those who were activists in 2011.

Traditional and security values were measured in our survey with three questions that asked respondents about the extent to which statements resembled themselves on a six-point scale with a range from 'greatly resembles me' to 'does not resemble me'. The traditional and security statements were about wanting to be rich; to live in a safe and secure environment and to feel secure; and being a person to whom tradition is important and who follows rules established by religion and society. A mean score was calculated for each respondent. There were four questions measuring self-expression values: being a person who considers it important to think of new ideas; a person who wants to be creative, to have a good time and enjoy themselves; a person who wants to have adventures, take risks and lead an exciting life; and being a person who pays attention to the environment and takes care of nature. As with the traditional/security scale, low scores indicate agreement. Activists in 2010–2011 scored relatively high on traditional/security values and on self-expression values. Those from politically engaged families also scored relatively high on traditional/security values and on self-expression values. Among our young Tunisians, support for traditional/security and self-expression values did not rise and fall conversely. Those scoring relatively high on one set of measurements also tended to score relatively high on the other. According to our evidence, young Tunisians want change. They want to modernise Tunisia, but in a way that does not map neatly onto Western-formulated versions of progress.

Respondents were asked about the extent to which they trusted 22 different groups and institutions on a 10-point scale on which the lowest score indicated no trust while the top score indicated absolute trust. Table 4 gives the mean trust scores, amalgamating all 23 ratings, for each of the four groups that are distinguished. We can see that participants in the events of 2011 were more trusting than non-participants, and those from politically engaged families were more trusting than others. Clearly, the Tunisian revolution was not instigated by young activists who were especially lacking in trust, though all the groups' mean scores are well beneath the mid-point.

4. Young People's Verdicts on Tunisia's Post-2011 Democracy

How did the young Tunisians' assess their country's post-2011 politics? Overall, our respondents clearly felt that there had been some improvements. However, it was equally clear that most felt that more improvement was needed. Table 5 gives the percentages of trust ratings of six or more awarded by the entire sample of 15–29 year olds to each of the groups and institutions about which they were questioned. The only group with a percentage above the mid-point of five is 'the people in general'. Ominously for its democracy, the three lowest scores are awarded to politicians, political parties, and elected officials. At the time of our survey in 2015–2016, Tunisia was a low-trust society, and its politicians, political parties, and parliament attracted less trust than anyone else, except employers.

Respondents were asked about their views on Tunisia's government before and since 2011 (see Table 6). Answers were expressed on a five-point scale with a range from 'very bad' to 'excellent'. The mid-point on this scale is 3, and all the pre-2011 mean scores are beneath this mid-point, meaning that more respondents said 'bad' or 'very bad' than 'good' or excellent'. The 'now' scores are consistently higher, except that the economy and the prevention of crime and maintenance of order were rated as worse that pre-2011. On all the other measurements, the situation was rated as better. The young people believed that citizens were more able to feel free to say what they thought, that everyone was able to join a political organisation or movement of their choice, that ordinary citizens were able to influence the government, that corruption was under control, and that judges and tribunals were free from government interference. However, politicians, political parties, and elected officials were still not trusted.

Table 5. Trust scores: percentages scoring 6 or more.

The People in General	64
National media	49
European Union	44
Legal system	41
Elections	40
Education system	40
Foreign media	37
United Nations	35
Religious leaders	34
Administration in general	31
USA	29
Trade associations and unions	27
Government	26
Local administration	26
Arab League	25
Arab Maghreb Union	25
Parliament	21
Employers	18
Elected officials	18
Political parties	16
Politicians	16

Table 6. Views on system of government before and after 2011 (mean scores).

	Before 2011	After 2011
Everyone is free to say what they think.	1.22	3.58
Everyone can enter/join the political organisation/movement of their choice.	1.3	3.66
All ordinary citizens can influence the government.	1.17	2.12
Corruption in the political parties and the state is under control.	1.5	1.68
People can live without fear of being illegally arrested.	1.54	2.08
The prevention of crime and the maintenance of order are a priority.	2.71	1.85
The economy is in good shape and everyone can live decently.	2.74	1.44
Judges and tribunals are free from all government interference.	1.46	1.86

The lowest 'now' scores in Table 6 are for the state of the economy, corruption in political parties, and prevention of crime and the maintenance of order. The economy was regarded as in bad shape pre-2011, and respondents clearly felt that it had worsened since then. These perceptions reflect all official statistics and our findings on the sample's labour market experiences. Tables 7 and 8 divide males and females into three age groups, then give the percentages who occupied different positions inside and outside the workforce. We can see that the percentages in education declined with age from 64 percent to 5 percent among males and from 76 percent to 6 percent among females. By age 25–29, the largest group of males (34 percent) were unemployed, and another 13 percent described themselves as economically inactive. Just 23 percent in total were either employers, self-employed, or in formal (official with a contract) jobs. Among females, the largest group of 25–29 year olds was economically inactive (43 per cent), and another 27 percent described themselves as unemployed. This makes it unsurprising that that when asked to select from a list the most important problem facing Tunisia, the most common choice was 'jobs', which was followed by 'terrorism', then the 'economic situation', and then 'standards of living' (see Table 9).

Table 7. Socio-economic groups by age, males (in percentages).

	15–19%	20–24%	25–29%
Socio-economic groups			
Education	63.7	25.3	4.8
Employer	0.0	1.5	3.0
Self-employed	1.2	4.5	7
Formal job	2.1	4.8	13
Informal job	7.8	15.2	19.4
Apprentice	3.3	3.3	3.6
Family worker	1.2	4.8	2.7
Unemployed	9.6	25	33.6
Inactive	11.1	15.8	12.7

Table 8. Socio-economic groups by age, females (in percentages).

	15–19%	20–24%	25–29%
Socio-economic groups			
Education	75.7	21.0	6.2
Employer	0.0	0.3	1.1
Self-employed	0.0	0.9	1.1
Formal job	1.0	5.2	7.0
Informal job	2.3	9.1	11.3
Apprentice	0.0	2.7	3.0
Family worker	0.0	2.1	1.1
Unemployed	6.3	23.1	26.6
Inactive	14.7	35.6	42.7

Table 9. Percentages saying that the most important problem facing the country was.

Jobs	36.2
Terrorism	17.3
Economic situation	15.7
Standard of living	13.2
Education system	6.7
Morals in society	1.8
Increasing influence of religion on government	1.7
Health system	1.7
Democracy/human rights	1.5
Criminality and drugs	1.2
Housing	1.0
Corruption	0.4

However, our hunch is that Tunisia's politics, as well as the economy, are responsible for young people's disenchantment with the outcomes of the revolution in 2011. Since then, governments have been led first by Ennahdha, a moderate Islamic party that emerged in the late-1960s and existed mainly underground with leaders in exile until 2011, then by Nidaa Tounes, which is a reconstituted version of the party of ex-President Ben Ali that was dissolved in 2011. Only 10 percent of our respondents 'felt close' to either of these parties. Despite the revolution, young people were likely to feel disappointed that so many of the 'same old faces' were still in positions of political power. There were no new parties, led by new politicians, offering to implement new policies.

Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes have each been willing to participate in a government led by the other, but together they deny political power to substantial sections of Tunisia's population who were among, even if under-represented among, the protestors in 2011—mainly the working and lower classes, women, the entire population in the country's south, and radical Islamists. Turnout in elections has been low outside the North-East where Tunis is located and among Tunisians everywhere who are not university educated (see [33–37]). However, the excluded groups' problem is their parties' lack of voter appeal. The Front Populaire Unioniste, a Marxist pan-Arabic party, the main party of the left,

was the choice of only 8.9 percent of our respondents who 'felt close' to any party, just 1.3 percent of the total sample. Hizb-ut-Tahrir, an international movement that seeks to restore the caliphate, was the choice of just 1.8 percent of respondents who felt close to any party, a mere 0.3 percent of the sample. No one named Ansar al-Sharia, which is listed as a terrorist organisation by the Tunisia government and the United Nations.

Another contributor to young Tunisians' political disenchantment may be their own mixtures of attitudes toward their religion (Islam). We have seen that most considered themselves quite religious. When asked about the extent to which they identified with the groups in Table 10, Islamic came top, just ahead of Arab and Tunisian.

Table 10. Identification with different groups (mean scores: 1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly disagree) 'I am ... '.

Islamic	1.26
Arab	1.33
Tunisian	1.44
Maghrebi	2.92
Belong to Mediterranean region	3.01
African	3.08
A citizen of the world	3.53
Amazigh	5.82

However, when respondents were asked to agree or disagree on a five-point scale with four statements about religion and politics (see Table 11), despite most regarding themselves as religious, and despite our measurements showing that political activists rated themselves as more religious than other young Tunisians, most of our respondents wanted politics and religion kept separate. They did not want religious leaders influencing government decisions or for people with strong religious beliefs to take on representative posts.

Table 11. Religion and politics (mean scores: 1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree).

Religion Should not Influence People's Political Decisions	1.64
It would be desirable for the country for more people with strong religious beliefs to take on representational posts or political responsibility	3.29
The religious leaders should have influence over the government's decisions	3.28
The practice of religion is a private affair that should be separated from socio-economic life	1.68

Young Tunisians, especially those who want change and who are politically active, are highly religious. They reject previous rulers who have been willing to discard or ignore their country's Islamic history and character. Consumer market research shows that young modern Moslems all over the world treat their faith and modernity as progressing hand-in-hand. They take their religion more seriously than 'traditionalists', and the internet is strengthening their engagement with the ummah (the global Islamic community). They see their religion as a prism through which to embrace modernity and vice-versa [38]. In Tunisia, they want to live in a country whose Islamic and Arabic identities have a high profile. Young people want to express their creativity, including their religious beliefs, and to develop new ideas, but all this is to be an expression of their freedom rather than enforced by government. Moreover, they regard economic security as equally important and rate creating more jobs as the country's top priority.

Young Tunisians are also worried that their country has no answer to terrorism. A minority want an Islamist state, and a minority of these are jihadists. Up to 7000 young Tunisians are estimated to have left to train with IS since 2011, more than from any other country outside Syria and Iraq. It seems a paradox that the most democratic Arab-Islamic country in North Africa and the Middle East has

been a major source of IS recruits. Tunisians train initially in Libya, then may move to Syria or Iraq, but some return home. In March 2015, an attack in Tunis's Bardo museum left 22 dead. Then, in June 2015, there were 38 fatalities during an attack on a beach resort near Sousse. Tunisians now live in a country where government buildings and foreign embassies are guarded by the army and razor wire.

5. Conclusions

Our research has made known much that was formerly unknown about the events of 2011 in Tunisia. We have found that less than seven percent of Tunisians who were aged 15–24 at the time were directly involved in these events. They tended to be males and proved to be on relatively advantaged life trajectories. Subsequently, they have not pioneered alternative ways of practicing democracy but have become over-represented in all normal forms of political activity, especially joining political parties, especially if they were not reared in politically engaged families. They have thereby joined the pools from which recruitment into their country's political class is possible.

We have found that young Tunisians are generally dissatisfied with the outcomes of the events of 2011 despite living in the sole Arab Spring country where those events led to a still functioning multi-party democracy. True, in 2015–2016, young people felt more able to express political views freely and to join a political party of their choice. Tunisia had over 100 registered legal political parties that were contesting elections. However, they still felt that corruption among politicians remained a serious problem. They had little trust in any politicians or political parties. They also felt less secure than formerly, perceiving the new threat of terrorism and greater risk of becoming a victim of crime. Perhaps above all else, they were concerned with the state of Tunisia's economy and the poor labour markets that young people were entering, to which no politicians or parties seemed to offer credible solutions.

It is still not clear, even in Tunisia, whether the events of 2011 were just events, after which the former normality began to be restored, or part of a longer-term change process. Asselburg and Wimmen (2016) [39] argue that the events of 2011 are best conceived as contested and open-ended attempts at transformation. Democracy has not swept across the entire region, yet as they note, there has been change everywhere. There are more active political parties and movements. As Cavatorta (2015) [40] has observed, all the regimes must now contend with pluralism. There may be no entirely new regimes containing no old faces, but there has been change everywhere [41]. Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds (2015) [42] have observed that although all the attempted revolutions in Europe in 1848 failed to establish democracies at that time, they added impetus to pressure for change that eventually led to the spread of democracy throughout the continent. Tunisia may be leading its region along a modernising path, and if so, the young people in our survey would clearly prefer this to be toward a distinctly Arabic and Islamic rather than a Western modernity.

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A Global Generation? Youth Studies in a Postcolonial World

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Abstract: Today's young people navigate a world that becomes simultaneously more interconnected and less capable of silencing long-standing inequities. What analytical perspectives does a sociology of youth and generations require in such a context? This paper makes two suggestions: to conceptualize generations as global rather than regionally bound (cf. Mannheim 1928) and to transgress the colonial bifurcation of academia between sociology for the so-called 'modern' world and area studies and anthropology for the so-called 'developing' world. Drawing from a large body of literature on African youth that has hitherto remained unheeded in youth studies, as well as from postcolonial theory and ethnographic fieldwork in Guinea and Uganda, I argue that academic representations of African youth constitute a particularly insightful repertoire for investigating the methodological challenges and potentials of a global sociological perspective on youth.

Keywords: youth; generation; sociology; epistemology; postcolonial studies; Guinea; Uganda; Africa; globalization; Mannheim; Karl

1. Introduction

Youth studies scholarship is currently entering an important debate on the fact that it has routinely studied Northern or Western youth while ignoring the majority of young people living in the so-called Global South [1–3]. Everatt [1] (p. 77), arguing that the concepts of youth studies "must mean something tangible to the teenager in Delhi or Nairobi or Bogota, not just to the academic sitting in London or Melbourne or Manhattan",[1] has urged the discipline to adopt a more inclusive approach. But how exactly are youth studies going to address youth in the Southern parts of the globe, methodologically and theoretically? Moreover, how come the discipline has ignored them in the first place? What academic literature exists to date about youth in the Global South and could it inform a more general sociological framework? This paper reflects on these questions to deepen the nascent debate in youth studies and connect it with both African Studies and postcolonial studies scholarship on youth. The goal is to carve out the challenges and potentials of a more globally oriented sociology of youth that is both aware of the enormous diversity of what youth and generations may mean today across the globe, and reflexive of how knowledge is produced about them.

In the first section of this essay, I critically consider the concept of 'generations'. In spite of popular discourses on today's 'global' or 'globalized' generation, the concept still formally relies on Mannheim's [4] idea that generations exist within fairly homogeneous historical and social units, share a common cultural heritage and engage in transforming it. The problem here is not only that such an idea is inapplicable to postcolonial nation states in the Global South, whose colonial borders have often forced heterogeneous populations to cohabitate and whose creation by an external colonial power contradicts *per se* the idea of self-contained socio-historical units.

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[1] Everatt specifically refers to the concept of belonging [1].

The ultimate conceptual trouble is that the Global South is not an exception in that regard, but rather an indicator of broader global trends [5]. Indeed, Northern societies, too, experience increasing social heterogeneity, and today's transnational dynamics are powerful enough in almost any country to empirically contradict the idea of self-contained socio-historical units. I therefore argue against the regionally based concept of generations and for a stronger focus on Mannheim's epistemological concerns in "The Problem of Generations" (1970 (1928)) [4].

Relatedly, this paper also addresses the institutional causes for youth studies' predilection for the Global North, and the difficulties within contemporary academia to develop an unbiased global outlook. A key concern here is the bifurcation of the social sciences. While sociology and other core disciplines, as well as newer fields such as youth studies, study the so-called modern world, constructing and transforming the leading categories and paradigms of social research, anthropology and area studies specialize in the so-called developing world, the world's "residual" social realities and "deviant" cases [6] (p. 613). This colonial heritage has entertained the idea that the world would eventually become more and more like the West, or else would be of little importance. Today's conjuncture contradicts this myth on several levels. Europe has ceased to be "the center of gravity of the world" [7] (p. 1) and given way to a more plural and precarious global present where multiple and rival futures are pursued [8]. In this postcolonial moment, where the long-silenced history of colonial violence [9–11] returns to haunt the Global North [12] (p. 957), the bifurcation of the social sciences becomes an obstacle to understanding global interdependence, for it has produced different academic communities specialized in different parts of the globe that hardly talk to one another.

As I will demonstrate in the second section of this paper, youth research is a case in point. African Studies research on youth, for instance, arguably represents one of the most productive and innovative fields in area studies, but remains virtually unheeded in youth studies. In turn, Africanists never cared much about insights from youth studies either, because the latter were deemed not to match the specificities of African contexts. More surprisingly, Africanists also paid little attention to non-Africanist research on African youth, particularly by economists and demographers studying population growth and the associated risks of political conflict under the label of 'youth bulge theory', which gained significant prominence in policy circles [13]. I provide a summary overview on these different strands of research to contribute to a more interdisciplinary debate on knowledge production about youth and generations across the globe.

In the final part of this paper, I reflect on fieldwork experiences in my doctoral research [14] that demonstrate the varying suitability of the concept 'youth' in two different contexts. Comparing the role of young men in urban protests in Guinea and Uganda, similar events locally meant very different things because youth and generational change were conceived differently in their respective contexts. I describe these methodological challenges to exemplify the sociological diversity that a globally oriented approach to youth inevitably has to deal with.

2. Conundrums of a Global Generation

Youth studies is a multidisciplinary field and 'knows' youth through a variety of approaches [15, 16]. The diversity of these approaches indicates unmistakably the complex nature of what is at stake, including the question of how and whether to generalize about youth. The classic way of generalization—the idea of youth as a universal biological period in human biographies and a transition from childhood to adulthood—has recently come under severe criticism [1,17–19]. Turning from a bio-psychological to a sociological perspective in turn has made some scholars reconsider 'generation' as a conceptual tool [4,20,21]. Drawing notably on Mannheim's essay "The Problem of Generations" (1971 (1928)) [4], their goal is "to develop an understanding of how each generation is located within its social, political and economic milieu" and fosters its own "meaning of age" [22] (p. 497).

Generational perspectives on youth face a critical dilemma, however. For while today's generation of youth is routinely discussed as a 'global' generation [23–28], Mannheim [4] (p. 394) notoriously claimed that generations "must be born within the same historical and cultural region." For a generation

to become an actuality, he argued, a given age cohort must participate in the "common destiny of [the same] historical and social unit" [4] (p. 394). Owing to classic sociology's embrace of national society as the bedrock of sociological reasoning, Mannheim focused on each generation's "fresh contact" not with the world at large but with their common region's cultural "heritage", which he argued would lead to a "reevaluation of our [cultural] inventory" and facilitate a selection of what needed to be forgotten and what was yet to be acquired, thereby enabling cultural change [4] (p. 384). Yet, almost a century after Mannheim wrote his essay, the idea of a bounded historical and cultural unit seems increasingly problematic [7,29]. The young generation in particular faces a "heritage" that is essentially transnational—whether it regards technological progress or environmental degradation. Young people come into contact anew not only with their own region's history, but with entangled histories whose origins are scattered across the globe. To different degrees and through different means, they harness and hybridize a diversity of cultural inventories to navigate a world that simultaneously becomes more interconnected and less capable of silencing long-standing inequities.

In this essay, I make the case for detaching the generation concept from the idea of bounded historical and cultural regions. This comes with a significant tradeoff. On the one hand, the concept immediately loses its clear-cut character, its quality of indicating a rather precise category of people in a given society at a given point in history. On the other hand, however, it gains an acute sensitivity to the fact that new generations participate in "common destinies" whose very aim is often to redefine previous notions of historical and social units (take environmental movements, for instance, with their decidedly global outlook, or certain strands of nationalism in Europe which now embrace a continental European identity in the wake of the moral panic surrounding immigration from non-European countries). Researchers may differ in their assessment as to whether such a tradeoff is worthwhile. A key argument in favor of it, however, is that Mannheim himself was not overly concerned with pinpointing generations. For instance, he sidestepped the thorny question of how a specific generation could be situated in history [30,31]. Instead, Mannheim was much more interested in what generational change meant from a sociology of knowledge standpoint [21] (p. 482). His concern was how new members of a society shed new perspectives on things, shaped by growing up in a specific historical period with potentially formative historical events. The contemporary debate on the significance of the Internet and whether 'digital natives' "think differently" than their parent generation (Prensky 2001a [32]; see also [33–37]) is indicative in this regard. Epistemologically, Mannheim likened generation to class [4] (p. 23ff.): both, he argued, determine an individual's position within a social structure, and that position in turn informs the individual's world views irrespective of his or her choice or consciousness of it (see also Bourdieu [38,39]). Accordingly, Mannheim was intrigued by the epistemological tension between generations, by the risk or inevitability of misunderstanding each other across generations [4] (p. 392).

How today's youth deal with an increasingly interconnected world is obviously an important aspect of generational change. Previous generations are likely to interpret their surroundings in different ways than today's young generation whose members experienced in their most formative years the rise of the Internet, the 2008 global financial crisis, as well as the current controversies about transcontinental migration. The new generations' reactions to such experiences of global interconnectedness are not necessarily an embrace of globalization. Their increasing exposure to the world at large may also entail a retreat into ethnic units, a sort of nationalist backlash, as we can witness in Europe and the United States today. But that changes little with regard to the contention that the underlying social reality to which generations respond today is transnational, and that therefore, the idea of social and historical units as a context for the study of generations is heuristically misleading. Relatedly, we must be wary of the notion of globalization as homogenization [40], the idea that increased intercultural contact will imply some sort of "cultural levelling" (p. 543). However much transnational dynamics may intertwine people and systems of meaning, and however much today's cultural resources are virtually shared across the globe, one must not forget that these resources are interpreted and "put to use in radically different ways" [41] (p. 543). A globally oriented

approach to youth and generations thus needs to be extremely nuanced in reconciling its highlighting of transnational dynamics with the fact that they are experienced locally in very different ways.

Unfortunately, contemporary youth studies are poorly equipped to develop such a nuanced perspective on a global scale. All talk about today's 'global youth' notwithstanding [23–26,28,42,43], data on young people are still mostly collected and evaluated in the Global North, and youth studies concepts, theories, and approaches, while often treated as universally valid, are in fact locally specific, i.e., rooted in European, North American, and Australian historical experiences and conceptualizations of youth [2,3,15]. Though these issues are only starting to emerge within youth studies [1–3,15], they are likely to gain prominence in the future. For it is only too ironic, as Everatt [1] observes, that youth studies, a field so acutely aware of social exclusion, tends to focus on social exclusion only within the confines of their respective Northern or Western societies. Exclusion on a global scale is ignored at best, Everatt argues; at worst, it is reified by effectively denying relevance to the Global South and reducing its youth to "objects of distant fascination, fear, or voyeuristic peeking" [1] (p. 64).

While Everatt's critique is appropriate, his statement is not entirely true. As the following section demonstrates, there has been substantial research on African youth [28,42,44–58] that has gone way beyond voyeuristic peeking and simply been ignored by youth studies scholarship. The problem here is not a lack of academic attention, but the academic treatment of Euro-American and African youth as two unrelated objects of research. A legacy from colonial times, it evidences the troubling academic bifurcation between sociology for the 'modern' world versus anthropology and area studies for the 'developing' world. Paradoxically, this academic bifurcation continues to feed off and to feed into the idea of bounded and internally homogenous social spaces, be they Africa [59], the Orient [60], or Latin America [61], while routinely glossing over histories of transcontinental migration, colonialism, racism and economic exploitation that are constitutive of today's nation-states, whether in the Global North, the Global South, or somewhere in between that dichotomy [9–11]. Today, as the legacies and continuations of that violent transcontinental history flare up, not least in Europe [62–64] and the United States [65,66], such bifurcation is no longer tenable, least of all in research on today's generation of youth who face an essentially global and disturbingly violent "heritage" that requires a globally oriented, less biased research perspective.

How to arrive at such a perspective within youth studies is contested. Everatt, tracing a "new direction" for youth research, demands a more inclusive approach to youth beyond the Western, industrialized regions of the world [1] (p. 77). Youth studies and its concepts, he argues, "must mean something tangible to the teenager in Delhi or Nairobi or Bogota" and should be animated by "the basic tenet of global justice" [1] (p. 77). They should highlight the local dynamics of how young people are excluded as an effect of global dynamics of exclusion driven by dominant Western forces and interests [1] (p. 77). Unfortunately, Everatt fails to specify the directionality of his inclusive approach. He ignores the very likely scenario that including Southern youth into youth studies risks transforming them into a kind of "ethnographic minutiae" from which youth studies might further seek to justify the purportedly transcendent nature of its theories [5] (p. 1) rather than causing the discipline to reflect upon its Northern biases. The same has happened in research on globalization, where conceptualizations of 'global society' conspicuously resembled earlier versions of national, metropolitan societies situated in the Global North [67], or in research on urbanity, where studies of non-Western cities long focused on chaos and political failure [68] rather than exposing the blind spots of mainstream understandings of urbanity [69].

Cooper et al. [2] in turn argue for a "disparate theorizing" about Southern youth rather than an inclusive approach. Instead of expanding youth studies towards the Global South, their idea is to trace a disparate "Southern youth studies project" [2] (p. 17) that takes into account the systemic differences between the lives of Southern youth and those of their Northern counterparts. The authors illustrate these differences through a variety of descriptive statistics on demographics, youth employment, education, poverty, crime, and violence among youth, as well as through the Human Development Index (HDI). Since youth evidently face harsher socio-economic realities in the Global South than in

the Northern parts of the world, Cooper et al. argue that these "pioneers in precarious places" need to be analyzed with different, or at least significantly adjusted, theoretical tools [2].

In this paper, I advocate a third approach, which is to engage with academic representations of African youth as a means of assessing the methodological challenges and potentials of youth scholarship beyond the Global North. Such an approach synthesizes the suggestions made by Cooper et al. [2] and by Everatt [1]: it reflects on existing "disparate" scholarship on Southern youth to then critically discern how to "include" them in a global debate. My conclusion, however, differs considerably from those of my colleagues. Though I agree with Cooper's [3] call for institutional changes and the "democratization" of youth studies, I am skeptical with regards to the merits of disparate theorizing. While it has produced an impressive body of literature within the confines of African studies, that literature has largely been ignored outside of Africanist circles and therefore lacked a critical impact on its broader academic environment. Furthermore, such scholarship has implicitly accepted the idea of a particular, typically 'African' youth, as if things were largely the same 'in Africa' and significantly different from the rest of the world. The same problematic effect, I believe, would haunt the academic separation between research on Northern and Southern youth. Concerning Everatt's [1] call for a more inclusive approach, I reiterate that we first need to understand what caused youth studies to ignore youth in the Global South in the first place to then discuss more seriously the methodological and theoretical modalities of a more inclusive perspective. This would obviously include studying the literature that has already been written about youth in the Global South and see how it can be improved.

That is the task of the following section. It sketches out two different strands of scholarship on African youth. The first is development and security research by economists and demographers. Relying on a quantitative approach, such research mainly measures the potential effects of Africa's massive youth population—the so-called "youth bulge"—on the risk of conflict [70–75]. In the second part, I outline qualitative scholarship on African youth in African Studies and anthropology, which also informs my own research on young people in Guinea [57,76–78]. Here, youth has become a new conceptual lens through which new perspectives on contemporary Africa have emerged, especially on politics and popular culture. Scholarship has also entered intriguing conceptual debates about the ambiguity of youth as "a social position which is internally and externally shaped and constructed" [79] (p. 11).

Both strands of research, I argue, are important to consider, though for different reasons. The youth bulge debate shows that the framing of an object of research is at least as important as the object itself, and that such framing oftentimes bespeaks prevailing concerns of the Global North. Youth bulge theory, for instance, draws on particular American fears surrounding race and crime, and constitutes a global upscaling of a previous approach that focused on the United States. Africanist qualitative scholarship in turn should be considered on a variety of levels. First, it has developed valuable insights from ethnographic research and conceptual debates that could enhance a more general debate on youth [80]. Secondly, it displays an empirical and conceptual diversity of what youth can mean—in Africa and therefore in the world—which a globally oriented research agenda inevitably has to come to terms with [81]. Finally, and on a more critical note, Africanist youth research may serve as a case to remain doubtful about the neutrality and the intrinsic heuristic value of the youth concept. It is hardly reflected in the field, but African youth research has insufficiently considered the limits of its conceptualization of youth, and largely ignored the places where youth is understood differently from what the academic literature suggests. As I have argued elsewhere [54], comparative research can shed light on such blind spots. In the third and final part of the following section, I will thus share some of my difficulties doing comparative fieldwork in Guinea and Uganda, where 'youth' meant two considerably different things.

3. African Youth: A Shifting Concept

African youth research is voluminous [28,42,44–58] and has largely become self-referential [49,54]. The reasons for its popularity and for the heightened interest in African youth are obvious: the continent's overall population has a median age of below twenty, compared to the world's average of over thirty. Whereas youth populations will shrink across the globe, Africa's youth will continue to grow. The UN predicts that more than half of the world's population growth will be in Africa by 2050 and that its youth will increase from roughly 212 million today to about 391 million by 2050. But Africa comprises diverse trajectories and any attempt of generalizing about 'African youth' is basically nonsensical [81]: consider Nigeria being one of the world's fastest-growing telecommunications markets versus the fact that the 19 lowest-ranked countries on the Human Development Index are currently African. Accordingly, there is continuous disagreement over whether Africa's "youth bulge" constitutes a ticking time bomb [70–75] or whether the "youth dividend" constitutes "a window of opportunity" [82] (p. 1). Consensus is confined to the fact that youth is a decisive category, and various disciplines have harnessed it to make sense of the present and future dynamics on the continent.

3.1. Youth Bulge Theory: Fearing Africa's Young Men

Politically speaking, the most important framing of African youth revolves around the notion of the "youth bulge" [70–75]. Developed in 1985 by Gary Fuller when he was a visiting scholar at the CIA [13], and later advanced by demographers, economists, and military analysts, it has become a prominent tool for predicting security threats on the basis of population growth. Based on statistics and econometric models, the overall argument is that a high youth population elevates the risk of violent conflicts. Urdal [73] (p. 96) goes as far as to specify that for "each percentage-point increase of youth in the adult population, the risk of conflict increases by more than 4 percent." Given such catchy formulas, youth bulge theory has become a highly influential approach in policy circles, notably with regard to the Middle East and Africa.

Interestingly, the youth bulge approach gained prominence alongside with the "super-predator" theory in the United States. The super-predator theory was advanced, amongst others, by former Princeton professor John DiIulio, who provided scientific backing to a moral panic surrounding race and youth violence in the United States in the 1990s. DiIulio proclaimed the advent of "a new generation of street criminals [. . .] the youngest, biggest and baddest generation any society has ever known" [65]. Like the proponents of the youth bulge theory, he "equated a rise in the proportion of young men in a given population with a rise in the numbers of criminal young men" [13] (p. 3), which, DiIulio presumed, are "growing up essentially fatherless, Godless, and jobless", show no remorse whatsoever, and which DiIulio suspected to emerge especially from "black inner-city neighborhoods" [83]. The super-predator theory informed the so-called War on Drugs and the rise of the prison-industrial complex, but later proved entirely false. Crime rates had already started to drop in the United States when DiIulio warned of an imminent criminological disaster [84].

Compared to the super-predator theory, youth bulge theory is concerned with a more global kind of political instability. An important source of inspiration in this regard, at times explicitly cited in academic writings among youth bulge theorists [81], is Robert D. Kaplan's (1994) famous essay "The Coming Anarchy" [85]. In apocalyptic prose, Kaplan argued that overpopulation and environmental disasters, paired with organized crime, social disintegration, state decay, porous borders, and the like, would overwhelm African states and eventually the world. He situates the beginnings of this global meltdown in West Africa, "a dying region" whose "hordes" of young men are like "loose molecules in a very unstable social fluid, a fluid that was clearly on the verge of igniting." Kaplan also made a direct connection between West Africa and the United States:

> The spectacle of several West African nations collapsing at once could reinforce the worst racial stereotypes here at home. That is another reason why Africa matters. We must not kid ourselves: the sensitivity factor is higher than ever. The Washington, D.C., public school

system is already experimenting with an Afrocentric curriculum. Summits between African leaders and prominent African-Americans are becoming frequent, as are Pollyanna-ish prognostications about multiparty elections in Africa that do not factor in crime, surging birth rates, and resource depletion. [. . .] Africa may be marginal in terms of conventional late-twentieth-century conceptions of strategy, but in an age of cultural and racial clash, when national defense is increasingly local, Africa's distress will exert a destabilizing influence on the United States.

Turning Huntington's (1993)[2] prognosis of a "Clash of Civilizations" into a warning of civilizational collapse both abroad and at home, Kaplan's essay attracted a broad and politically influential readership. According to anthropologist Paul Richards, who at the time did fieldwork in Sierra Leone, "The Coming Anarchy" was "widely circulated to American diplomatic posts and apparently had been read by senior people in the Clinton Administration" [88] (p. 57). Richards later responded to Kaplan in his book "Fighting for the Rain Forest" [89], now a classic in African studies. The book highlights the specific causes and local dynamics of political conflict in Sierra Leone to demonstrate that it was "a mistake to try and generalize [it] into something generic" [88] (p. 57).

Various other scholars have attacked Kaplan's view of African youth as indicating "The Coming Anarchy" ([90] (p. 183); [91] (p. 278); [70] (p. 15)). Youth bulge theory, the quantitative offspring of Kaplan's apocalyptic journalism, has however been strangely ignored by Africanist scholarship, although it is widely used by policy makers and would deserve a serious debate on a variety of issues [75]. For instance, does youth bulge theory not wrongly rely on aggregate national data that glosses over critical variations within countries, within cities, and across different youth categories, all of which might indicate something important about the relation between youth and conflict [82]? What does an entirely de-contextualized theory do in the sense of knowledge production and what is it politically useful for? Raising these questions could have furthered an important debate on quantification as "a technology of distance" [92] (p. ix) as well as its role in international development politics [93–96], for while experts have substantially questioned insights drawn from development statistics in Africa [93,94], the latter are still cited and believed to inform far-reaching policy recommendations on the continent.[3] Africanist research, however, has not been overly concerned with youth bulge theory and the quantification of youth-related issues, perhaps because it had already established its own agenda: almost exclusively qualitative, based on ethnographic fieldwork and intimate knowledge, it would see youth "as a window to understanding broader socio-political and economic transformations in Africa" [97] (p. 1).

3.2. Ambivalent Youth: Makers and Breakers

One major publication for qualitative youth scholarship in Africa is Honwana and de Boeck's edited volume "Makers and breakers: children & youth in postcolonial Africa" [50]. Like other important works, it stresses ambivalence as one of the new hallmarks of Africanist youth research.[4] In their introduction, Honwana and de Boeck caution: "children and youth are extremely

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2 Huntington's 1993 article in Foreign Affairs "The Clash of Civilizations?" [86] was the precursor to his later book, which had the same title but missed the question mark at the end [87].

3 The mismatch between the limited validity of development statistics and their frequent use in development politics and in the mass media is blatant. By 2011, for instance, only "seventeen of the forty-seven [sub-Saharan African] countries had prepared estimates" of their GDP for any of the two previous years [93]—an interesting detail when thinking about the 'Africa Rising' narrative. Most surprising, however, is that the capacity of national statistical offices, often staffed by only a few individuals who lack both the equipment and staff to accomplish foundational statistical tasks, often deteriorated as a direct result of the IMF's and World Bank's structural adjustment programs, which demanded African governments to cut their public spending [93]. Whether such consequences were unintended or not, they suggest that the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are in fact operative without credible empirical data, and this in turn evokes a number of important political and epistemological questions.

4 E.g., Abbink and van Kessel's "Vanguard or Vandals" (2005); "Promise or Peril" by Muhula (2007); or "Hooligans and Heroes" (Perullo 2005). Richter and Panday [98] (p. 292) have described youth as Janus-faced actors.

difficult to pin down analytically [since] they often occupy more than one position at once" [97] (p. 3). Such caveats resonated on both theoretical and empirical levels. Theoretically, they opposed the Afropessimist scholarship of the 1980s and 1990s, which had either ignored youth or one-sidedly cast them as a "lost generation" [99], "easily manipulated" by political elites and therefore unable to bring about social change [100] (for an exception, see Mbembe 1985 [76]). On an empirical level, and perhaps more importantly, the caution was due to the particular diversity of what youth and generational relations may mean in Africa, even within single countries. "Who may be considered to be youth," Durham demonstrates in Botswana, "is highly contested and rapidly changing" [101] (p. 590). On a continental scale, age categories and their respective social roles differ considerably between societies in West Africa and the Bantu linguistic groups in Eastern and Southern Africa, for example [102]. This, however, does not imply that specific age systems overlap easily with ethnic or linguistic groups. In North East Africa, for instance, they frequently transcend ethnic boundaries [103] and structure political conflict not only within, but also across societies [104]. On a micro-level, moreover, youth denotes a relational status vis-à-vis elders rather than age, and thus can be applied to a broad range of individuals, including to people in their early fifties. Youth thus constitutes a "social shifter" essentially inscribed into intergenerational relations [101], and constitutes means of strategically positioning the self and others in negotiations over authority and responsibility. As such, it is a category under constant reconfiguration, gaining new meanings under new circumstances and when intersecting with other social categories, be it class, gender, education levels, or urban or rural settings. As Mbembe [76] (p. 6) clarifies, youth constitutes a heterogeneous and fragmented social universe rather than a clear-cut generational unit.

It is a curious twist that, as much as authors highlight that "we know remarkably little about [children and youth], in Africa as elsewhere" [97] (p. 2), youth has nonetheless become a significant entry point for knowledge production in African studies. Key to this was a fresh focus on young people's agency and creativity, which, in the face of most adverse conditions, situated them "at the forefront" of emerging sociabilities where young people "create, re-invent, and domesticate global trends into local forms" [97] (p. 1–2). Youth thereby enabled a new, more dynamic perspective on Africa. Highlighting their agency in "interaction with structural elements" of postcolonial societies [105] (p. 9) made these structural elements legible not as fixed determinants of action, but as dynamic social fields [106,107] that were constantly changing, appropriated, and re-interpreted by (young) people. The structural elements under scrutiny included unregulated urbanization [108–110], patronage networks [45,76,99], overburdened education systems and informal labor markets [51,58], as well as political conflict and civil war [76–78,111–116]. Research evidently featured an early preference for spectacular topics, often focusing on young males in some sort of conflict. While this has rightfully been criticized as potentially "enshrouding the continent in a mystique of otherness and exoticism" [117] (p. 315), the goal of such research was usually quite the opposite: to ground analyses of political violence in ethnographies of young people's quotidian experience. Contrary to the generalizing arguments about endemic corruption and African "neo-patrimonialism" as the hotbed of violent conflicts [100,118–121], ethnographers of youth in violent settings attempted to show that these were in fact normal young people responding to exceptional circumstances [53,89,115].

If youth has invigorated a new curiosity in African societies beyond previous conceptualizations, it also suffered from a lack of "conceptual clarity" [122] (p. 5). Given that youth was defined as ambiguous from the start [44,50], it could accommodate multiple meanings, and thus lent itself as a versatile tool to researchers who could always fall back on the notion of youth representing both vanguard and vandals [105] (p. 22). The problem of that diffuse notion was that it remained unclear whether youth meant all young people or only those who were specifically termed youth, i.e., whether

it was an empirical or a discursive phenomenon.[5] Consequently, there was little methodological discussion on the 'work' that the youth category did as a heuristic tool: its singling out of a particular part of the population, designating it as an excluded or marginalized "numeric majority" in African societies ([105] (p. 11); [76] (p. 7)). I stumbled upon this problem in my doctoral research, which set out to compare the social formations of young men that were involved in urban protests in Conakry and Kampala, the capital cities of Guinea and Uganda, respectively. It is illustrative of both the diversity of youth and the concept's implicit epistemological baggage.

3.3. Dealing with Diversity: Comparing Youth in Guinea and Uganda

My initial research on Conakry's youth was published under the telling title 'Ambivalent Rage' [71]. It embraced the above-mentioned 'makers and breakers' approach and held that Conakry's young men from the urban margins entered political protests both out of conviction and because politicians paid them to do so, arguing explicitly against the idea that one precluded the other. Yet, when I later tried to compare the case of Conakry with Kampala, where similar dynamics could be observed [124–126], and hoping to arrive at a more general understanding of urban youth and protests, I was stunned to find out just how differently youth could be conceptualized in the two countries.

In Guinea, youth had been a key social category since independence [127–129]. The country's first President, Sékou Touré, saw young people as the embodiment of the newly independent nation. "We can say," he wrote," that the nation itself is young. It is young because it has just entered a new life, because the structures forming it today didn't exist a few years ago ... [because] its new methods correspond to a deep transformation of the past" (cited by Straker [129] (p. 41)). When Touré died during a heart surgery in 1984, and was succeeded by General Lansana Conté, the country turned from socialist state control to liberal laissez-faire, and was flooded immediately with cultural goods from the previously vilified West. Youth, and particularly urban youth, witnessed an ever-increasing availability of foreign television channels, films, cassettes, and CDs, and discovered and identified with new cultural tastes. They felt a growing distance from their parents' generation. As one of the country's early rappers, Masthogui from the group Demonix, recalls: "if [...] you were young, in your head you told yourself 'yeah, man, those who have lived under Sékou [Touré], ya know, that's the old ones, that was a dictatorship, they didn't live well. Now, this is our time, we must live our era!" [71] (p. 99). In the new millennium, however, the Conté regime sunk deeper and deeper into corruption, inflation soared, and the revolutionary character that the state under Sékou Touré had vested in youth ultimately turned against the state in numerous demonstrations starting in 2006 against the regime of Lansana Conté. Although the unrest was accompanied by riots and looting, youth were widely seen as the vanguard in the Guinean people's fight for democracy and for the rule of law. Guinean journalists often interchangeably employed the terms 'youths' and 'demonstrators' [71] (p. 49) and, as in some of the Africanist literature, political conflict was frequently depicted as a youth vs. state antagonism:

> Nothing will be as before, under the current as well as under future regimes. By defying the state forces [...] the citizens, and particularly the youth, have overcome and destroyed a myth. The myth of fearing to challenge authorities, to exercise one's citizen's rights. The youth have understood that freedom is being gained by bravery [...], by sacrificing one's blood.[6]

The case of Conakry's protesting youth between 2006 and 2009 provided a surprising consistency between how youth defined themselves, how they were seen by their environment, and how

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5 Though in the more rigorous conceptual debates, authors defined youth mainly as a discursive phenomenon (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2005 [123]; Durham 2004; Honwana and de Boeck 2005a; van Dijk et al. 2011).
6 Sylla, Bengaly. 2007. "Enfin, les libertés retrouvées!" *Le Lynx* 774: 5, my translation from French. For more examples of journalistic youth narratives, see Philipps (2013a: 49).

youth were discussed in the Africanist literature, notably including implicit overtones from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) which had long associated youth with counterhegemonic and politicized subcultures [97,130,131].

In Uganda, 'youth' was different. It was much less prominent in public discourse, and associated with different concerns. The two main areas where it was evoked were party politics (Youth Members of Parliament, Youth Leagues) and entrepreneurship (the Young Achievers Awards, the Youth Venture Capital Fund). Youth was broadly conjured to highlight the continuation of the present, a foundation for continued national development. Though Ugandan history features instances where youth explicitly challenged older generations' outdated political leadership (e.g., in the interwar period between 1920 and 1940 [132,133]), the political use of notions such as 'youth' and 'generation' tends to be confined to strategic political competition between younger and older political rivals at the elite level, while mass protests and militant antagonism are usually framed in terms of ethnicity or political parties [134]. Uganda's recent history is important in that regard. President Museveni is the political offspring of a system of youth cadres, nurtured by former President Milton Obote within the UPC party, the Uganda People's Congress. When Museveni later turned against Obote in the notorious Bush War (1981–1986), his National Resistance Army (NRA) relied on a significant number of youth and children [135]. But the fact that these soldiers were youngsters remained conceptually irrelevant, for it was the 'army' that won the war, and it continues to be the 'army' and the 'military' that constitute key categories in the country's political-symbolic order, heroizing the soldier figure across popular culture and dominating the field of politics [136–138].

Curiously, the only region where the concept of 'marginal youth' seemed somewhat popular was Northern Uganda, where NGOs had used it to attract foreign aid after the civil war with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).[7] It was, in short, a category for Western publics and development institutions. The fact that I broadly subscribed to that conceptualization as a researcher in Kampala provoked irritation. Yusuf Serunkuma from Kampala's Makerere University argued in a conversation that, to him, 'youth' seemed like a discursive instrument that helped foreign observers to falsely dissect a blended Ugandan population into distinct generations.[8] From a Foucauldian point of view, he made me realize, youth was not a neutral, descriptive concept, but a conceptual tool to develop a topography of power. Youth connoted the margins in that topography, which, aligned with transnational (or Western) cultures, directed its social criticism at a national center. In short, the target was again the African state, only that this time, the critique was formulated through a concept that could claim to come from within African societies, and was therefore all the more legitimate.[9]

Sensing that 'youth' was not a helpful category for describing urban unrest in Kampala, I sought to abandon it. But it proved difficult. Searching for alternatives, I realized the extent to which youth had filtered and structured my interpretations of a variety of issues—not just of protests—and these issues turned nebulous without it, disintegrating into diverse concerns, histories, and coincidences that made no sense together, or rather, whose legibility seemed so arbitrarily dependent on any alternative lens I would employ. Eventually, the ensuing confusion inspired the formulation of a 'crystallization' approach to urban protests [126,139], an approach that reflexively looks at conceptualization as a co-constitutive process to urban unrest. But still after that change of perspective, I remained astonished that Uganda, a country that had recently experienced complex political conflicts [125,140,141], with one of the world's youngest populations and one of the world's longest-serving presidents, could evolve without open inter-generational conflict. That was in 2014.

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7   Conversation with Adam Branch, Kisementi, Kampala, 20 March 2014.
8   Conversation with Yusuf Serunkuma, Makerere, Kampala, 22 March 2014.
9   Durham (2000: 113) makes the point that youth tend to be problematized in terms of their "incomplete subjugation" and their need of "containment." Calling for a stronger/better African state that is capable of containing its risky youth is a handy political argument for all kinds of interventionism.

In July 2017, the 'Ghetto President' became a member of the Ugandan Parliament. Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, a.k.a. Bobi Wine, a popular rap, reggae, and Afrobeat musician and one of the few prominent politically critical voices in the Ugandan music industry [142], won the seat for Kampala's Kyadondo East constituency. Since then, youth and generation have made headlines. Right after the elections, President Museveni wrote a public statement on youth and politics, arguing that it was young leaders with a lack of ideological principles who had driven the country into crisis in the 1960s and that "biology is not enough" to advance Ugandan politics [143]. Bobi Wine responded in a public letter the next day [144]. Contradicting Museveni's insinuation "that the present young people lack in ideology", he instead suggested that generation and ideological change were linked:

> Our society has moved on and new issues are emerging. The generation of the 1960s and 1970s had to respond to challenges of that time and we are grateful to those of you who rose to the occasion and played a role. However, the challenges of our time require a new kind of ideology and approach. We are talking about a generation where technology is evolving at a terrific speed. A generation which must struggle with the effects of climate change! Today's generation has to deal with complex issues in science and technology. Young Africans must find out what economic models work best for their times and work hard to improve the living conditions of our people [144].

The ongoing political debate on youth and generation in Uganda underscores that how young people are represented is rapidly changing [101] and that it can differ tremendously from one context to the next. The category of 'African youth' is somewhat misleading in that regard, for the diversity of what youth means on the continent could suffice to drop the 'African' prefix. Unfortunately, there has not been a debate in African studies as to how and whether insights from African youth research can feed into a more globally oriented debate on youth. The focus on what youth meant in and for 'Africa' simply absorbed most of the intellectual attention. Scholarship thus never really escaped its embeddedness in area studies. It is still part of the troubling academic bifurcation between sociology for the 'modern' world versus anthropology for the 'developing' world. Thereby, the notion of 'African youth' too often had the banal effect of designating a social category on the entire African continent that was somehow distinct and crucial for Africa, a category that moreover proved particularly accessible to foreign researchers, and whose distinctness was quickly associated with marginalization (for a counter argument, see Philipps 2017 [57]).[10] In certain ways, Africanist youth scholarship thus may have been "too concerned with Africa" and not sufficiently concerned with youth [145], in the sense that its insights were too often generalized across the continent and kept isolated within it. Entering non-Africanist debates could help African youth scholars advance beyond the nagging and problem-oriented narratives surrounding Africa, and inversely enrich youth studies with intimate understandings of the complexities and diversities of what youth can be.

4. Conclusions

This paper alluded to a nascent debate within youth studies about how to develop a more globally oriented perspective on youth. It addressed two underlying concerns: the question of conceptual validity across different social and geographical contexts and the problem of institutional barriers between academic disciplines in the study of different parts of the world. Conceptually, I focused on the idea of generations, questioning Mannheim's precondition that generations had to be born within the same social and historical region and share a common cultural heritage [4]. Such a notion, I argued, is unsuited for analyzing not only the culturally heterogeneous societies of the Global South but today's transnational context in general. The Global South, with its transnational and colonial history,

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[10] My cross-continental comparative research about rioters in England and Guinea [57] indicates that European youth felt more marginalized from their national politics than their African counterparts.

is not an exception to the sociological rule here, but indicative of broader global trends [5]. This should put into question the very assumption that processes towards greater conceptual validity across different contexts come from the Global North to eventually embrace the South. In fact, given that the social sciences have thus far reasoned almost exclusively from the North, Southern perspectives are more likely to entail particular elucidation. Considering Area Studies scholarship both as a corrective and a source of inspiration for youth studies can thus be a fruitful starting point to develop more inclusive concepts and understandings of youth, in particular when aligned with postcolonial theory, which has challenged the conventional North-South directionality of theory-building in manifold ways,[11] and has unequivocally demonstrated that global reasoning requires a solid epistemological foundation. As Souleymane Bachir Diagne [155] (p. 7) put it, it is "only in a postcolonial world [that] the question of the universal can truly be posed".

On a more institutional level, and this leads us to the second concern of this paper, the nascent debate in youth studies thus hints at the need to overcome the academic bifurcation between sociology for the 'modern' world versus anthropology and area studies for the 'developing' world. Concerning youth, this institutional division has led to a bizarre separation of scholarship. Youth studies research on young Euro-Americans and anthropological research on African youth draw from two almost unrelated bodies of literature. Youth studies' neglect of Africanist youth research, which today builds on a voluminous literature, is all the more astonishing, since youth studies scholars are explicitly calling for more research on youth in the Global South. While this paper has only superficially sketched out the broadest contours of the Africanist field, it hopefully inspires some of the non-Africanist readers to explore it further (for broader literature reviews and foundational texts, see [28,42,44,46,49,50,54,76,79]).

Area studies scholarship, in turn, should find in postcolonial scholarship the incentive to think beyond their prescribed disciplinary boundaries and make inroads into the general discussion on youth. Ultimately, the present bifurcation between mainstream academic disciplines and area studies needs to be transcended from both sides of the divide and with an explicit understanding of the shared responsibility for developing a better and less biased social science of youth. As Macamo [156] has insightfully stated, no knowledge production can extract itself from the legacies of racism and colonialism engraved in the origins of the humanities and the social sciences. They are simply too present in our conceptual and institutional dilemmas. As much as we may want to distance ourselves from them, we must acknowledge these legacies to advance beyond them.

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[11] Key works include Chakrabarty's (2007) "Provincializing Europe" [146], Comaroff and Comaroff's (2012) "Theory from the South" [5], and Connell's (2006, 2007) accounts of how social theory [67] and globalization theory [147] argue from Northern vantage points, as well as her alternative approach "Southern Theory" [148]. It should be added that these different approaches are fairly heterogeneous and are hotly debated within the field [12,149]. For the debate on 'Theory from the South', for instance, see Aravamudan (2012); Ferguson (2012); Mbembe (2012b); Obarrio (2012) [150–153]. The Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism organized a whole symposium on the Comaroffs' "Theory from the South" available online as an edited collection of essays [154].

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