
MYPLACE



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WP5: Interpreting Participation (Interviews)

Deliverable 5.3: Country-based reports on interview findings

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1 Introduction

This report is the Danish deliverable 5.3 for the MYPLACE project. MYPLACE is a large-scale FP7 project that explores how young people's social participation is influenced by the shadows of totalitarianism and populism in Europe.

MYPLACE intends to provide an empirically rich mapping of young people's understandings of the civic and political space that they inhabit. In policy terms, MYPLACE identifies the obstacles to, and facilitators of, young people's reclamation of the European political arena as a place for them.

WP5 is one among a number of empirical data sets gathered under the auspices of the MYPLACE project and consists of in-depth interview data that complements survey (WP4) and ethnographic research (WP7). WP5 is closely related to the WP4 survey, because its respondent set is drawn from the stock of survey respondents.

WP5 has three objectives:

1. To elicit the meanings attached to statements or opinions expressed in the survey by the respondents.
2. To provide an opportunity for respondents to explain in a more nuanced way their positions on key elements of the survey.
3. To provide a space for the articulation of experiences or ideas of relevance to the research but not included in the questionnaire.

The WP5 interview is based on an interview guide that was drafted by the WP leads and finalised at the Qualitative Working Group meetings in the spring 2012. Locally specific variations of the interview guide were then implemented.

The interview process ran in parallel with the WP4 survey, so that respondents were invited to participate in a follow-up interview shortly after completing the questionnaire.

In Denmark, in total, 28 interviews were conducted, transcribed and deposited from the field site Centrum, and 32 interviews were conducted, transcribed and deposited from the field site Øst.

2 The field sites

The Danish field sites are two districts of the municipality of Odense. Odense is the third largest municipality of Denmark. By 2011, the number of inhabitants was 190,245 of which 164,264 (86.4 %) descends from Danish citizens. 49 % are men, 51 % are women. 27,013 inhabitants are in the age between 16 and 24 years (14.2 % of total population). In this age group 22,139 (81.6 %) descends from Danish citizens. The research field sites selected were the central and the eastern parts of the city. Each roughly cover one third of the city.

The field site Centrum is characterised by a large student population and many highly educated inhabitants. Its population has the highest income of the two selected regions. The core area of the field site is the Munkebjerg/Hunderup area. In this area lives 12,111 inhabitants of which

11,383 (94 %) descend of Danish citizens. 2038 (16.8 %) inhabitants are in the age 16-24 years. Among the young people (16-24 years), 1,878 descend of Danish citizens (92.1 %).

The field site Øst is on the contrary characterised by lower level of education and income. A substantial part of the field site Øst is Vollsmose, a 1960s settlement, which was designed to serve as relocation site for inhabitants from parts of the inner city that were designated for demolition. However, soon it became a socially deprived district and gradually turned into an area inhabited by immigrants. Today, it is included on the government's official list of national ghettos (The Ministry of Housing, Urban and Rural Affairs, 2013). In the Vollsmose area lives 9,307 inhabitants of which 1,351 (14.5 %) are in the age 16-24 years. Of the total number of inhabitants 2,806 (30.1 %) descend of Danish citizens. Among the young people (16-24 years), 329 descend of Danish citizens (24.3 %).

The areas represent, also in the common perceptions in the population, a socio-demographic clustering of the city.

The areas also differ in political attitudes. In the field site Centrum, more people vote for the centre-right-conservative parties, while in the field site Øst, districts with the highest concentration of left-wing voters in the city are located.

The difference in political attitudes is clearly illustrated in the following table:

Table 1 Voting at two polling stations. Parliamentary election 2011.

Parliamentary election 15 September 2011	Sct. Knuds Gymnasium /Munkebjerg polling station Field site: Centrum		Abildgårdskolen / Vollsmose polling station Field site: Øst	
	Votes	Pct.	Votes	Pct.
Socialdemokraterne	561	15.1%	1.705	43.4%
Det Radikale Venstre	559	15.0%	304	7.7%
Konservative	344	9.2%	75	1.9%
Socialistisk Folkeparti	303	8.1%	531	13.5%
Liberal Alliance	291	7.8%	54	1.4%
Kristendemokraterne	9	0.2%	11	0.3%
Dansk Folkeparti	251	6.7%	409	10.4%
Venstre	1.237	33.2%	277	7.1%
Enhedslisten	171	4.6%	559	14.2%
	3,726		3,926	

Source: The municipality of Odense

3 Method and data

In this section, the methods of investigation used for data collection and analysis are described and explained.

Due to the overall methodology of the MYPLACE project, WP5 fieldwork was closely linked to the WP4 fieldwork. The WP5 fieldwork started one month after the beginning of the WP4 survey to allow respondents to be selected for WP5. The fieldwork started at the end of November 2012 in both field sites, and it continued into the beginning of February 2013 in field site Centrum and until the middle of March 2013 in field site Øst.

The flow in the interviewing was as follows: In November 2012: 8 interviews, in December 2012: 13 interviews, in January 2013: 23 interviews, in February 2013: 15 interviews, and in March 2013: 1 interview.

The length of interviews showed a certain variation. In the field site Centrum, the average length of interviews was 80 minutes. The minimum length of interview was 53 minutes, and the maximum length was 125 minutes.

In the field site Øst, the average length of interviews was 66 minutes. The minimum length was 41 minutes, and the maximum length was 124 minutes.

This might indicate that the socio-economic and demographic differences between the two field sites are reflected in different practices in the interview session.

The interviews were conducted by three interviewers in each field site. The total number of interviewers was four, which means that two of the interviewers conducted interviews in both field sites.

The interviews were conducted by university students with prior experience in interviewing, either from previous fieldwork during study, occupation in commercial companies, or in one case as a social worker. The interviewers were first instructed and trained together with the WP4 team, and they participated 4-6 weeks in the WP4 survey. During this period, they were instructed and trained in the WP5 interview guide. All training and instruction was carried out by the national WP4 and WP5 leads.

The sampling was performed in accordance with the maximum variation principle and interviewees were selected in accordance with the guidelines in the document 'WP5_Interviewee Selection Strategy_14_05_2012_FinalDraft.docx'. The sampling was purposive, which implies that the cases were not intended to provide a basis for generalisations, neither was there any aim to reach statistical representativeness on the demographic sampling criteria. The main aim was to obtain cases that allowed insight into, and to obtain a comprehensive understanding of, the issues being investigated.

The selection principles stipulated that cases that were information-rich and showed considerable differences along dimensions of political participation and tolerance should be selected. Selection should also ensure heterogeneity in terms of age, gender, education, ethnicity, citizenship, and nationality in each subsample.

The time dimension made it necessary to begin the sampling procedure as soon as possible after the start of the WP4 survey. Immediate contact was perceived as important, in order that WP4 respondents who had volunteered for the WP5 interview did not lose interest. Secondly, the two investigations were scheduled to run almost at the same time.

While, the sampling guide allowed for the first 10 interviewees to be selected randomly, this phase was omitted in the Danish case. The WP5 forms filled-in during the WP4 interview were delivered to the WP5 principal researcher for evaluation and the comments made by the WP4 interviewer on the completed forms about the respondents' eligibility as an interviewee constituted the first criteria for selection as a WP5 interviewee. Secondly, the selection was based on answers to two questions in the survey questionnaire: the first measured civic and political activity by asking how often respondents had taken part in a number of activities over the last 12 months (Question 17 in the WP4 questionnaire) while the second measured level of tolerance by asking whether respondents agreed or disagreed with a number of indicative statements (Question 40 in the WP4 questionnaire).

Precaution was taken to secure a balance in gender, a full distribution across the age level, to secure participation of young people with immigrant parents, and to secure a diversity of educational and occupational backgrounds. While the higher educated were predominant among those who volunteered, the criteria for selecting respondents with a lower level education, persons with vocational education, persons in vocational employment, and persons with immigrant background were less strict.

The respondents cover activity levels from very active to passive and tolerance levels from very tolerant to very intolerant. The dataset contains a share of persons with immigrant background, although they are underrepresented. The dataset contains individuals across the educational spectrum as a whole, although the highly educated are overrepresented. As a consequence, the number of employed persons as well as unemployed is low in the dataset. This is partly a consequence of the composition of the youth population, partly due to self-exclusion from the sample.

Predominantly, the interviews took place in the interviewee's home. When requested by the interviewee, their educational institution was used as the interview location. In a few cases, public libraries or similar locations were used. Appointments were made directly between the interviewer and the interviewee. Incentives were not used. There was no indication that the content of any interview was influenced by the presence of other persons. In one interview, a person called the interviewee to hurry up and finish the interview, because they had an appointment. In some cases, a telephone call interrupted the interview. No interviews were terminated prematurely.

The interviews were recorded, but not videotaped. Only the interview guide was used. Visual elicitation tools in any format were not used.

No ethical issues occurred during the interviews. All interviews have been carefully anonymised and any material that might identify the respondent or others they refer to has been removed. In some cases, this required the removal of relevant information contained in the interviews, but the anonymity of the interviewee held the highest priority.

It was possible to carry out the interviews in accordance with the research plan, and the original research questions were not modified. National prompts were added in the section that addressed history, memories and political art and music.

All questions worked well, although it was obvious that the interview guide addressed issues that were not part of many interviewees' everyday reflections. Three areas in particular generated little response. First, this concerned interest in history and historical fiction; secondly, it related to political art and music and consequently knowledge about political music subcultures; and finally, this was the case with the issue of extremist politics, where the imagination of the interviewee fell short. On historical issues, it was necessary for the interviewers to prompt the respondents. This might have influenced the events specifically mentioned by the interviewees, who commented more in response to the cues than expressing their own views spontaneously.

The recorded interviews were transcribed by seven transcribers. Thereafter, the transcriptions were corrected and anonymised by the principal researcher. The transcribed and anonymised interviews were imported into the qualitative data analysis software, NVIVO 9.2. The interviews were coded by three coders. The first coded about two thirds of the interviews, the second coded one third of the interviews, and the third coded two interviews. The refinement of the coding was carried out by the principal researcher. The coding process resulted in a large number of nodes (level 0 nodes) that were distributed on 24 level 2 nodes. The level 0 nodes in each level 2 nodes were merged into larger nodes (level 1 nodes). The number of the resulting level 1 nodes varies between 6 and 19.

The process of synthesizing the initial low-level nodes into level 1 and level 2 nodes was exclusively based on the purely linguistic content and the structure of the interview guide that served as the primary structuring principle when level 2 nodes were defined.

The analysis has adopted a modified grounded research approach. The interview guide employed was theory-informed. However, the analysis did not adopt a theory driven, deductive, analytical approach, nor was it driven by a search for statements that could justify predefined theoretical assumptions. The analysis of the interviews was content driven employing an inductive approach based on the meaning of the answers of the respondents to the questions of the interviewers. Through a close reading of the respondent narratives, a variable-oriented thematic coding framework was constructed.

The analysis of the interviews was supported by Qualitative Data Analysis Software NVIVO.

4 Demographic profile of respondents

In this section the demographic profile of the respondents in the two field locations is described. The gender distribution is equal in the Øst district, although there is a small underrepresentation of young women in the Centrum district. The age distribution underrepresents the younger part of the target group, while the average age is about 22 years.

Table 2 Gender and age by Field site location

Gender and age		Field site location		Total
		Centrum	Øst	
	Male	15	16	31
	Female	13	16	29
	Age - mean	22.5	22.3	22.4
	- <i>std. dev.</i>	3.0	2.5	2.8
Total		28	32	60

The respondents in the two field sites appear to be less different than might be expected when the demographic differences are taken into consideration. One third in each site consists of university students. Fewer are enrolled in professional bachelor degree programmes to become teachers, nurses, social workers or kindergarten teachers. Relatively few have completed an education. The two sites are almost similar with a small tendency towards a higher educational level among the respondents in the Centrum district.

That the educational profile is almost equal reflects the fact that Odense is a large city offering all sorts of educational opportunities. This attracts students from a wide area, many living in dormitories that are located in both districts.

Table 3 Education by field site location

Education		Field site location		Total
		Centrum	Øst	
	Completed a short cycle higher education	2	1	3
	Completed vocational training	1	1	2
	Graduated with a university degree	0	1	1
	Graduated as professional bachelor	1	0	1
	In short cycle higher education	0	2	2
	In education (not specified)	3	5	8
	In a professions bachelor program	3	5	8
	In lower secondary school	0	1	1
	In university	10	9	19
	In upper secondary education	4	3	7
	In vocational school	1	3	4
	Terminated vocational training	1	0	1
	Not in education	0	1	1
	Other	1	0	1
	Terminated education (not specified)	1	0	1
Total		28	32	60

The employment profile of the respondents shows that the vast majority is in education. Only two in each district are unemployed. More are working in the Centrum district, but the level is still below one fifth.

Table 4 Employment by Field site location

Employment		Field site location		Total
		Centrum	Øst	
	In full-time education	19	28	47
	In full-time employment	5	2	7
	Unemployed	2	2	4
	Working and in part-time education	2	0	2
Total		28	32	60

Less than one fifth of respondents live with their parents. Relatively more in the Centrum district live with their parents. More than one third lives with a partner. The category 'Live independently with friends' covers cohabitation, where couples may live together.

Table 5 Residential status by Field site location

Residential status		Field site location		Total
		Centrum	Øst	
	Live at home with other relatives e.g. grandparents	1	0	1
	Live at home with parent(s)	6	5	11
	Live independently alone	7	5	13
	Live independently with friends	2	9	11
	Live independently with own partner/children	12	12	23
	Not Known	0	1	1
Total		28	32	60

The family status as a single is mostly found among the youngest respondents. The family status is a less clear indicator of the life situation, because some respondents might have a partner, although they do not live together.

Table 6 Family status by Field site location

Family status		Field site location		Total
		Centrum	Øst	
	Married or living with partner	12	14	26
	Single	9	10	19
	Not Known	7	8	15
Total		28	32	60

The large majority of respondents are native Danes or persons with at least one Danish parent. Respondents with immigrant backgrounds are underrepresented.

Table 7 National origin by Field site location

National origin		Field site location		Total
		Centrum	Øst	
	Danish	28	26	54
	Asian	0	1	1
	Middle East	0	5	5
Total		28	32	60

The last table shows that a few native respondents have a parent with a foreign western nationality, both European and American.

Table 8 Parents' national origin by Field site location

Parents' national origin		Field site location		Total
		Centrum	Øst	
Father	Danish	27	24	51
	Asian	0	1	1
	Middle East	0	5	5
	Western	1	2	3
Total		28	32	60
Mother	Danish	28	24	52
	Asian	0	1	1
	Middle East	0	5	5
	Western	0	2	2
Total		28	32	60

Although more than two thirds of the survey respondents volunteered for participation in the WP 5 interview, the composition of the respondent set is inevitably influenced by self-exclusion before the survey and then before the interview. Nonetheless, judging from the interviews, the interviewees represent a rich variety of political engagement, as well as activity and attitude patterns.

5 Key Findings

The analysis of the interview material is reported in six sections that cover the key dimensions of the research questions. First, respondents' perceptions of present times in which they live are analysed. Here, a picture is drawn of how the respondents reflect upon societal development and the changes caused by the financial crisis and immigration. Secondly, the respondents' awareness and interests in historical issues and political art are analysed. Thirdly, the development of political consciousness is addressed. Both key events that have triggered political awareness and socialisation in primary groups are included in the analysis. Fourthly, the respondents' understanding of the concepts of democracy and politics is analysed. Fifthly, the rich diversity of political engagement among the respondents is scrutinised. This includes different forms of activity, such as civic engagement, political participation and activism. Sixthly, the evaluation of politics and forms of political engagement is addressed. This includes as well an analysis of the understanding of political alternatives. Finally, the similarities and differences between the respondents in the two research fields are discussed.

5.1 The current situation

The opening question 'What is going on right now that is really affecting people in Denmark?' opened up a rich variety of issues that affect the respondent's perception of their life world. In the analysis, the complexity of the information has been reduced and strictly personal or arbitrary information excluded. What is reported, therefore, is information that relates to social conditions

and social relations. The analysis is divided in two. The first part covers a broad range of contemporary social issues; the second part addresses the topic of immigration and integration.

5.1.1 Contemporary social issues

Respondents' general view of Denmark can be summarised in two words: harmony and idyll. However, in contrast to this picture there are cleavages in the society that are revealed when specific issues in the present situation are addressed.

Although respondents are aware of different aspects of the current social conditions and observe different phenomena, some issues occur more regularly than others. In particular these are the financial crisis, the insecure economic situation, and especially the risk of unemployment. Current political debates that have caught respondents' attention include the new legislation about unemployment benefits, tax reform, and changed and reduced study grants. The most frequently mentioned political issue concerns claims that two of the parties in the government have cheated the voters by making promises before the election that they subsequently breached.

The breach of promises has led to a general dissatisfaction with the political system. This is indicated by the following respondent who is, moreover, one of the most left-wing of the respondents:

I voted for Enhedslisten in the last election. I do not advocate the overthrow of capitalist society, and the like, but I like that they say things directly, and I can understand that people are disappointed. I really expected a lot from the change of government, and perhaps too much, but it has disappointed me a little, I would say. (Finn, Centrum)

Besides the highly informed respondents, there are also respondents who have little or no interest in current politics. As one of the respondents noted, he does not follow other people's discussion. He does follow the news, and because he disagrees with politicians in general, he ignores their public statements and opinions.

Similarly, some respondents find the present situation overwhelming, although this is attributed to intense media coverage of political issues and their constant publication of voter preference polls. One respondent felt irritated by these polls; given there is still three years before the next election, he finds this intense interest in polls to be excessive, just like the media's exaggerated interest in a religious sect's pronouncing of a supposed doomsday in winter 2012.

The financial crisis and the economy was the most pressing issue at the time the interviews were carried out. Comments were made suggesting that the present situation is completely different to the situation that was experienced before the financial crisis. Before, it is said, people experienced a huge economic boom, people consumed extensively, and they were happy, despite the fact that the economic cleavage in society was increasing and the distance between rich and poor growing.

The financial crisis is for the respondents synonymous with lack of social security. Job guarantees that existed before the crisis have been removed. People are being sacked, and they, and the newly graduated, have difficulties finding a job, or they are unable to find a job. Unemployment and

insecurity about the development of the labour market are a major concern. Unemployment is a prevalent observation about what is going on in society now.

Respondents report how this affects their personal life and well-being. They are affected by the lack of security and have experienced family members, friends and acquaintances being sacked and becoming unemployed; some have experienced this themselves too. It makes a big impression when they discover family members or friends' parents are laid off after being at the same work place for maybe thirty years and with no prospects of finding another job.

Some reflect on future prospects if no new jobs are created and new generations enter the labour market more quickly than the older generations retire. Others are ironic about the short-term jobs that are created to support the unemployed who are about to lose their benefits. It seems to them to mirror what they were told communism was like.

Respondents note that the crisis has led to wage cuts and other negative impacts on labour market conditions. During the interview period, the collective bargaining between teachers and public employers, which eventually ended with lockout of the teachers and the conflict being resolved only after intervention by the government, was mentioned by respondents.

Some support the unions. Some propose neo-liberal reforms of the labour market with wage cuts and tax reduction. A respondent points at Germany as an example of the successful use of such austerity measures.

Some respondents are not concerned by crisis and unemployment. It appears that they feel secure. To them, the financial crisis is just an expression, words. Several respondents report that the financial crisis has not influenced their personal lives. They have not been personally affected, their family is still well off, and none of their friends have experienced negative consequences of the crisis. They are able to observe the crisis at a distance. They experience the consequences of the crisis by being informed by the media or through direct observation. Some take an emphatic stand, others remain observant. Some appear not to care.

Besides unemployment, housing issues were said to be the most pressing consequences of the financial crisis in Denmark. Respondents had not been directly affected by the fall in house prices, but were aware of the situation. Opinions on this differ; one respondent even expresses malicious joy when noting that house owners who had initially adopted a new type of loan with exemption from repayment now have to start paying back their debt.

Tax policy was a major political issue in the period when interviews were carried out, and it is an issue for many respondents. Respondents were divided in terms of their attitudes towards it, however. The left-wing respondents took a principled political position against new tax legislation that reduces tax for the highest earners and point to the tax-financed welfare system as their reason for supporting current tax rates. In contrast, respondents with neo-liberal economic attitudes support the lowering of tax rates for those on the highest incomes. Some hold a party political view on the matter. The most radical positions are taken by supporters of the Liberal Alliance party, which supports flat-rate tax. Others support lower taxes on the basis that that the economy needs it. One claims to be willing to reduce welfare and to introduce a 40-Euro fee on medical consultation. Some respondents support tax reduction because of personal experiences. Several

respondents recall childhood experiences, where their father had been absent due to a high workload, and they find it unjust that the financial reward for this effort is highly taxed.

Respondents with left-wing attitudes are also aware that the tax issue is difficult. One young woman mentions how she was annoyed, when, while being with her family, radio news reported that a spokesperson for the left-wing party she supports proposed even higher tax rates for the rich, and she had had to downplay the statement in a conversation with her father.

The tax issue is closely related to the welfare issue. One respondent expressed a sense of injustice that some in society make sacrifices to get an education or work long hours as independent traders, while others, as they put it, just enjoy themselves on public benefits.

There are cleavages in the support for the welfare state system. One group is concerned that the welfare system is under pressure, while another group considers that the welfare system has become too generous. The pressure on the welfare state is recognised, and it is observed that attitudes towards those receiving social benefits have changed. A new discourse that seeks individual explanations for unemployment is beginning to take hold in public debate. The use of such words as 'need' and 'cheat' express some of the opposing viewpoints and respondents' concerns reflect new developments in public discourse. Respondents with left-wing attitudes are not unaffected by this. One respondent complained about what he considers a virtual stigmatization of left-wing people in public discourse. He suggests that the left-wing are caricatured as supporting social benefit payments for all claimants, regardless of actual need; this is unjust, he argues, because he personally argues that 'need' must be proven.

Nonetheless, support for the welfare state remains the predominant attitude among respondents. Concerns are expressed that beggars have appeared on streets and the American welfare debate is compared negatively to the Danish system, which, it is said, would not allow people to sink so low.

Educational issues attract attention. Issues or concern include: the recent legislative changes that reduce the length of time grants for educational study can be taken; the lack of available apprenticeships; and some particular issues of relevance especially to students of education and health.

Respondents also referred to a dilemma that students faced at the time of the field work concerning a political debate about students' efficiency. It was being suggested that students should reduce the time spent in the educational system; respondents, however, did not see the logic in this demand since the current employment situation left almost half of new graduates unable to find a job anyway.

The level of crime in the society worries the respondents, especially the risk of physical violence. Criminal gangs feature prominently, but new forms of violence – such as domestic burglary - attract attention as well. One respondent supported the reinstatement of the death penalty. Although this was an exception to the rule, the topic appears to be one that is discussed.

Cross-border crime affects respondents; the inflow of foreign criminals is mentioned, and one respondent regretted the open borders. Others mention drug dealing as a serious problem.

Other crimes that are mentioned include anti-Semitic acts and paedophilia (the latter possibly because a film on this issue was showing in cinemas just before the field work took place).

Fear of terror and feelings of lack of security are concerns that are mentioned. Some respondents think that the fear of terror was more predominant just after the so-called war on terror began; the more relaxed atmosphere now, however, can be easily disturbed by a forgotten suitcase or bag. One respondent ironically recounted an incident when traffic had been suspended for hours and the media released 'breaking news' after passengers alerted police to an unattended parcel in a train to Sweden; in fact, it turned out, the parcel had been placed there consciously to avoid postal charges and it had been intended to be collected at the other end by the recipient.

The protection of the environment is mentioned by respondents including concerns about global warming and the waste of resources and the opportunities provided by recycling for the individual to make a direct contribution to protecting the environment.

Danish participation in the international wars features strongly in respondents' consciousness and one respondent had personal experience of serving abroad, some knew people who had been involved, while others just expressed opinions about warfare.

The EU is remarkably absent from issues mentioned. However, the consequences of the European debt crisis in southern Europe are mentioned. International politics, on the other hand, are noted; the Arab spring to a lesser degree, the presidential election in USA to a greater degree.

5.1.2 Immigration and Integration

Immigration has been one of the dominant political issues in the last two decades and this is reflected in the respondents' narratives. Statements by native Danish respondents reflect a wide diversity of attitudes, from strongly negative to very tolerant attitudes towards immigrants. The narratives of respondents with an immigrant background reflect the experience of 'otherness'.

Concerns raised by native respondents include the problem of low educational attainment by male immigrant children and the difficulties and obstacles immigrants and their children face in the integration process.

The tendency to categorize immigrants was mentioned as well as examples of how negative actions committed by a few stigmatize the whole group. On the other hand, quite negative attitudes were formulated in relation to immigrants.

Several respondents expressed negative attitudes to the degree of integration of immigrants and many recognise the importance of language skills for being able to live in Danish society:

It is quite clear that you have to provide them with free Danish lessons when they come into the country. It is the best measure that has ever been made for integration in Denmark, I can say. Because, you cannot get along if you do not learn the language. This is how it is in my opinion, and in many others that I know of, at least. (Johnny, Øst)

One respondent points to cultural differences being at the root of immigrant young people's insufficient language skills and it is claimed that a barrier to integration can be that young people are

forbidden to speak Danish at home in the family. On the other hand, respondents point to the fact that more young people from immigrant backgrounds, especially young women, are achieving well in the educational system.

There are three main reservations expressed by native Danish respondents in relation to immigrants. The main issue causing hostility concerns the receipt by immigrants of social benefits. This is seen as a problem and blamed, by some respondents, for cuts in welfare benefits for all. Crime committed by immigrants is a second issue of concern. This is not crime per se but in particular gang violence and the fear among respondents of being exposed to violence from a gang:

It is generally when you go near the pedestrian zone, that you risk being beaten down. Now I have experienced it many times, not on my own body, but among friends. They were attacked as they just came walking. It makes you a little uncomfortable and you are going less in the city. ... I'm not racist, but it's just scary that some are waiting for the coming of a drunken person they can beat up. (Jane, Øst)

Even quite populist claims are put forward. In general, they follow the line of argument that the country should protect itself against immigrants who are not willing to follow basic civic requirements, such as respect for the law. A common view is that there should be no restriction on deportation of immigrants convicted of crimes. Indeed, one respondent went as far as to suggest that citizenship should be withdrawn from convicted criminals, if they were naturalised citizens.

Inappropriate behaviour in the public space adds to native respondents' impression of a severe cultural cleavage between the native population and immigrants. During the fieldwork, a group of immigrants entered the city's hospital to retrieve a person injured in a violent incident during the Eid feast in Vollsmose, and they threatened the personnel and vandalised the premises.

A respondent of immigrant background condemns the same incident:

We are not happy that these 60 people, or so, went to the emergency room to destroy it. We strongly disagree. And I do not know if you read this, but later [a relative] and some of his friends, their children and so on – they went to the emergency room with flowers to apologize. (Arne, Øst)

The crime issue is challenged however by respondents who perceive it to have been exaggerated. Respondents of this persuasion note that gangs of native Danes exist too and one respondent, who lives in Vollsmose, states that she has never experienced threatening incidents.

Concern about religion is the third main issue that arouses negative attitudes towards immigrants. An incident that occurred during the interview period is commented upon by some respondents. In this specific case, the majority of a residents association board decided to abolish the annual Christmas tree. Some respondents interpreted this as Muslim intolerance, because the board had previously supported the Eid celebration. The issue gained much attention in the media. Respondents with native Danish background mention the incident as an example of how immigration is potentially threatening national culture and that it brings into question the willingness to support basic democratic principles that the majority should respect the minority. None of the respond-

ents with immigrant background defended the decision either, despite its formal legitimacy. It was perceived as an unwise decision, because it creates rifts between immigrants and the native population.

Respondents of immigrant background explain that it is difficult being a minority and that their sense of discrimination is pronounced. Many respondents of native background empathise with their situation and challenge discrimination:

One should not generalize because not everyone is like that, and there are a lot of wonderful people who are foreigners. When it becomes generalized, then I become angry – very, very angry. Of course there are thugs, but there are among the Danes too. (Gerda, Øst)

5.2 Historical and cultural representation and memory

The question of history and the transmission of historical memory and knowledge is a key focus of the MYPLACE project. It addresses the issue of how historical awareness influences the political engagement of young people. In this section the respondents' awareness and knowledge of history, memorials and political art will be analysed. The statements are derived from interview questions 'What do you find most interesting and/or important about Denmark's past?', 'Do you think that remembering particular historical events is important?', 'Have you ever been to a local museum or site of commemoration?', 'Do you think that contemporary politics affects which historical events are celebrated and which are ignored?', and 'Do you like films, books or music that has an obvious political (historical or social) message?'.

5.2.1 History significant persons, phenomena, and episodes

The commemoration of the Danish history begins with the Viking age:

The Viking age, I think, is crazy cool. It is just war and heroes. (Bente, Øst)

I think it goes back to the Viking age when we explored a lot and extended our map. I think it has had most impact when we sailed out and traded, ravaged and plundered. (Carlo, Øst)

The Viking age represents a period, when Danes played a role as a super power in very early Europe. There is an underlying idea that having a Viking past is something to be proud of. Some incidents from the medieval times are also mentioned, such as the Christianisation of the Danes, symbolically represented by Jellingestenene. This was the moment when the inhabitants in Denmark were born as the Danish people as they are today, it is said.

Nothing is mentioned about the so-called Svenskekrigene (the Swedish wars).

The early modern and modern history 1700-1900 is mentioned as a period of significant changes, among them the end of absolutism and the democratic constitution although one interviewee expressed his longing to return to absolutist monarchy. This period also contains significant events

in national history and warfare, such as 1801 and 1864. Another, also very significant year, 1814, when Denmark and Norway were separated, however, was not mentioned.

One view of the period is given by a young man, who stresses the important events as he sees them:

I really like it there in the 1800s, the development we had there. At first, it was a monarchy and had a very traditional rule, and then came 1864, when we lose the war and lose Schleswig and Holstein. And then comes, then that Constitution came around. And I think, just like that, it became a modern country. That period, I like very much.
(Frode, Øst)

Despite the fact that the respondents normally accept the claim that older history is important and that we can learn from history, the opposite point of view is also present:

I thought everything after 1800 is insanely boring. That's why I do not read history any longer. It does not interest me at all. I know so well at the same time that it is some of the most important that has happened and affects us most now. (Ida, Øst)

One episode is the most important in modern history, the battle at Dybbøl in 1864 (Østergård, 2004). After having lost Norway in 1814, the Danish King now lost all possessions in Germany, and Denmark was reduced to the Danish Kingdom and some North Atlantic colonial possessions that were forgotten once the outcome of the war in 1864 was said to be the loss by Denmark of one third of its population and two thirds of its territory.

In general, 1864 is mentioned, but as a passive memorial year. There is exception to this rule, by one respondent who, even though he is not a history student, is well informed and refers even to what he terms 'the myth' of 1864:

If we have to go a little into detail, there has been a very ingrained myth that the Danes lost the war in 1864 because the Prussians were so much better. The fact that it was we, who were attacked..., but in reality, it was we who asked for the war and had a very unprepared defence and lack of everything. Feeling like a victim in the 1864 war is nonsense. It was an inept government's fault. There was not much that could be done about it. Of course, bitter, but the depiction of the 1864 as if Denmark was a victim – I think it is a little nonsense. (Finn, Centrum)

There is also an awareness of the consequences of the loss for national identity; 1864, it is stated, developed the feeling of being a Dane.

In Danish history, 1864 cannot be discussed without mentioning 1920, the year of the referendum and the re-unification of a part of Schleswig or Sønderjylland, as it is called in Danish. One respondent recalled the importance of this incident:

Having been born in Sønderjylland, I think I would always be reminded of how important it was that we voted Sønderjylland back again. In addition, I think, in fact, I have said that it was one of the most important events. However, it is not just regionally, that it is important to us down here. Globally too, I do also believe that it is important to see that it is the first time that a democratic referendum was held to determine a border, so to speak. Therefore, in that way I think also it is an important event, globally. (Oliver, Centrum)

The democracy and the Constitution hold a central place in the minds of respondents. The Constitution is respected and perceived as the foundation of society:

I think the constitution is extremely important; a basic guideline for everyone in the country, it is a really important thing. It puts the little ... uh, in a way it is also the foundation stone for the safety net we talked about earlier, common conditions for all, and in that way it keeps the a firm line against the lawlessness, or however one puts it, that might have been. (Jimmy, Øst)

The Constitution is even important to those who know that it exists, but do not care about the details:

The Constitution is of course important, because it is what we all support, since we are Danes living in Denmark - one must then assume that, all else being equal. Now, I have not personally read it and it is not of any interest to me, but then, it is just important. Period. (Patrick, Centrum)

The newer history is represented by the building block of the modern welfare state. The welfare state is seen as a historical development that builds on certain economic preconditions: 'First, the importance the post-war years had on the Danish economy and how one then decided to develop the welfare society as we see today' (Dennis, Centrum).

The democratic constitution is closely associated with women's right to vote, because until 1915 democracy as a public issue was the preserve of men. The inclusion of women into public democracy was noted by many female respondents as a significant historical event:

Yes. I think there are two things that I always notice. Now, any anti-feminist would cover their ears, but when women got the right to vote back then, I think it really was ... Yes, I think it really was a bit like ... It seriously opened up that ... what can you say, that women are not a minority, but were maybe suppressed politically previously in Danish society, and they were given the opportunity to participate actively. (Ann, Centrum)

The mentioning of women's right to vote is not restricted to women, almost as many men mention it: 'It is probably something to do with women's rights, because it is a sign that all people are

equal' (Ole, Øst). The mutual support for women's voting rights, however, does not imply that gender politics is not an issue. More contemporary women rights issues divide opinion.

In more recent history, one event draws more attention than anything else; WWII including the occupation, the cooperation policy, and, closely related to that, the resistance movement.

The statements reflect that the dominant discourse is that Denmark was not just occupied, but voluntarily cooperated with the occupiers and thereby took a controversial position in the war:

There might also be something with the World War II and cooperation. I do not know how much it was glossed over just after the war, but over time, I think it has been very well elucidated. It was not as if we mounted any wild resistance. There are maybe too many people today, who have the impression that we were one of the allied powers. Maybe it was just to exaggerate it. It was not until 1943, or something like that, the British were aware that we were loyal. (Finn, Centrum)

Such critical evaluations of the national policy during the occupation are not dominant, however; more typical are slightly distanced and relatively uninformed positions:

Of course WWII a little, yet so I think it is a bit like that of course, we were involved in one way or another, but we had a minor role. It is not that we were so totally bombed, or that all Danish were killed, but of course it was not cool well ... my grandmother who lived during World War II, she has not really talked about it, but she did not think it was so violent. (Joan, Centrum)

It is obvious for the respondent to use his grandmother as a witness, but it also shows how the perspective of the individual is skewed, when information about the past is based on personal recollections of older family members.

Other statements discuss aspect of the war at a more profound level than might be expected. Several respondents refer to their grandparents' generation, where they have a family member who had participated in the resistance movement:

My grandfather was a freedom fighter, and he had a very strong opinion on things, and of course it left its impression on my mother. I also heard this for myself, when he was alive, and his views were very strong. Of course, I knew about it, but it has not affected me as such, I have not been in to it. I have only heard the story and seen a documentary about it. (Leif, Centrum)

Having a family member with a personal experience from the resistance movement transmits a strongly emotive memory. This influences successive generations, although the impact stops with the death of the person. However, the respondent claims to distance himself from any direct influence of the strong views being expressed by the grandparents.

Another young man recognised a significant aspect of the resistance movement as being made of activists of his own age: 'And there were also many young boys. They were young boys of our age that did many of the things here and sacrificed their lives for it - for this issue here' (Anton, Centrum). Recognising that the people who were involved were young people requires some reflection since to young people today, those people are remembered as very old, and they might even have kept their memories secret.

A further lesson that has been learned from the resistance movement is the broader consequences of activism. In her reflection, a young woman expands on the connection between herself as a citizen in contemporary society and the activities of the resistance movement. The heritage from the resistance movement, what the members gave, convinces her of the existence of a deeper linkage across the generations:

I think anyway, somewhere with our ... the groups that were formed during World War II. I think there is, one way or another, a national feeling that, it was good they did it, how it was good that they were fighting for Denmark. I think you become a little more Danish, and you are a little more Danish when you hear about the story. Because of how important it is ... we remember that our nationality means something that it cannot simply be subordinated to Germany, Holland, or Russia or something else. (Doris, Centrum)

The reflections that the respondent makes show that the real significance of intergenerational transmission of historical memory is that historical knowledge nurtures national identity. For the respondent, the development of national identity is based on recognition of a shared historical past and a shared national destiny, whereby the perception of an imagined community is connected not only to a shared territorial space, not only among contemporary people, but back into the history. This is some sort of kinship writ large.

The spectrum of insight is illustrated, however, when deeply knowledgeable reflections are contrasted with more superficial comments. The latter can also be found in the interviews and employ a discourse from the ahistorical present:

Yes, I thought that it is positive that the freedom fighters fell for their country. Of course it is negative they fell. But they did it for their country. This, I think, is super positive and cool. (Carlo, Øst)

The aftermath of WWII was the Cold War. Although it began immediately after the end of WWII, symbolically it was most clearly represented by the Berlin Wall that was erected in 1961 and removed in 1989-90. The fall of the wall, for example, is much more frequently mentioned than the fall of the Soviet empire, which signified the end of the cold war.

One respondent draws a direct line between WWII and the end of the Cold War:

For example, if I look at what the Danes are most interested in. It is Hitler's war against Denmark, and the most important thing for them is certainly also that the wall fell. [...]

It [the end of WWII] is something important for Denmark; it is as if Denmark got its land back after all. So, it is like in all the other countries where land was regained. It is important, I think. (Nicki, Øst)

There are few extensive reflections on the Cold War, but it is obvious that young people perceive this part of history with disbelief. The irrationality of the Cold War and not least the Berlin Wall is clearly expressed by the following young woman:

I think after being in Berlin in the summer, I became aware of how surreal it has been observing that the wall first fell in '89. But otherwise, I have not thought about anything. (Lis, Centrum)

The history of the development of the welfare state is perceived as the most important historical event by a young man who travels a lot abroad. To him, this history strengthens his national pride:

Most interesting.... now I do not know so much about history, but the most interesting thing is that we have the social system we have: How long it has existed and how it was built, I'm not quite informed about, but now I have travelled a lot around the world, and no matter where you are in the world, then you will hear, if they know just a bit about Denmark, then they want to know whether it is really true that we get money to be able to study, or if it really is true that we have free access to hospitals, and things like that. It is that which I think is most interesting to tell people about when you're traveling – about this part of Denmark's history. (Ronny, Øst)

Parallel to the development of the welfare society, the 1960s and 1970s are decades that are characterised by revolt against cultural norms in society. The phenomenon of '68 is represented in the interviews as illustrated by this positive mentioning of it:

What I found most striking is '68. It seemed to me a landmark. In the way, that your normal way of thinking was shaken up, and that you are looking for development and improvement of society. [...] I think that something like the youth revolt really is a landmark for culture. (Eli, Øst)

A similar positive evaluation of the period is made by another young man:

I am convinced that others do not think it was a liberation period, and that I am probably influenced by these great stories about hippies, although they were not a majority of the population. Nevertheless, it has had an influence in political and mentality terms that they have tried to rebel against some things and that the world grew at the same time. (Theis, Centrum)

It is inevitable that society changed because of the value change in the 1960s and early 1970s (Inglehart 1977). However, '68 has been characterised generally negatively and thus it is striking that among MYPLACE respondents, reference to this event is exclusively positive.

Membership of the EEC/EU is noted as an event with historical significance, in particular on how governance and legislation has been shaped by membership. The following quote is typical in its reference to one of the negative aspects of membership as being the weakening of Danish legislation although it is atypical in its identification of advantages to membership.

In much of the work we are doing in relation to my work with nature conservation projects, we get funds from the EU to make it work, for example. But conversely, much Danish environmental legislation has been downgraded, because it must be adapted to EU standards. It is of course a little irritating. (Finn, Centrum)

More recent history plays a significant role in the historical worldview that is displayed by respondents. What has been termed the 'war on terror' is mentioned by many of the respondents. Only rarely do respondents mention a single incident; typically, a group of related issues are mentioned together. The 11th of September, which is how 9/11 is referred to in Danish, or the World Trade Centre, again not abbreviated in Danish, are mentioned together with Iraq and Afghanistan (since the names of these countries have become synonymous with war, because Denmark has played an active role in both of them, the names of the countries are used alone, with no need to refer to the 'war' there).

Attitudes to the wars differ among the respondents as these two quotes illustrate. In the first, a young man recounts developments:

11 September 2001, I remember it reasonable clearly. I do. Otherwise, I don't really know. What you can remember at that age, well it's very much 11 September, the war in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan, and now it's Tunisia, Egypt and whatever else they call it down there in North Africa and the Middle East. They have started moving. It's such a big change that is happening, really. Given, that there have been several international wars. That is what is most clearly remembered, I would say, because that is what I think had a strong presence in the last 10-12 years. (Nils, Centrum)

While the above respondent adopts the role of a somewhat detached observer, the following respondent is more passionate and engaged:

I think it's great that you remember 9/11 just because there are so many people who put their lives at risk to save others. It is very nice that when it comes down to it, there are people who want to do something for others they do not know. That they do not think so much of themselves. (Vera, Øst)

The major tragedy is relieved by the embedded story about the fire brigade's heroic rescue action.

The recent wars, in which Denmark has participated, are mentioned quite a lot. Some are aware that the warfare represents a break with earlier foreign policy. Attitudes are divided, but normally expressed in rational terms. One exception is the following emotional statement:

Yes, well ... if we look at it, then it is not all countries that are involved in it, compared with Denmark that is involved all the time. It is also a good thing, because ... it is as if you are proud that your country is involved in various wars and things like that. (Nicki, Øst)

Another case that is mentioned is the Cartoon affair, where international Muslim protests arose as a reaction to the provocative drawings of the prophet Mohammed in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten. There is no real diversity in the meanings expressed in the interviews by the native Danish participants. The views are more or less nuanced, but they all subscribe to the official discourse, which argues that their publication was justified by the importance of protecting freedom of speech. Some express a concern about the consequences of the reactions that the event aroused.

5.2.2 Representation of historical memory

Visits to museums and memorials are the first step necessary to gain insight into this form of representation of historical memory. The recollection of museum visits shows a quite diverse picture. At one end of the spectrum, there are respondents who have never visited a museum, or if they have, it has been with school, and they have forgotten about it. At the other end, there are the very dedicated visitors, who eagerly plan trips and vacations so that it is possible to visit museums and sites of memory.

In the middle are statements that show an interest, but also some difficulties in remembering what has been seen: 'I grew up out in Gentofte, quite close to the memorial grove that lies in Hellerup, where there are very many who were shot, freedom fighters' (Ann, Centrum). The name of this iconic site of memory from WWII, Mindelunden in Ryvangen, is forgotten, although the essence is remembered. Ann is one of the respondents who had visited museums together with her parents during childhood.

One of her experiences is that impressions from museum visits can be too sensitive. This was illustrated by reference to a recent visit to New York, when she avoided visiting the Jewish Museum with the family, because she knew from previous visits to Jewish museums that she would be too emotionally touched. To others, the emotional is part of what is searched for in the museum. As one respondent noted, the strong impression left from visiting a concentration camp stems from the awful that it represents.

A memorial might be able to tell a story to a person who is not interested in history. One respondent recounted how it touched her to see name plates on WWII memorials indicating that an assassinated resistance fighter died at only 17 years old.

One respondent had developed a strong and intense interest in everything related to the resistance movement during WWII. He recalls his first visit to Mindelunden:

It was when I was with my friend, and we were going to a birthday party with relatives in Copenhagen, in Brøndby. Then I thought - it was not until four o'clock in the afternoon, and we drove from here in the morning. So I thought, 'we can just get up there'. I had never been there before, so we drove up there. And it is located in Hellerup. And then it would be possible for us to be up there for an hour, two hours, then we could run back and be there for the birthday. It was actually just something that happened all of a sudden, that we did it. (Anton, Centrum)

This example of a spontaneous visit is atypical for the visiting habits of respondents. It is more typical that visits take place with school or are initiated and accompanied by parents. Often very committed fathers have guided the visits. One respondent noted that her father is very serious about distinguishing between historical narratives and facts while another states that their grandfather was an active museum guide.

One respondent is split in his perception of museums and memorials; he recommends museums in principle because he considers it important that such sites of memory exist while at the same time does not find them personally interesting or attractive. In contrast, another respondent does not rate museums, not because she lacks the interest, but because she feels better informed by reading about things on the net. To attract her to visit a museum, it has to be impressive and visually persuasive; boring museums are not visited. Another respondent suggests that museums should always be interactive; a museum you just walk around but are not allowed to interact with holds no interest.

A site of memory does not have to be institutionalized. A respondent recalls a visit to Bosnia, where the remnants of the war were still visible. It was the authenticity there that fascinated her. In this way respondents apply feelings and personal experiences about historical sites and memories to their interpretation of contemporary events.

One respondent uses the feelings of national identity nurtured through insight into national history to justify negative attitudes toward foreigners by suggesting immigration is a contemporary form of occupation by foreign powers threatening the nation. This shows that history is an empty signifier that has to be filled with meaning, and different discourses can be mixed in ways that a scientific approach would not approve.

Another respondent denies the importance of historical memories. She has no experience from her own family that historical memories have played any role, but she admits that it might be of importance for those directly involved. Another respondent just states that until now he has lived well without having any historical knowledge, so he cannot see why that should be changed.

This point of view is contradicted by the opposite standpoint, which a respondent formulates as an almost grandiose tribute to history:

I believe that we tend to live only in our own time, and to forget our children and the next generations' future, as well as the past. Moreover, I think that somehow it means that we will always be sceptical towards anything except the time in which we grew up. (Elin, Centrum)

Therefore, to her, historical memory has significance, while it delivers a basis for judging the direction that society takes and the ways it should develop.

History might also be a question of remembering where you were when a historic event took place. For the younger generation there are few such moments. Even the fall of the Berlin Wall is too distant for the young to remember. For the present youth generation, it is mainly 9/11 and a few other significant episodes that might fall into this category.

Historical memory may also develop into tradition. This occurs when direct links have been lost, but the tradition functions as a generalised symbolic representation of the past, and thereby strengthens the feelings of national belonging.

This is true also of very personal memories which, with time, turn from a sense of deep emotional loss into a more abstract experience. This is the case with the respondent noted above, whose grandfather was assassinated by the occupiers. The feeling left today is proudness – ‘yes, he did it’; the kind of feeling associated with someone who has won a competition.

When it comes to evaluation of the representation of historical events, the respondents are remarkably silent. This aspect is not part of the experience of sites of memories.

One issue that did attract interpretative comments is 1992, when the Danish national football team won the European championship. Indeed, this event is articulated not only as the year in which the Danish team won the European Championship, but that Denmark became European Champions. The event is seen as something that strengthens national identity; one felt proud of being Danish and the event is still remembered (not least because the national football team has not had much success since then):

In cultural terms, I think it has been really good that we proved that we could achieve something even though we are a small country. The story runs still about the ugly duckling that becomes a beautiful swan. All those national stereotypes they build on that they could win the European Championship, so they take up a lot. (Nils, Centrum)

Historical events can be interpreted differently depending on how the interpreters may want to represent the event. Differences in interpretations reveal cleavages in views of the historical past. This did not seem to be the case in most of the interviews. The most common answer is that this is something that the respondent does not know, or a general statement that there might be differences, because of different knowledge or that new knowledge becomes available. The general opinion, however, is that there are no differences in the interpretation of the past. Whether or not this is correct, it is a relatively uncontroversial perception:

I: Are there different ways to interpret or perceive historical events? Do you think they emphasize different things or interpret in different ways?

R: Yes, because we don't all have the same attitudes and some have one interpretation and others have another interpretation, but I think, generally, I think it is very similar how they interpret. (Gurli, Centrum)

This lack of critical approach is similarly recognizable when the question is raised as to whether memories are politicized by different interested parties. Almost nobody commented on politicians' use of historical events, and those who did comment had no specific examples.

Differences in interpretation of historical issues are almost as rare. Although there are a few examples in the interviews, they are all related to foreign issues, such as the conspiracy theories after 9/11 and the Iraq war. A statement that it is the winners who write history is mentioned by several respondents.

The general view is that it is difficult to find controversial interpretations of history in Denmark. Very brief answers are given when asked about differences in the interpretations of history. It is seen more as a question of how history is being interpreted by the older generation, and that the younger generation is less involved and therefore holds less strong opinions.

There are few exceptions to the general picture. One is related to the perception of 1864, another relates to conflict about Ungdomshuset, which was an alternative assembly house for the young in the capital that had been closed by the authorities. Interpretations of WWII are mentioned by a few respondents. One point of view supports the collaboration policy and stresses how it relieved the conditions for the population and that it made it possible to rescue the Danish Jews by securing their escape to Sweden, while the other point of view is that the Danes were cowards whose reputation was saved only because of the resistance fighters. Finally, the financial crisis is also mentioned as a topic that is subject to diverging interpretations, although it is possible too early to define this as a historical event.

How respondents understand the meaning of history should be noted. Maintaining and respecting traditions is the major approach to the meaning of history. It is not that history actually means something, it is more that it is there, and that it is recognised and respected. A typical response to the significance of historical remembrance would be that it is important and that we can always learn something from history.

Remembering history is a generalised attitude. It is not particular historical events that are remembered, but history in a more abstract sense. The individual is a product of the past, it is said, and therefore, history has to be remembered. There are respondents who deny any significance of history because history has never been of interest to them, and they have not been prompted towards that interest in school or by the family.

Finally, there are respondents who see the interdependency and the close connection between past and present. They are able to deconstruct contemporary incidents and interpret them in terms of the historical past. Such an example is a respondent that sees parallels that are frightening in Greece:

Well I think a bit that history is repeating itself, that they simply get migrants and drive them out of their homes and shops, beat them, and kill them. It is incredible. (Maren, Centrum)

The importance of historical remembrance and celebration can be summarised by referring to respondents that mention that it is important to remember history, because it has contributed to

the constitution of national identity, and it is the explanation of why society has developed into what it is today. Further, it is stressed that sharing knowledge of the past is what turns a society into a community. One respondent blames his own generation for a lack of historical knowledge, for example, not knowing why the 9th of April is a memorial day. Some stress the importance of knowing the past, because such knowledge might allow the recognition of, and thus prevent the repetition of a negative past.

5.2.3 Representation of political art

The respondents are in general very interested in historical fiction. There are two fields where the knowledge about historical fiction is heavily represented in the interviews. The first is fiction about WWII; the second is TV-series and films with a historical content.

Those interested in WWII fiction tend to be well informed and to demand that fiction does not stray too far from the established facts about movements, events or persons generated by historical knowledge. Some of the respondents are very dedicated to the story of the WWII and the resistance movements, and take a very detailed and critical approach to what they have seen or read. At the same time, such respondents are aware of the aesthetic qualities of fiction and that it has to conform to genre conventions. Therefore, the critique is double-sided. They demand that the fiction is of high quality in terms of its correspondence to the factual story and in relation to the aesthetic narrative:

Then Hvidstensgruppen came. It was indeed a fucking good movie. And it had a very overtly historical message. But, it is not that I see it for history's sake. It is for the film's sake and then it is cool that you get this also. (Michael, Centrum)

The desire to watch is the primary motivation for openness to historical fiction, but well-informed people manage the dual demands of pleasure and reality.

TV-series with a historical content are predominantly characterised by *Matador*, a family saga that describes the development and transformation of modern society from 1930 to 1950. A follow up called *Krøniken*, describing the development from the 1950s to the 1970s never got the same all-encompassing reception, although it followed the same recipe. A new serial called *Borgen* uses reality-like figures and events in its narrative. It is less frequently mentioned by respondents, however, who are more likely to know about it than to watch it regularly:

Borgen is very entertaining. I think it is really funny; it gets close to the political world, anyway, and sometimes surprisingly close to what might take place. I think that is funny. (Rasmus, Centrum)

Besides Danish material, Michael Moore's critical documentaries are well known, but the reception is mixed.

The main issue to be addressed when dealing with historical fiction is whether the information is stored in memory as a representation of reality. The respondents are of course aware that fiction

and reality differ, but when questioned in more depth their understanding of this relationship becomes less clear.

The Danish serial, *Matador*, which has earned iconic status as the Danish narrative about the twentieth century, is often claimed to have superimposed its historical fiction over historical reality among the viewers. However, these interviews do not provide evidence that respondents mix up facts and fiction:

I think *Matador* portrays well the developments that happen in society and how the different places and personalities there can be in a society have to change, but I do not think that there was any such family like the bank manager and Maud [Laughing]. I think it is symbolic of development. (Bente, Øst)

The quote does not state that there is a clear understanding of the difference between fiction and reality. It leaves the possibility that the fiction is not an empty signifier, but an ideal type, and that in general it is true historically, but the details are constructed fictionally.

The respondents are generally open-minded when asked about their preferences for art and music with a political message. Where politics is implicated in art, it is mainly mainstream politics. A few examples deviate from the general picture of a low awareness of political art. The first example is a political movie:

It is to a large degree scientific literature, as you might call it. So about the books, it is because you want to be informed about something. Music and movie wise, I do not see ... it is reasonable to mix them. A new Che Guevara biography has been made with Dennis Botelro. I saw it and thought it was a damn good movie. I have read the book, so it is not like I had any need to consume it for political reasons. Music and movies, it is just what I care about. (Finn, Centrum)

The second example is about political music:

R: Well, that is when I was younger I was also maybe a little more punk-like. And there we heard indeed some music with political messages in it.

I: And what sort of messages was that?

R: Well, it could be like anti-capitalist messages. (Kate, Øst)

In both cases, the examples refer to left-wing politics. No respondents expressed a preference for art with right-wing political messages.

It is difficult to get more than general statements concerning art and music that is avoided due to the political content. Michael Moore's documentaries are mentioned by one as an example, because they are perceived as one-sided and exaggerated. The German group Rammstein is mentioned by a few because of the lyrics. Especially a song called 'Mein Teil' is called sickly and disgusting, and one respondent stopped listening to the band after having the lyrics translated, despite the band being one of her boyfriend's favourites.

The examples are few about political art and music that the respondents like or listen to despite the political messages. Most striking is an activist in a conservative political youth party. He listens also to left-wing political music.

Similarly, the respondents are not part of musical subcultures, although some have friends who are more involved.

5.3 Thinking political

The development of political thinking is analysed in this section. The analysis focuses on three aspects. First, it looks at which experiences or events that might have served as the starting point for developing a political consciousness. Secondly, it scrutinises the political socialisation in primary groups, first of all the family. Finally, it seeks information about visions of a better society that the respondents might want to contribute to develop. The statements are derived from the questions 'Can you recall a moment when you became interested in an issue, changed your opinion about a particular issue or lost interest in issues or debates previously of interest to you?', 'Do you ever talk to other people, such as friends or members of your family, about [political] issues?' and 'What would a 'better' society look like to you?'

5.3.1 Initiating experience

Why do young people become interested in politics? In this section, issues that have triggered political interest are considered.

Events capable of evoking political interest include 9/11. This was the case for a male respondent who recounted how 9/11 had made him take more of an interest in American politicians and revealed some deeper insight into how the world functions.

Personal contacts can also be influential. One young man, undecided about which party he sympathises with, was invited to a meeting of a youth party and, after attending the meeting, decided in favour of the party that had established the social link.

A young man with immigrant parents had become politicized after having his citizenship applications turned down. A young woman with a similar life history got politicized by the discrimination or, more accurately, the everyday racism that she experienced:

And even though I'm Danish, I'm Danish! I came to Denmark as a baby and was 5 months old. But still I have experienced injustice ... But just to feel unfairly treated over nothing. Just that people can pass by you and then just say something. (Hanne, Øst)

Experiences related to one's social situation might also encourage young people to be active. This was the case for a young woman who had been inspired by seeing how her parents, and especially her mother, had managed to move upwards socially:

So, I come from such a reasonably privileged background, but none of my parents do that. They have enjoyed that they have been able to break the cycle of disadvantage. Something in particular that my mother has done. (Ann, Centrum)

A respondent got interested in tax policy because she felt that her father had been treated unfairly by working from early morning to late evening and then being ripped off by the taxation.

Another respondent adopted a neo-liberal economic political position in reaction to her father who treated her stubbornly while sticking to his own dogmatic socialist rhetoric:

I have never had to be a craftsman or anything. We do not discuss it in my family because it ends in a fight and my mum crying, because he is convinced that it is the workers that make all the difference for Denmark. (Britt, Centrum)

Social experiences that are gained in different life situations, typically in education or through parents' work, do also serve as experiences that trigger political awareness and interest. Parents may experience budget cuts or rationalisation at the work place and deliver such information to young people in everyday conversation. Sudden outsourcing of the parents' workplace and the parent being laid off as a consequence is also a key experience. It opens the door to the world of social risk.

Although parents largely sought to protect their children from being affected by social divisions, when eventually the knowledge is revealed, the reaction is much stronger:

I had probably a little culture shock when I met the outside world; that people actually had two cars and a house of more than 90 square meters; it was just a little bit a ... yes shocking in one way or another; it seems a little crazy when you look back on it today, but I was surprised by the wealth in some places. (Elin, Centrum)

Foreign travel works as a sublime catalyser, because it creates an alternative on all dimensions. A respondent, in America at the time, had the chance to participate in demonstrations against new state laws that attacked unions' rights. Being in a huge demonstration was experienced as something really different:

I took part in a demonstration where there was a governor named Scott Walker who took office in Wisconsin, where I was, and he was in favour of some laws which completely took away all the rights of trade unions. ... So we went to the demonstration in Madison, 100,000 people. It was a pretty great experience. (Brian, Centrum)

5.3.2 Political discussions and persuasion

Some respondents say that they have adopted their parent's political views. When the respondents express an awareness of such transmission, they are also aware of the political preferences of their parents. Their knowledge might not be on specific party political preferences, but they can place and position parental preferences within a small cluster of politically adjacent parties. Below one respondent expresses a vague idea about value congruence that has been developed as part of the socialisation in the family:

R: That's probably something that has been imprinted from home, I think.

I: Your parents are also [a specific party¹] people, or?

R: Yes. So I think, it must be something like that. And just like that, all the attitudes you have, the different parties, not a preference for just that party, but today you might agree with many things, perhaps it is something you are brought up with. (Kai, Øst)

This kind of reflexivity is characteristic of the way respondents think about the influence of their parents on their political identity development. They do not perceive it as a deliberate act of persuasion carried out by their parents. Adopting the same political attitudes as their parents seems more like developing common values, as one respondent puts it. Developing common values is not the result of a conscious act, just something that happens:

So I think, somehow, we have the same political beliefs in my family. Therefore, in that way I do not think so much that anyone has affected anyone else, but it is just the history we have had. And, it has just been more logical to turn in that direction. (Patrick, Centrum)

Another case shows that the children might also take a directly opposite stand than that of their parents. Contrary to the situation in the 1960s, what are found in these interviews are cases where the parents are left-wing, while the youth has become conservative or neo-liberal:

I: Is there a particular person who has had a special influence on your attitudes?

R: No, I think I have created them myself. My whole family is very red, so I am a little different there

I: You are kind of the opposition?

R: Yes. I think, perhaps, that when I was 16-17 years, I was a little rebellious, a rebel against my father, because he is [support a left-wing party]. It is the workers, etc. I thought this is nonsense. Then I have taken that angle. (Britt, Centrum)

In this case, the father aroused an antagonistic reaction. The quote is characteristic of the discourse often found in the interviews. The case is further characteristic for the kind of interaction that exists in families with oppositional views between children and parents.

In other interviews respondents explain that mothers confront their political view because it is too right-wing. Examples of mothers that do the opposite are not represented in the interviews.

In cases where the family is non-political, the inspiration for becoming political might also come from outside the family. Such an example is given by a young woman, who experienced the world of the political when she met her boyfriend's family:

Yes, I did actually when I began to get together with my boyfriend, because his family talked a lot about politics, and held attitudes towards it. And we did not in my family,

¹ Anonymized in the transcript because of the context.

in the same way. And they had a lot in school, and we actually had not. Also, I began, suddenly, thinking that this was really an exciting issue, which I certainly could be interested in a little too. Then I started to keep up with, for example, policy ... and so, what is the difference in the public and private sectors, and everything like that. Well, just followed with a sudden, in a completely different way, because there was someone to talk to about that in another way, too. (Doris, Centrum)

Here, the meeting with the boyfriend's family opens a new world of politics that had previously not been part of her life. This example illustrates how inspiration from outside the family creates an alternative environment that places the non-reflexive stance towards the given family in perspective and helps the respondent frame her own attitudes and opinions towards politics.

Political attitudes are influenced by discussion with parents. The outcome of these discussions is not a simple cause-effect relationship, but might display a much more diverse variety of forms of interaction.

One respondent gives an example of the total lack of communication:

I: Through your childhood and until you left home, did you discuss politics and things like that?

R: No, we have never done that, we watched the news while we ate, but there was never really any discussion of what was said. (Sanne, Øst)

Another case is the family where influence is gradually effected as a consequence of repeated efforts from the rest of the family:

Before, I was very [...], so I began to discuss it a little with my brother and mother when I was older. So they got me a little persuaded [towards supporting a more left-wing party]. I did not know quite what [first left-wing party] stood for then, and it just sounded very cool to say that you voted for [first left-wing party]. Then I read a little about the other. So it's [the second left-wing party] with a mixture of [the first left-wing party]. (Frances, Centrum)

As a consequence of the discussions about politics, the respondent's attitudes moved further to the left after what appears to have been the deployment of soft family power. The values and beliefs of the two parties are not contradictory, so there was no fundamental change in attitudes and it is not clear whether it is cognitive or emotional factors that prevailed in the process.

At the other end of the spectrum, respondents describe discussions with parents that are seen as enriching and enjoyable, not only when both sides agree, but also where they manage to establish discussions based on mutual respect:

I: Can you think of a certain person who has had a particular influence on your attitudes?

R: No, well it's a bit like that ... I think, it's a bit hard to say because we have always discussed a lot, and we have always challenged each other very much at home, so I have really got a pretty good base to form my own opinions, and I do not always agree with my [parents], but I have to give a lot of credit to my mum and her husband. That is because they have, what can I say? – They have encouraged you to take a position on what is happening in society. So they have not consciously foisted any position on me, but they have certainly helped me to shape and develop one. [...] We have always discussed a lot, and it has meant that I have been forced to take a position on it because I could not just come with empty arguments. (Ann, Centrum)

Roles as discussants could be unequally divided between parents. In many cases, the father appears to be the most sought after discussion partner, but the opposite is also the case. It seems to be the case that discussions take place with the persons that establishes the most egalitarian and respectful communication:

R: This is [with] my few selected friends and then my parents. I also do it with my dad, but it is not as often as with my mother.

I: Okay. On what occasions are you talking about it?

R: My mother is a news junkie, so she sits all the time and reads the newspaper, and I read a newspaper. My mother always hears the radio in the morning so that we can have a quick chat, and then she sees the news at night. With my father, it is at the dinner table. If there is anything he found too wrong, then it comes up. (Brian, Centrum)

A special case occurs when parents disagree politically. This might arouse emotional dissonance, while engaging in a discussion with the parents can lead to everything from a momentarily bad mood to a long-term negative relationship. The respondents typically choose to avoid conflict. They simply avoid engaging in discussions with the parents when disagreements are too strong.

In several cases, avoiding discussion takes place between respondents and their father. Most cases refer to a respondent who is more to the left than the father, but the opposite is also represented.

More atypical is the case where the respondent is in accordance with the father, but in disagreement with the mother. In one such case, the solution was to discuss politics with the father, but to avoid this with the mother. Conversation with her was about other aspects of everyday life.

A typical case is a young man who supports Liberal Alliance after being a supporter of Venstre, which his father supports. The women in the family, his mother and sister, support Socialdemokraterne:

R: My father and I have a lot ... we all share the same opinion. However, with my mother I do not share as many positions. Not that I do not love her, but we just do not agree on things. My father and I always ... It's probably my dad I've got my thoughts and ideologies from.

I: You go to your dad when you need to talk. When you talk to your mother, it turns into arguments once in a while?

R: No, there are no arguments. I'm fine with her, but we just do not talk about our thoughts and what we think in political terms.

I: It puts slightly an end to the conversation?

R: Yes, we disagree a lot. Not much, much, anyway. But it's mostly my dad I talk to these things about. (Chris, Centrum)

The positions observed among the respondents range from shared values and political attitudes developed during family interaction in childhood and youth to attitudes developed in opposition to parents. It is significant that family socialisation allows rooms for an independently developed political identity.

The communicative climate in families follows a similar pattern of tolerance. Young people are not necessarily in agreement with their parents, but there is also no conscious persuasion taking place. Persuasive discussions occur as well as mentoring, consisting of respectful and tolerant discussions despite the lack of complete agreement. In case of disagreement, it seems that the young people withdraw and avoid political discussions with the respective parent, while other sorts of communication are not withheld.

5.3.3 Social vision

Visions about a better society are drivers that guide political engagement. Respondents express such visions.

A better society is measured by lack of discrimination, where discrimination is understood as discrimination against immigrants. Thus respondents see a better society as one in which such behaviour no longer exists and as one that is more tolerant towards immigrants.

A better society is a society where welfare state principles exist as a reality. In making this critique, one respondent argues that Danish realities do not match the representations of Denmark as a supportive society that exist abroad, and that the welfare state should be improved so that realities are in accordance with principles.

These are not just idealistic formulations. Respondents mention a range of specific issues where improvements are possible and needed to bring society closer to what they understand as a better society.

Behind the different proposals and approaches to a better society, is the ideal of equality. Equality is a priority for some respondents when they mention the elements of a good society. No respondent claims that equality means sameness; many argue against such impressions. Equality is removing barriers, helping those without capacity, and removing inherited privileges. A good society is based on equality, understood as matter of equal opportunities:

It is the most important thing in my eyes, because it gives you the freedom that no matter how you are born into the society, you have the opportunity to get far. (Finn, Centrum)

The best that we can start with, it is, I think that the framework is there so that we give everyone a chance. It is at least in principle how our society works. (Ann, Centrum)

This leads to the idea of a fair and just society. Many respondents have a blurred idea of the meaning of justice. It is a concept that respondents need to reflect upon. They do not give simple answers, but reflect upon their views. Fairness is defined both as formal legality and in moral terms.

Basically, the respondents are divided in accordance with their political opinions. Welfare state followers take economic equality as their approach to fairness, while neo-liberal followers argue that fairness is the right to retain the product of one's own efforts instead of delivering a high proportion to the state.

Freedom is an often mentioned quality of Danish society that respondents emphasize. Freedom is a common denominator whether the respondent supports neo-liberal views or the classic welfare state perspective. It is commonly understood that society supports individuality, not only for those who can manage on their own, but also for those who need support from the state: 'The best aspects of Denmark are that we have the possibility to create our own lives. We all have good opportunities to have a meaningful life' (Eli, Øst). Such support is understood first of all as educational opportunities.

Further, freedom of speech is a symbol of the level of freedom in the society. Through a comparison with the fate of the Russian political music collective Pussy Riot, the freedom of speech in Denmark is characterised as one of the best aspects of society:

It is not the case that if we make a song against Helle Thorning, then uh oh, and you are thrown in jail for 5 years and are tortured and things like. We do not do this. (Hans, Centrum)

The urge for freedom of speech does also create a critical view on situations where ideal and reality are in conflict. Some complain that while one is allowed to speak, in practice nobody listens, or politicians might listen, but they are not moved by the communication. They remain unaffected.

There is widespread variability in the perception of which individual actions might help to develop a better society. One position is the ethical approach, which is sometimes rooted in Christian ethics. This suggests that you should treat others as you would have them treat you. Claims can only be legitimized through the moral behaviour that is displayed:

I think the only thing you can do is to be a good example yourself. So if you preach that you want to pay taxes, then you have to do it. I believe that you have just got to keep your nose clean, you might say. So, if you want something, then you have to live it then. (Dennis, Centrum)

Another view that follows this line is that ethical behaviour must be maintained and unethical behaviour cannot be justified just because it is the behaviour of the majority.

Passivity might also be a form of reaction, when an individual just feels that he or she cannot influence the way things develop. This is of course an individualistic approach to political action, but such statements are being found also among respondents that previously have been politically active.

The vision of the good society is a society characterised by harmony and community. It is characteristic that an inclusive society is an ideal. It is not an egoistic society that allows space only for oneself. The vision is the all-encompassing community:

A rare once in a while, you will experience a great community that actually makes you happy, something like New Year's for example. It is a lovely thing which unites in fact pretty much everyone. I like it when people get together in that way; that it does not always have to be focused on why we disagree, but that you will find some common values to work from. (Lasse, Øst)

It is stressed that Denmark is perceived as a good place to live. Not perfect, but better than possible alternatives. The core values mentioned are democracy, rules of law, and security.

For one respondent, a better society is rooted in nostalgia for how things were in the good old days. Satisfaction with things as they are is also an obvious reaction for the respondents who also praised the qualities of Danish society: 'Yes, I think that of course there are the small things that could be better, but overall I think that the preservation of the society we have is important' (Christel, Centrum).

Several respondents provide a vision of the good society, not as something different from what is known, but as a radical realization of what is already embedded within contemporary society.

Those following the social security discourse may also uphold a social protection discourse including the protection of the national labour market against foreign workers.

The welfare society is in general recognised as something that characterises Denmark as a good society. Even those who think that economic redistribution goes too far do not argue against the welfare society as such, they argue against the level of redistribution. The neo-liberal approach to a better society rests in tax policy. It is not claimed that this is an improvement for everybody, but it is proposed, because it is deemed justified.

There is a reservation about the implementation of radical changes. For one respondent, socialism is such a negative vision:

I am really, really happy with our society and do not necessarily see that a socialist revolution would significantly improve our world. [...] If we turned the whole world into a big communist benevolent system in which all had the same - then I could, for example, not afford to walk around with a new wrist watch, and then we two might share a tea bag, because there would be no money. There is no one in Denmark that really believes that we should all have the same. (Ida, Øst)

Danes are perceived to be among the happiest people in the world. Such an impression may appear to be confirmed by respondents, when they reflect upon the good dimensions of Danish society. When talking about minute details in Danish society, respondents do not refrain from criticism, but are equally critical when reflecting on the alternatives:

We are doing well, we are. I have to admit. (Rosa, Øst)

I think Denmark is a really nice country, and the way this welfare state is built. I would not exchange it for anything else. I feel really good here because we just do not lack anything and everyone is taken care of. (Palle, Øst)

Many respondents are aware of living conditions elsewhere in the world. This makes the judgement of their own conditions more positive.

5.4 Reflections on democracy

This section analyses respondents' conception of democracy as a principal societal order, and the conception of politics as a specific political organisation of society. Finally, the respondents' evaluation of personal and civic life within democracy is analysed. The statements used in this analysis are primarily derived from answers to the questions 'Politics is often discussed in relation to the idea of 'democracy': what does 'democracy' actually mean to you?', 'If I mentioned the word 'political' to you, what would immediately spring to mind?', 'Political parties/politicians are frequently labelled as 'socialist', 'neo-liberal' or 'conservative' and as 'right wing' or 'left-wing': do you think these descriptions capture the main differences between political parties?', and 'Do you experience democracy in your own life?'

5.4.1 Concept of democracy

There is a basic consensus among respondents about the meaning of democracy. Democracy is understood as peace, which in this respect means lack of civil wars. Democracy is understood as participation or co-determination. Democracy is understood as a form of conversation between inhabitants, which allows decisions to be made peacefully instead of using violence where the strongest win and decide:

Peace. It is partly the connection between democracy and peace, partly that it means co-determination; that society never is allowed to go off on a tangent. There will always be a counterbalance. (Dennis, Centrum)

A respondent mentions that democracy means freedom of speech, the right to express one's own thoughts about society and governance. Views on democracy and freedom of expression are closely knit. Again the opinions cover a wide spectrum and they might be in contradiction with each other. However, freedom of expression is seen as a basic right, and as something that should be fundamental to all sorts of social relations, because freedom of expression cannot be disconnected from the idea of co-determination:

Yes, I think, one thing might actually be pretty telling of my generation, the youth of today, we would like to have something to say in many cases. We do not like it if decisions are being taken over our heads. (Elin, Centrum)

The internet is added to the ingredients of democracy. The internet is perceived as something that has changed democratic conversation towards direct democracy. A respondent is attracted by the model of democracy in Switzerland, where referendums are common.

Another respondent says that democracy is self-evident. It is there, and the opposite is unimaginable. Democracy is part of all aspects of life. It opposes both the idea of totalitarianism, that one person decides everything, and it opposes the idea that social elites make the decisions.

The idea of an all-encompassing democracy provokes other respondents on the issue of gender roles. Some male respondents, but also some female, think that regulating the relationship between the sexes is not democratic. One respondent went as far as to claim that gender equality is against the law of nature.

The evaluation of democracy in Denmark is in general positive. There is no general critique of the way the formal political system functions and it appears that reality matches the ideals:

I: Would you say that the political system in Denmark is distinctly democratic healthy, or?

R: Yes, I would say. It comes as much in ... Now we have decided it should be democratic, and we have shaped it to be ... but it is also one of the systems in the world that is most difficult to corrupt. And I think that it is an indication that something is working. (Rasmus, Centrum)

However, a few critical remarks are to be found among the respondents. One is that the system is quite rigid; the constitution is almost impossible to change. The other is that the principle of representative democracy requires a concordance between politicians and their voters when this relationship is under threat because of breach of promises. This is most frequent criticism of current democracy and is seen as problematic because the relationship between politicians and voters is built on trust.

Parliamentary democracy in Denmark is thought to be potentially confusing because of the multitude of parties, but respondents see this as a democratic quality compared to countries where only two parties have managed to establish themselves.

There is a general observation that politics have become more pragmatic. Democratic ideals have turned into process oriented strategies instead of being oriented towards issues and problems. The increasing influence of the educated elites is mentioned as a threat to democracy. It might end up in technocracy.

Views that support restrictions of democracy are rare, but they can be found. Some respondents support expert rule: 'I am not in favour of dictatorship, but maybe I could support some sort of oligarchy, expert control of society' (Ida, Øst).

Another respondent supports technocracy as the preferred form of governance, because it reduces the risk of political populism:

It does not make any sense that we should waste taxpayers' money because there is someone who would like to continue to be thought well of. So I think it would be better to have some technocrats who could sit here and say that now we just calm down. (Patrick, Centrum)

A similar elitist point of view is put forward by a respondent. She thinks that many people lack the necessary knowledge to be allowed to vote. Before being allowed to vote, they should pass a test to be certified as a voter.

On the other hand, nobody argues explicitly for the abolition of democracy. Not even a respondent who argued that technocracy worked better, would defend it when prompted for a direct opinion:

I: Would you say that we might as well just have one big party?

R: Um ... No. I do not think so. Because that is the whole beauty of politics, it is that opinions are being shaped by the hinterland. Then you could also trust that those who now have different mandates and authorizations to sit, that they are going around and do the right thing. That it reflects those who vote for them. (Patrick, Centrum)

Less conventional suggestions include: nostalgia for a system of absolutist monarchy; a concern that majority decisions taken within parliamentary democracy constitute a form of dictatorship towards the rest; that democracy protects certain groups even if they do not contribute in the most positive way to society.

The high level of appreciation of Danish democracy becomes clear when the respondents compare democracy today with that which existed earlier. There are no indications that formal democracy had deteriorated, although it is suggested that democratic tolerance and the idea of political consensus might have declined:

More people are adopting the same position as me on issues like immigrants, for example, and things like that. [...]The more time passes without the problems being solved, the more frustrated people become, and the less democratic they become. (Anton, Centrum)

The respondents do not mention having experienced restrictions on freedom of speech in political life imposed by the authorities although there are examples of respondents restricting themselves, because they fear potential consequences. These range from simply being misunderstood, or the risk of getting into arguments to the risk that speaking in public might influence their labour market career:

Maybe I practice a little bit of self-censorship in many situations. If I can see that others think something radically different from me, then I may choose not to be straight and present the most radical of my opinions at the table. (Diana, Øst)

With the exception of democracy in Switzerland, which one respondent praises, the respondents may even be more positive about their own national democracy in comparison with that in other countries.

5.4.2 Politics and democracy

Many respondents think that they are in line with the population's general perception of politics. It is a perception that the political parties can be grouped in two blocks, a red and a blue block. This colour scheme, that today is associated with the American metaphors for Democrats and Republicans, was introduced by former chairman of Venstre Uffe Elleman-Jensen during the election campaign in 1994 (*Berlingske Tidende* 30.08.1994). In the Danish context, red signifies parties with a socialist element in their policy agenda, and blue signifies centre-right and right-wing parties:

I: If I mention the word politics, what is the first thing you think of when I say the word?

R: It's something with red and blue parties, and such. Christiansborg and - yes.

I: Do you think this is the general perception of politics among young people?

R: Yes, definitely. (Iben, Centrum)

Despite the fact that bloc politics has been quite rare in Danish parliamentary history, the strong bloc politics that dominated from 2001 to 2011 has created the perception among young people that this is the normal state.

Such a simplification of politics might, in the Danish context create indifference towards politics. This is the perception by one respondent that politics are being disregarded by young people:

I think that there are many other young people who do not care and are not concerned about what politics is. I think it is a shame that they resign from the community. But on the other hand, they also have the right not necessarily to participate. (Lis, Centrum)

From a democratic and an individualistic perspective, this is a legitimate position to take. On the other hand, besides ignorance, politics is also a source of frustration:

My view is that if you mention the term politics for people, then it is perhaps not the most positive word, one can mention. I also think it is a word which involves a lot of ignorance and a lot of frustration for many. (Nils, Centrum)

Respondents suggest that people have more and higher expectations of politicians than they are able to fulfil. One respondent states that the Dansk Folkeparti has been good at using the disap-

pointment felt by the population with cutbacks in the public welfare provision. It is perceived as populism, but recognised as effective politics.

Asked about what politics is, one respondent defines it as: freedom, freedom of speech, and no discrimination; legislation and taking care of the needs of citizens; freedom to travel and to be mobile, and free trade. Another respondent is aware of the how the concept is formulated in ideal terms, and he literally demonstrates that such issues are not commonly thought about or expressed:

Then I think of the conversations. And then I think that you should ... I do not know because politics that is not ... I do not know exactly about politics, if there was democracy before ... Or, there has always been politics.... That was a really tough question, but I will say: It is an open and honest conversation, politics. And discussion. So discussion, what is right and what is wrong, what to agree on. (Anton, Centrum)

Others are more pragmatic, politics is associated with the parliament. Major political issues occur: immigration, integration, and the economy. Political rhetoric and the political discourse are added together with politicians' trustworthiness and the breach of promises issue.

Interaction with the media is part of this conception of politics:

I think a lot of the media. All this spin that takes place. I feel often that they are trying to twist you around their little finger, us or the people, with all their good ideas; saying one thing and doing another. I think this is a big part of politics. (Egon, Centrum)

The respondent feels manipulated by the media and the politicians' spin.

One respondent finds Danish politics unattractive in comparison to international politics. This does not exclude political participation, but it makes it more selective; while joining a party is out of the question getting involved in specific campaigns remains possible. Such an opinion is even held by a respondent who became heavily involved in the campaign for a candidate to the national election in 2011.

The range of political experience goes from passivity to high activity. The most active are found in formal politics. Several respondents hold positions, or have held positions in political party organisations. In informal political organisations, high activity takes place outside the organisation. There are several indications that mobilisation begins in upper secondary school and then the level of activity declines when they leave it. It is rare that respondents have been active at an earlier age:

So, in Year 7 it was extreme not to be rebellious and be different; it was wildly extreme. But then it calmed down a bit. I went to a boarding school, so there were other things that were more important. (Helen, Centrum)

Against the proposition of having only one party, respondents either argue that they like the system as it is, or refer, negatively, to the USA where only 2 parties are represented. Having only one party, it is thought, would result in excessive standardisation:

I: Would it possibly be better with only one party rather than several competing parties?

R: No. The downside is that you only have one party that you can choose. That is ... we are not everything... There are 5 million of us. We do not all have the same views on things. (Rosa, Øst)

Political involvement is different depending on whether one sees it from the outside or the inside. One respondent recounts the experience of envy when a relative gets all attention during family gatherings, because he can reveal the inner life of national politics. Compared to that, ordinary life appears uninteresting:

I have a cousin who is in the parliament. He is going to be a spin doctor. And when he sits there and tells all those old aunts and uncles, they are off their chairs thinking, 'how bright you are'. Whereas I'm just thinking at that moment, 'Well, I have just washed two floors recently'. (Gurli, Centrum)

Seen from the inside, political life is fascinating. One respondent recounts how their involvement in political party life began, first as a concern with community, then with politics. These experiences are shared from the furthest left to the furthest right.

Respondents were asked about their perceptions of the differences between now and when their parents were young. Their picture of political engagement in the older generation is probably influenced by differences in social conditions. It is also influenced by how developed communication in the family. One respondent perceives earlier hierarchical relationships to have been replaced by more inclusive ones:

Very different. Children and adolescents did not have as much to say, many years ago when my parents, who are in their 50s now, they had to just keep quiet or else they were beaten. Now, politicians do like to hear our opinions. Although they should be a little better at it, I think, they want to hear what we think. (Egon, Centrum)

Many respondents have the impression that the difference between now and then is that young people are more involved and engaged today. They are not restricted by the older generation, in the way they perceive their parents have been. On the contrary, they might even be pushed into being active by their parents. The perception of respondents' parents is that they were suppressed and had to comply with their own parents: 'It was much like that in my parents' generation – if that is what my father says, okay, then I say that too' (Helen, Centrum).

One respondent adds that the material conditions for expressing a view in public is very different today. It required more effort for the parents to be politically active than it does for young people today:

Nowadays, anyone can have an opinion about anything and quickly get the meaning out into the media, even if it is a very small side-issue. I think back then, one would have had to really try to get an opinion out in public. I could imagine that today there might be more who would like to express an opinion about something. (Lis, Centrum)

One respondent states that impressions of the past are influenced by present conditions. Some have knowledge of parents' political activism or activism in the parents' generation. They have a different view of the difference in the level of activation, and they recall big issues that the parents' generation has put on the agenda, such as the student revolts, and resistance movements against nuclear power and the EU. However, the most typical argument is that in the parent's generation some might have been more engaged, but more are engaged in a different way today. Young people today are not allowed to escape involvement, one respondent claims.

Some respondents find it difficult to explain the differences in political involvement now and then. There is an awareness that society today is created by the parents' generation and that the high level of welfare and prosperity might have developed a complacency and ignorance towards politics:

I: Do you have a sense of - overall - now I assume that you also know others from the generations than your parents - how people were back then and whether people are more reluctant today, or whether it is roughly the same level?

R: Immediately I get the impression that we are a little more reluctant and self-contained.

I: Why do you think this is so?

R: Maybe because we might not have things that bad now. (Christel, Centrum)

5.4.3 Experiences of democracy

Respondents express that they might censor themselves in certain situations. Although nobody reported feeling forced into silence, they have felt more comfortable not expressing their opinions openly:

I: But have you felt that you could not express yourself and say what you want?

R: Well. Well, I think sometimes that can be. If you can sense that those you are with do not agree, then you keep the meaning to yourself. (Frances, Centrum)

Such situations where bad moods could appear are family and friends gatherings. Educational settings were not mentioned. Some have also experienced that the tone on the Internet can be rough, but none expressed experiencing any direct threats.

Democracy in everyday life is an extension of a concept designed to deal with citizens' relation to the state. Therefore, democracy in private life issues is not a right, but a possibility enabled by a power holder that invites co-determination. Parents' authority over children is regulated by law, and the relationship between employer and employee, as well as between student and teacher is regulated by a negotiated contract and legislation. Some respondents state that it is a contradiction in terms to ask about their experiences of democracy in the family. Others explained how parents had listened and negotiated in their upbringing. Talking with the child and giving the child responsibility is used as a proxy for democracy.

The negotiation family, which is the model just described, is typical for middle class upbringing (Zeuner 1994):

In our family, we have always talked about things if there have been problems. It has never been ... I have been brought up that you do what you want, but you must inform. It has never been that.... My sister and I have had to take responsibility our-self for how it had to be. Of course, our parents were in the background. (Chris, Centrum)

Many of the respondents had experienced parents getting divorced. Legislation allows shared custody, but many children suffer from lack of cooperation between the parents. This leads to very rigid schedules for the child's stay with each parent (Ottosen 2004). One respondent recounted the opposite experience when the child, not the parent, decided where to stay, and this was described as an example of democracy in the family.

Democracy in everyday life is when the children's view is taken into consideration and maybe even that they decide what the family is doing, for example during a vacation. Not all respondents have experience with more egalitarian relationships between parents and children. In such cases, typically the father is an authoritarian figure.

A respondent with immigrant background said that their father had become more democratic while in Denmark. The respondent draws this conclusion based on a comparison with the situation in the country of origin.

Democracy in the workplace requires co-determination and being listened to:

I: How do you perceive democracy in your own life?

R: In my work. The fact that we are heard. All employees have the Monday meeting where the boss calls us in and we are heard about how things are going and what we think and how we can influence the business. I would say that is democracy. (Freja, Øst)

The experience of democracy in the workplace shows that the level of democracy is restricted. It is perceived as democratic when the employees are being listened too: 'The manager is very much a leader. When a task comes in, you ought to solve it. It is a very militaristic style' (Finn, Centrum).

In the school, similarly, influence is seen as democratic, and at the same time, it is accepted that activities are structured by the institution.

With the exception of a few examples, relationships in schools and educational institutions are not interpreted in terms of democracy. One exception was when some respondents reflected upon the lack of influence they had if they were not satisfied with the teaching they received. A second exception is a teacher who had very negative psychological behaviour. The third is a respondent who claims that the school management dictates how things are at the institution.

The respondents all express that they feel democracy in their own personal life. Several respondents live in a partnership. When addressing democracy in the relationship, the statement is that nobody holds the power. There are, however, situations, where they are in a group and have to act as a group rather than each member acting individually. It seems that the decision model always in this case is a vote where the majority decides. This is perceived as truly democratic.

5.5 Civic and political engagement

This section analyses the respondents' experiences with and attitudes to civic and political engagement. The sub-sections are divided into five areas beginning with less political civic engagement in voluntary associations and ending with extremism beyond the political. In between low level political participation, political activism in organised formal politics and alternative new politics are discussed. In addition two areas are specifically addressed. This is political consumerism and internet activism. The statements are derived from answers to the questions 'Can you tell us about your experiences of participating in (formal) politics?', 'And what of less formal political activities?', 'Would you ever do something that was risky or even dangerous for a political cause?', 'Do your own political (ideological, moral or ethical) views ever influence what you buy?', and 'Have you ever been involved in internet activism?'.

5.5.1 Civic engagement

Trade unions have a controversial public. They have been viewed traditionally as pillar of the welfare state, and this perception is upheld by the following respondent for whom they represent all that is worth fighting for and supporting: 'Trade unions are very social. It is also really good when it comes to community and community feelings. I think it is fine' (Ida, Øst).

Another respondent confirms this and worries about the move away from the classic trade unions toward either so-called 'yellow trade unions' or no union membership:

Concerning trade unions, I follow it. I think it is interesting to see that people resign from the classic trade unions and joins the yellow [ones]. It is perhaps a slippery slope; it saves some money now, but in the end it undermines, how to say, the conditions of the employees. That is also something that concerns me. How it is going to develop.
(Finn, Centrum)

A substantial part of the civic activities reported relate to voluntary sports associations. Some hold positions on the board of the association, but many just carry out practical duties and obligations.

The motivation to become active in voluntary work is more altruistic than being active in political matters. The latter is concerned with changing general conditions in society, to improve conditions

for people and nature, and to remove unjust conditions. The former is specifically directed at doing something for particular fellow human beings without aiming to affect wider society:

The work that is being done there, in some way, helps a whole lot of Danish children to get some good experiences. In addition, I think that it is super cool. To send someone home punching the air, because they just had a great experience. (Rasmus, Centrum)

Therefore, it is not the case that participation in voluntary work is associated with political activity. Seen from the political field, it is in a strange way apolitical. Seen from its own perspective, it might be characterized as everyday life politics. The support is idealistic, but also passive. Being a member requires no active engagement, which seems to satisfy the expectations of some respondents.

Some respondents have experience of holding leadership positions which develop organisational and leadership skills that might be useful in organised political activity. Being a leader, for example, might reveal some of the underlying struggles for power that are part of organisational processes and is perceived as frustrating by the respondent who reports it. Later, such experiences might be perceived as skills.

Membership of or economic support to aid agencies is even less associated with institutional politics. The typical example is that a respondent donates money, but does not get involved in a time consuming way. Others stress that they perceive such organisations as non-political; supporting them adds, rather, an ethical dimension to life: 'When I am approached [by a funds collector], I cannot say 'no', and then I think, 'now I am feeling really good'.' (Vera, Øst). Such feelings might even occur in people that have a critical approach to international aid and are aware of possible corruption and fraud.

Some of the aid organisations have adopted a quite aggressive telephone campaign in their fundraising and some respondents cited this as the reason they had cancelled their membership.

Their non-political nature is mentioned by a respondent as a condition for supporting international organisations, such as Amnesty International. They gain credibility by not being identified with party politics:

It may be that I do not agree with them in all matters, but still it seems to me that it is good that someone is fighting for something fundamental, and that it is not directly a political party. That it is standing outside in some way. (Iben, Centrum)

Other respondents have the impression that the international environmental organisations can be positioned on a political distance scale. About Greenpeace, a respondent says that she could imagine that it was quite left-wing; that she 'imagined' this indicates it was not a knowledge-based attitude.

Another respondent, being prompted as to whether organisations, NGOs, could be positioned on a political distance scale, confirms that she thinks they can and aligns them all on the left side of the

scale from socialist to social democratic. She goes on to conclude that she knows of no such organisations that she would characterise as centre-right or conservative.

5.5.2 Political participation

The basic form of political participation is voting. Every single vote counts, it is often said. This is also the perception of one respondent:

I: What do you think [you achieve] by voting?

R: I think that if it goes well for the party you vote for that there will be some changes, if, for example, there were to be a general election, and if power went back to the centre-right, then you hope that some changes will be made compared to how it is now. It is more changes that I was hoping for.

I: You feel that when you vote, it makes a difference.

R: I definitely think it makes a difference. (Chris, Centrum)

The respondents have a high appreciation and respect for voting. It is also mentioned as a privilege and a civic duty. Several respondents mention how they persuade other people, their friends, to vote. The argument is used that voting is a civic duty, so if they do not want to vote for any of the parties or candidates, then they can leave a blank ballot:

R: I usually say to people I might not know well, the most important thing is basically just to vote. In general, it is not a discussion I seek, but if I just overhear it, I might but in.

I: So in a way you do it unconsciously?

R: No, it's not that I go around ringing doorbells or making calls to say 'now remember to vote'. But if I just get into it, I may think of encouraging people to do it.

I: Could you try to draw a picture of what that kind of situation might look like?

R: A situation could be, for example at home, if my girlfriend had a visit from a friend, who sat and talked and she was not interested in politics, then I could say to her, 'You don't have to be interested in it, but it is important to reflect on it and at least go down and cast a blank vote. Just to show that you have ...'. This could be a situation. (Nils, Centrum)

Although it is a very dominant attitude to vote in elections, there are exceptions. The statements made about not voting are not based on any elaborate argument or perception of why one should not vote. They appear rooted rather in lack of knowledge and maybe lack of socialization:

I: If we talk about voting in the parliamentary and municipal elections?

R: So, I will not vote.

I: Why?

R: I have no interest in it.

I: Do you not think it makes any difference?

R: No. (Carlo, Øst)

In this case, an immigrant background causes unfamiliarity with the parliamentary election system, but this is not exclusively an explanation, and immigrant background is not as such an explanation. Lack of awareness and interest is caused by other, typically socio-economic factors.

Compared to political participation through voting, being politically active through being a member of a political party is much less attractive. One argument against political party membership is that it is difficult to find a party that is in accordance with one's attitudes, and one's attitudes might change so that they are no longer in accordance with the party. One respondent claims to have rapidly changing preferences: 'I don't think it achieves enough, and my opinion changes sometimes so quickly that I would not have time to change the contingent payment' (Patrick, Centrum).

Such an attitude reflects a new approach to political parties. It is comparable with consumer behaviour that is found in the field of mobile phone subscriptions. Traditional demarcations seem also to have been dissolved. One respondent has been a member of both the social democratic and the centre-right youth parties, but then he lost interest in this type of political involvement.

Another respondent explains the dilemmas that occur because of the youth life course. About the age of 18, the respondent considered joining a political movement, but other things in life got priority: 'It just turned to dust, and it was not because my views changed or something, but then I got a job, and there were just a lot of things in my life right then' (Kate, Øst).

Some respondents avoid identifiable political participation because they are afraid of being identified in public with certain points of view. This is a part of the registration discussion. The persons do not want to hide their sympathies and viewpoints, but they are afraid that they are registered and stored, and this might prove to be a stigma in the future.

The respondents do not live in political camps. They interact with persons regardless of their political belief. They have reservations about those who are highly committed: 'They will insist their party is 100% correct. If they are socialists, then everything others are saying is wrong. I don't agree with that fully' (Britt, Centrum).

Thus, one reason for not having joined a party might be that they want to maintain the freedom to take their own position, instead of being obliged to follow the party line. Interactions with friends with different political views might be problematic. In some cases it is possible to avoid getting into discussions, but in others, it is not possible, and one respondent says that listening to certain views could arouse negative emotions. This is often the reason why respondents do not engage in discussions.

It is quite common that the respondents manage to distinguish between other persons as persons and as political individuals. It is not common to judge a person on the basis of their political belief. A person can be respected despite holding completely opposite political views to one's own.

The level of commitment differs. Some might move in circles where all are members of the same party or support the same political movement. Such relations might turn into a camp. Others have a more flexible relationship. It is not unusual to find friendship circles that consist of people with diverse political attitudes and sympathies. Having both friends that are members of the most left and the most right wing parties in the parliament is such an example.

Such friendships might be irritating because the politically active friends appear totally committed: 'If you talk to them, then they go into it a lot. One of them has just been elected to the city council for VU, so every time you talk to him then all you hear about is politics' (Joan, Centrum). Even among members of the same party, political discussions are not necessarily sought and can appear to be a waste of time: 'If I talk to someone who also is centre-right, then we can sit there and pat each other on the shoulder all evening. I can't be bothered with that kind of thing' (Freja, Øst).

There are no indications that having politically active friends leads to political activity. Individualization is the key word in young peoples' social interaction. They engage and disengage in accordance with their life situation. Therefore, there is a high level of political engagement in upper secondary school, but for many the transition to higher education is a break that discontinues the political activity.

The range of political experience with political activity is wide. For many, political activity is limited to voting in the elections and being a member of a student council or a youth parliament. One respondent had experience of running for election to the municipal council. Another had been involved in a candidate's election campaign for the national parliament.

There are individuals who have not been engaged at all. Some have not considered being active, others have considered it, but decided against. One of these made her decision out of disgust for political life:

I considered becoming a politician, but then I found out how much mudslinging there was and how little respect there was for politicians in the media, then I said, I didn't want it. (Bente, Øst)

A previous activist in party politics was considering becoming active again if things changed radically in society in the coming years.

The motivation to engage in party politics might come from different sources. One respondent whose parents and grandparents were both politically active became active herself. However, the interest might wane also; one person who had been a member of a leftist youth party at a very young age got tired of the lack of development and left again:

But I resigned at a fairly early age. Because ... I think that was what the ... I think people were too idealistic and not realistic enough in reality. And therefore, I did not really get anything out of it. And it does not seem real, that it shifted anything, for me personally or for others. It was more about having an identity for young people, I think, and having a political opinion, more than being about debate and new thinking for me. (Elin, Centrum)

Being a member of a party is a search process that sometimes does not lead to a goal. The inner life of the party might contain something quite different from what was expected. In this case, the respondent expected to find a forum for political discussion, but found a circle for identity building instead.

One respondent compared experiences from being a member of two left-wing youth parties. The two differed in style: one was more engaged; the other more relaxed. The engaged party organised its work efficiently, while the less engaged appeared to be so loosely organised that it verged on disengagement.

Political membership might also happen by accident. One respondent recounted how she had got drunk at a party and ended up being recruited to a political party. Although she had maintained her membership, she did not participate actively in the political activities.

Being a member of a political party is not a lifelong commitment. It may even be a sort of testing process; you join to find out what is going on and then you make a decision. In this way decisions about political participation are comparable with decision making in other life situations, such as in consumer behaviour. Other respondents are inclined to join a political party, but their decision to join might be hindered by lack of self-confidence or by holding a self-perception that makes it too complicated or filled with risk to become active. It requires certain personality skills and cooperative abilities to succeed in a group, which some respondents do not expect to possess or to be able to develop. One respondent specifically mentions the risk that, eventually, she will have to leave because she tends to let disagreements ruin relationships.

Engagement in political parties is still less commonly mentioned than other types of activity. The most typical is engagement in voluntary associations, where committed persons contribute substantial work. Activities that are more political in content are less common. The most common such activities are signing a petition or gathering signatures on a petition. The level of involvement in such activities appears almost comparable with voting.

It is artificial to compare young people's political participation today with previously. Many respondents declare they are unable to make such a comparison. Of those who do have an opinion about it, one view is that the political participation of the parents is seen to determine the level and the form of engagement of the young people. Today's youth are perceived as more engaged than previous generations: 'I think that the newer generation is more ... they're maybe a little more daring and go a little more to the extreme, such as throwing stones or whatever' (Britt, Centrum).

Another respondent claims not to be able to say if there is a difference, but still holds the opinion that politics has become more confrontational. The judgment is built on assumptions; it is not rooted in knowledge:

I do not know if it is just because young people nowadays have a very rigid approach. That might well be it. However, yes especially in the media. I cannot see anything else than that. Many of the young people who are in these youth organizations have very marked opinions. (Bente, Øst)

Comparison might be difficult for young people with immigrant background as they do not have relevant opportunities to compare.

Making such cross-generational comparisons is difficult. Comparing youth today with parents today, as one respondent do, is misleading because of a generation effect in political activity. Lack of knowledge, however, is the most obvious reason why such comparison is difficult.

The form of involvement among today's youth may seem lower than previously. This is because the kind of involvement is different from previously. Now people are active more in the social media (something discussed in section 5.5.4).

5.5.3 Political activism

Respondents have different sorts of experience with demonstrations. Many have participated in demonstrations in upper secondary school. Often it was only once, and it was related to economic decisions that politicians had made.

Others participate or have participated in demonstrations in other fields and with different purposes. Participating in a peaceful protest demonstration against the massacre committed by Anders Breivik is one example that is mentioned.

A respondent mentions a demonstration concerning environmental issues, and it is stressed that it did not lead to any sorts of escalation. The respondents are painfully aware of the difference between non-violent and violent political actions.

As one of the few experiences with participating in violent demonstrations, one young woman recounted how she had travelled to Copenhagen to participate in the demonstrations against the demolition of Ungdomshuset. She was only 14 years old, and her parents did not know. Today, she admits, she would not go again. It had been a scary experience, because the atmosphere was so unfamiliar, and there had been an intense aggressiveness and much violence. Later it became a learning experience, because she has become aware of the quality of arguing. She realizes that there is a difference between just shouting slogans and engaging in a discussion about the substance of the issues. She explains this by suggesting her societal horizon has been widened.

There are also examples of learning processes that go in the other direction. One young man reflects on whether the lack of awareness displayed at demonstrations might change if the behaviour in demonstrations got more violent. He blames the media for indirectly fostering violence, because it is only violent actions that are exposed in the media:

Now, I will not say that I would urge people to smash houses and throw cobblestones, but it seems sometimes, as if we are only heard properly, when we begin to make trouble; then there is a sudden media attention, and so on. (Kevin, Centrum)

On the other hand, some participate in demonstrations, because they think that it is important to express their opinions, although they see the other side of the coin as well. They are aware that the outcome is low, probably. They point to other facets of demonstrations. A demonstration has also a social mobilising effect. Although it is counterbalanced by the frustration, when it shows that the demonstration had no impact and no change happened. The demonstration is valued on its own, because it creates a collective spirit and a fascination for the situation.

A more experienced demonstrator mentions that demonstrations are smaller nowadays, and it is more difficult to arrange a demonstration. His explanation is that young people have become frustrated and that they have lost confidence in politicians. Young people have realised that the politicians are immunised against being persuaded by demonstrations. They close their ears.

Respondents hold clear and well-argued views of different forms of political activism. The typical attitude to demonstrations as a means of political activism is that it is positive as long as it is non-violent. Respondents are concerned about being inside or outside the law, but they are also aware that demonstrations are a constitutional right of citizens: 'I think that in a democracy you will have to argue your case. Otherwise, anyone with the biggest gun can decide' (Bente, Øst).

It is stressed that basically, politics is driven by political dialogue. From this point of view, writing letters to the editor is enriching due to the fascination that occurs during the process of writing, and because it forces you to formulate and clarify arguments:

It is crazily satisfying, I think, when I get it done. It is just not often that happens, unfortunately. It is really cool. What's more, that you are forced to articulate your thoughts clearly. (Carina, Øst)

Letters to the editor are only mentioned by one respondent. To her it was a very exciting experience with a lot of positive feedback that turned her into a regular writer of letters to the editor.

Petitions have been used by many respondents. Many respondents had signed a petition although no respondents reported having organized one. Signing a petition is seen as uncontroversial. There is although one argument that point in another direction. By signing, the person also leaves a mark in history about an opinion at a certain point in time. This can be traced, or if the person is uneasy about what such knowledge might be used for, it is better not to sign.

The attitudes to activism are diverse among the respondents. There are respondents that hold a negative attitude to political protests. A respondent argues that it is easy, but un-constructive to criticize and protest. Appropriate behaviour is to put forward constructive propositions. Political activism is bad manners, she argues.

Reflecting on the outcome of political activism, and why it is important to be active, a respondent recalls her activist history, and states that she is convinced that it is the right thing she has been doing, and she would not have done otherwise if she could do it all over again.

According to Fishbein's theory, activism is supposed to develop attitudes, but the opposite might also be the case (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). Participating in political actions leads to critical after-thoughts. The respondent gets into questioning whether the arguments that have been adopted are in fact true:

I also think that I have experienced that there have been times where it has been a little too childish, and where I think 'hi, you know what, this you are perhaps a little too adult to be involved in'. (Eli, Øst)

Finally, one respondent answers very pragmatically that it is not a problem when friends engage in activism, as long as they do not use their time together to discuss political actions.

The typical attitude to political violence is rejection. Most respondents reject violence simply because they are uncomfortable with the consequences or because it breaks their behavioural Code of Conduct. Some express themselves hypothetically, when they say that in extreme cases, such as a revival of the Occupation, then they would consider using violent actions, but their examples are so hypothetical that it is almost an unconditioned denial. Therefore, it is interesting to observe the few statements where respondents have a more elaborate positive attitude to the use of violence. One example is when a respondent formulates radical attitudes concerning deviant criminals combined with sympathy for vigilantism and a critical view on the human rights declaration. Evil against evil is how they envisage it.

Strikes and blockades are part of trade union activism. In the autumn when the fieldwork took place a specific case was high on the media's agenda. Only respondents with neo-liberal political views express opinions concerning this case; they are against the unions:

I do not think that we can allow ourselves to do such things because people decide which union they will choose. So it goes beyond what I think is politics. It becomes more of a personal smear campaign to me, in my eyes at least. (Nils, Centrum)

Willingness to engage in risky political behaviour is seen as a first step towards extreme activism. The respondents do not contribute to this picture. Their approach to risky behaviour is hypothetical. They answer as if the scenario was a question of national patriotism. One such example is a respondent with strong nationalistic sentiments who displays a super patriotic attitude. Several respondents have similar opinions, but none with such a strong form of national patriotism.

The other situation that is addressed is political actions, such as demonstrations and the like. Here, it is not possible to find respondents who directly propagate the use of violence or say they presently are involved in such activities. Some reflect on it, but they end up rejecting it for several reasons. They are not willing to run the risk, after all, but mainly they do not think it is legitimate:

No. Not where I could risk being beaten down and sit on the cold ground for a very long time. It is not for me. I do not feel well with coming across the law. So, I would rather find another way to support than to go out and, well ... (Hanne, Øst)

One respondent is prompted by a provocative remark from the interviewer that she has been a member of a radical activist organisation, but she rejects the accusation stating that the question is based on a misperception of the organization, which is actually non-violent: 'Well, we did something called 'car-free city', where a police officer told us to move away, but then it is not ...' (Kate, Øst).

5.5.4 Political consumerism

Political consumerism is a question of conscious behaviour. A specific place to start is in the local community. One respondent perceived it as political to support the local grocery store and to buy

Danish products instead of imported goods. Another area where political consciousness influences consumer behaviour is health. Ecologically produced food, especially vegetables are mentioned.

Political consumerism is mixed up with bad consciousness. There are two types of political consumers. The first act in accordance with principles, the second regret not being able to do the right thing. This is sometimes because it is too difficult, but more often it is because it is too expensive. The typical explanation as to why respondents do not act in accordance with their principles is that their economic budget does not allow it.

There is also a group of respondents who react against this idea of political consuming. They do not choose such products because they are not aware of the problem, or they disagree politically. For the latter, it is a principle not to buy products that are perceived as politically correct. Being anti-ecological is in this respect a political attitude as well: 'I do not care what is written on the things. I do not look at what country it comes from. I look at it to see whether it looks as it should, and if it is good quality' (Jane, Øst).

Among the respondents, there are many negative expressions about political consumption. A former friend is characterised as vegan and wearing clothes that look like a farmer's sack. Some respondents deny that political consciousness influences what they buy. They buy as cheap as possible, and this is their only principle. Some almost provocatively describe their consumer behaviour to demonstrate how politically incorrect they are:

I love fois gras and I love caviar. I can just say that right away. If I could eat lobster every day, I would also do that. And I got eels here for Christmas, so I will not... There is not anything I would not eat. (Patrick, Centrum)

They willingly eat food that is produced unsustainably or that is criticised from an animal welfare perspective. These are not positions that correlate with how well off the respondents are.

Fairtrade is not only a symbol of political consumerism; it is an active support to producers in the third world. There is an almost undivided recognition of the Fairtrade principle. Whether or not the respondents buy Fairtrade, is an economic decision because of the higher price on these products. As one respondent says, at the beginning of the month, it is easier to be politically correct than at the end of the month. Economy matters: 'It is also a good coffee. ... And I do not think I am so economically tied that I cannot allow myself to buy some more expensive products, and then get something decent' (Rasmus, Centrum).

Ecology and animal welfare are two areas where ethical sentiments are most strong. The respondents that support ecology and animal welfare do it out of strong belief. Some have been influenced by the behaviour of parents; others have developed their attitudes independently.

Vegetarians differ in their level of commitment. Vegans stand out. Some hold perceptions of a commitment that is very strong. Therefore, it might be a bit difficult to admit if former vegetarian behaviours have been omitted: 'So I have a sister who is still vegetarian.... So my husband has noticed at least when we are out and eat that I never eat meat when they are present' (Kate, Øst).

Respondents mention that consumption is very much influenced by family attitudes and behaviours that were learnt through upbringing. The ecologically conscious attitudes among parents are inherited by the young people.

Political boycotts are part of political consumer behaviour, because efficient boycotts might have a devastating influence on the companies they are directed against. Respondents mention products where they know that they are produced by child labourers or very low-paid workers. This is especially a question of food, leather, clothes, and flowers. Boycott of products that could be related to the arms industry is mentioned of more political and ethical reasons: 'I would probably not buy things that support the arms industry or something silly like that' (Patrick, Centrum).

Other examples are mentioned, such as specific products or companies, or boycott of products from specific countries. Specific large companies' treatment of their employees and monopolistic market behaviour are further reasons for establishing a personal boycott.

Political boycotts cannot unequivocally be positioned on a political distance scale. It is more typical that political boycott correlates with left-wing political attitudes, but there are many nuances involved. Political boycotts are used across the political spectrum.

5.5.5 Internet activism

Political use of the Internet is the most common form of political activity. The internet is the dominant site for respondents' political activities and Facebook the most common medium used.

There are two approaches to Facebook; one is observing by interest, the other is participating by delivering comments or by commenting on comments.

A typical politically engaged Facebook user observes and reads but normally does not comment, unless he or she has been really provoked. One respondent adds that there is no need to expose political attitudes on Facebook, because your friends are very well aware of them anyway and this reflects a wider reticence among respondents to reveal political attitudes on the net. As other respondent comments, it is easy to write something on the net, which means that it is easy to say something that might not have been thought through too well. This could be regretted later on, but would still be traceable on the net.

'Liking' postings on Facebook is more common than commenting; an even easier way of expressing one's attitude:

So, if you come across a page 'Support this, fight for ...' I think that it is very exciting to click through and read what it is about, and if I agree, then I press 'Like'. Then it comes up on my page what they continuously update about what is happening, and what they have done. (Frances, Centrum)

There are a few examples of respondents who use Facebook actively for political activism. Such examples are related to political parties and interest organisations.

The respondents' experiences have taught them that it requires good communication skills to communicate on the net. You have to be fast, and it is easy to be misunderstood and misinterpreted; the tone can easily turn unpleasant.

Respondents' views on freedom of speech on the net differ. Some see the internet as facilitating endless discussions, consuming large amounts of time and involving a seemingly never ending range of participants through the online flow of comments and access possibilities to the discussion. Others, however, feel that communication is indirectly censored, because it is expected that, for example, employers will search the net to draw a profile of applicants for positions. A third view is expressed by a young person of ethnic minority origin, who thought that freedom of expression had been diminished as a consequence of the cartoon case. The claim is that, since the cartoon case, it has been more difficult to express deviant views within the minority community, because they are met with strict responses.

An example of the new cautiousness is mentioned by a respondent who thoughtlessly posted on the net, and the posting still pops up when her name is being googled:

I try to keep my internet path very clean. So, it should really be something that I'm passionate about before I would leave tracks. ... One of my Communist friends got me to write my email on a website some time ago, and it still pops up if I google myself.
(Sanne, Øst)

Internet activism outside of Facebook does not differ in substance, only in the forms and channels used. Some internet activists may use a lot of time on the net following discussions:

In recent months, especially after I moved home, it has probably calmed down, because there have been other things that have been ... that have occupied me. But usually ... I expect to return to that [how it was previously]... that would mean a couple of hours a day, with a few exceptions, which I use to either explore a current event, or to have some discussion about the same, or just something a bit loftier. (Elin, Centrum)

Another respondent uses the internet as a modern equivalent of a discussion circle. He discusses only with friends he knows in person. Only one respondent differs from the general picture, being a member of countless discussion forums.

The use of twitter seems rare, although one respondent uses it and prefers it to other forums: 'Twitter is a bit more political and a little more serious where you get some really exciting contributions to the world situation' (Ida, Øst).

There are diverse experiences of activism in Internet discussions. The experience is that it is one thing to discuss with known friends and a completely different thing to discuss with unknown persons on the net. In the former case, the discussions are respectful, while in the latter, comments might be quite negative: 'If strangers, then it may well be that some are negative and incapable of tolerating criticism' (Jane, Øst).

Like in other areas, the use of the net can be more or less serious, and it allows activity that would not be possible face to face, such as improper behaviour or the use of faked identities: 'You just say you are in SF when you are in there, and you lie a bit. ... Sometimes I enter the discussion. [...] ... Super cool. Nobody finds out about it' (Frances, Centrum).

There is little knowledge to be gained about the relationship between internet activism and face to face activism from the interviews. An activist in party politics sees internet activism as a supplement to, not a replacement for, real activism while an activist from the non-formal sphere explains how his internet activism led to his recruitment to real activism: 'It has been a bit of a chain reaction. Because of Facebook activism, then I was introduced to [an association] and I was asked to be their coordinator...' (Palle, Øst).

5.6 Evaluation of politics

This section analyses the respondents' evaluation of contemporary politics. It takes a comprehensive approach to politics by looking at perceived differences between the parties, and the evaluation of parties and their leading politicians. As part of this analysis, the significance of the charisma of politicians for the attractiveness of a party is considered, or whether, on the contrary, political leaders might put off followers. The role of the media in constructing the image of politics is analysed also. Finally the attractiveness of political alternatives at or outside the political edge to respondents is analysed, and the question of the perception of and possible attraction to extremism is addressed.

The statements are derived from answers to the questions 'Have you ever felt attracted to a particular political party?', 'How have the current (or recent) government and state institutions responded to the issues [the best things about the society, and its worst aspects; tensions or conflicts in the society; inequality] you have just described?', and 'Are there other parties or politicians who are addressing these issues?'

5.6.1 Political parties, politicians and political leaders

Socialdemokraterne is the leading party in the government. Respondents identify the core political idea of the party thus:

The Social Democrats are clearly prioritizing overall welfare and they retain the view that one should try to care for the weak, even if it is expensive. I think that there is enough breadth in Socialdemokraterne for individuality to be allowed. (Dennis, Centrum)

It is recognized that the party is both socially and economically responsible although several respondents expressed the view that the party's politics has moved to the right. The current prime minister does not have a high reputation among the respondents, including female respondents. She is seen as an obstacle rather than an advantage for the success of the party and the government.

Radikale Venstre is the most right-wing of the parties in the government. Its distinctive feature is the way it combines economic and welfare policy with policies related to wider values. It attracts several respondents and many have considered supporting it, but were deterred by its political profile. The leader of the party is perceived as a skilled politician and a good communicator. She is found sympathetic by many respondents. One of the respondents joined the youth section Radikal Ungdom, because of the mother party's immigration policy.

SF is the leftist member of the government. Respondents sympathetic to the party express frustration about the development of the party since it joined the government: 'It is never 100% clear, I think, when they talk about political parties, what really constitutes a socialist party' (Doris, Centrum).

The former leader of SF has lost his reputation after becoming a member of the government. By some respondents he is perceived as weak, and respondents mention that he is ridiculed in YouTube videos.

SF is not mentioned as an alternative to Socialdemokraterne. On the other hand, it is quite common for respondents to choose between SF and Enhedslisten. Some respondents mention that they have switched between SF and parties on the right at the elections.

SF has a youth section, SFU, which is very active in upper secondary schools. SF and its youth section, SFU, have several followers among the respondents.

Enhedslisten has many followers as well. It appears that their followers are more committed. Many express support because of the party's clearly formulated policy: 'I thought that it is appealing that they say what they think. Of course, I also tend to agree with their ideas about how society should be, the socialist idea' (Carina, Øst).

It is perceived as a strength that the party stands up for its principles. The party on the other hand encounters strong rejection. Several respondents say that this is a party they would never consider supporting. With a few exceptions, the political speaker for Enhedslisten is recognised as a clever politician by the respondents across the political spectrum; even among respondents who deeply disagree with her politically. They mention that her personality and personal charisma is outstanding.

SUF is not a youth section of Enhedslisten, but they support the party. Several respondents have been members of this organization, but left when their political activity declined. The pattern of recruitment to SUF and SFU seems quite similar.

Venstre is the leading party in the current opposition. It appeals to many respondents because of its mix of economic policy and a welfare state profile. Some respondents are committed followers, but more are still considering whether it is the right choice:

They move a little ... Such that they are also suitable for society even today. The same applies to a party like Venstre. It would be a little exaggerated to say that they were pure neo-liberal. (Ann, Centrum)

The former leader of the party, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, divides the respondents. The critical approach is that he was very authoritarian and led Denmark into international warfare. The sympathetic approach is that he was very skilled, well organised, and a very good communicator: 'I think Anders Fogh, he was probably the most charismatic politician there has been, but I did not agree with anything he said' (Palle, Øst).

He had, even among his opponents, a charismatic reputation. His successor has followers among respondents that support the party, but he is viewed negatively because of the extensive criticism he has received over his use of money, both in his personal use of public money and in his politics, such as the economic model for private hospitals in Denmark.

The more neo-liberal respondents support Liberal Alliance. The followers of the party are strongly committed. Their supporters like the party's pure neo-liberal ideology. On the other hand, those who disagree with the party do it very strongly, and opponents criticize the party's approach to the welfare state. It is mentioned by respondents that one of their parliamentarians has gained much publicity because of a rather provocative attitude in the public debate over recipients of social benefits.

Konservative has a stronghold in the area where the fieldwork has been carried out. One of their few parliamentarians was elected in the city. There are strongly committed followers among the respondents. To many the party has been a possible choice; often being seen as an alternative to Venstre: 'I was conservative for some time. But it was a little too old-fashioned... yes, it had a little too old-fashioned atmosphere about it sometimes' (Iben, Centrum). Even among the respondents who are party members, there is a feeling that that the party has grown old and needs modernization. The leader is perceived as dull and without public impact.

The youth section, Konservativ Ungdom, is an independent organisation. It is a recruitment path to the mother party. Some of the respondents are committed members.

Dansk Folkeparti is perceived to be most to the right among the parties in the parliament. It is rejected by the strongest leftist respondents because of its strong opposition to immigration and negative attitudes towards immigrants. Especially, the key persons in the party have gained much publicity. Many respondents have an outspokenly negative attitude to the former leader of the party. Her rhetoric is perceived to be too harsh, and attributions such as cynical and arrogant are used. This is the politician that attracts most negative opinions among the respondents. While the former leader has a predominantly negative image, the current leader receives positive comments because he appears as highly skilled and always well-prepared.

The respondents can be divided into two categories. In the first group, the typical respondent views the political parties with insight and differentiates meticulously between them. They are aware of the significant differences, which they recognise as existing despite some general critique of the parties being too dependent on polls and that they are all trying to conquer the political middle. Several respondents are, or have been, members of a party. In the other group, respondents are characterised by lack of awareness, lack of interest, lack of knowledge, and misperceptions. This leads to poorly reasoned opinions, often based on shallow generalisations. One example of such an opinion is the claim that all parties are equal and they all run in the same direction:

I do not think they care very much about the agenda, I do not think they have any concrete suggestions, so often I really find that I have the opinion that a party has the attitude the majority of Danes want to hear. (Doris, Centrum)

The underlying assumption in such opinions is that politics has become more short-sighted, more pragmatic, more responsive to current issues, and more dependent on opinion polls. It seems that several respondents subscribe to this view.

5.6.2 Parties and politics

Respondents' evaluation of the role of parties and politics in the current situation is largely characterised by disappointment. This is particularly true of those who had voted for a change in government:

I personally have been disappointed with the red government. But it is just again because you have told yourself that a red government offers red politics, but it does not necessarily do that; especially because they have Radikale with them, and they are also a mixture of everything. (Hanne, Øst)

The respondents seek clarity in politics and cooperation in practice. Many support consensus seeking negotiation; many even support, or accept policies, that are not in their own interests, as long as they perceive the policies to be fair and just. Lack of a balanced politics is, on the other hand, criticised:

I understand the SU-reform, but one of my political friends posted on Facebook yesterday that they are also in the process of buying a very expensive fighter. I think that the priorities should be reversed; defence and war in Afghanistan is not essential when you compare it to establishing a proper education system and treating citizens properly. (Sanne, Øst)

The political parties are valued by their supporters and disliked by their opponents. The discourse about parties is nuanced and fair. Often, respondents are able to take an impartial stance towards the parties and emphasise strength and weaknesses among their own preferred party as well as others:

There is also something about the neo-liberals that I think is cool, and the way they do things ... such as that you are the master of your own fate; you are responsible for your own life, but at the same time we have to think of the weak in society. (Frances, Centrum)

Noteworthy is one respondent who is a member of a right-leaning party, who is very critical of his party's leader and at the same time praises the leader of one of the leftist parties, although he does not sympathise in any way with the party.

Respondents praise parties that clearly set out their policy:

I think it is fine, that is, the closer they are to each other, the more they must also really make clear what they stand for, so you can see that ... that it makes a difference whether you vote for one or the other. (Iben, Centrum)

However, it is widely accepted that the middle of the political spectrum is relatively crowded and many respondents admit that they have difficulty figuring out the differences between the parties and their policies.

There is a general view that the small parties hold stronger views on specific issues, while the two big parties, each of which have put up a candidate for prime minister, are perceived to be more pragmatic: 'Venstre and Socialdemokraterne are a little more down to earth. And they can identify the things that can actually be turned into something in the long run' (Lis, Centrum).

One respondent proposes that values and the economy might serve as a better criterion for distinguishing between the parties than left and right. This left/right difference is also recognised, but it is felt that the differences between the parties are much less prominent in Denmark than in other countries, such as the USA.

The general perception is that there is common ground that the major parties cannot ignore, consisting of a mixture of both welfare state principles and economic liberal principles. Parties are perceived as becoming more similar in the sense that they all target the same middle class population. Differences still exist, but parties underplay them to be attractive in the eyes of the voters. Therefore, similarities between the parties might look greater than they really are, and the parties on the edges might look more radical in comparison.

The tax issue has functioned as a way for one of the new parties to distinguish itself from the others. This party has proposed a flat rate tax, which is perceived as the most radical attack on the principle of economic redistribution in the welfare state policy: 'I think hardly a day goes by without some issue they can discuss their disagreement on; as long as that continues, there are at least significant differences' (Nils, Centrum).

Some respondents regret that the old idealistic parties do not exist any longer, although the reasons for this regret differ. The typical approach is that it makes politics more transparent. Others prefer clearer differences, because then politics can be more demarcated.

Distrust in politicians is a major theme. Contrary to trust in democracy, respondents believe that trust in politicians has declined compared to previously. 'Spin' is a commonly used word, and it has a negative connotation. Spin is mentioned in connection with polls, and one respondent interprets the behaviour of politicians as steered by polls. Polls tell them who the captured voters are, and who the available voters are and how to get them. Therefore, the argument goes, political debates will address the marginal voters:

Politicians, they would like to have the vote; they would like to get hold of those who do not know whom to vote for. They are the ones they want to reach, because they know through this Megafon² that they have the rest. I do not know what they are doing; I have never been contacted by Megafon and asked what I would vote for. (Kevin, Centrum)

Developing new political elite is a social and political problem:

I think that maybe politics has been something fewer people actually get involved. ... My impression is probably just that politics has become a little more for a tightly knit group, where you might have politicians in the family. (Finn, Centrum)

The other part of this elite phenomenon is that politicians to a larger degree are recruited from a narrow social segment of those highly educated in the social sciences. People with other sorts of experience do not get elected to the parliament to the same degree, so the social variety and the variety in life cycle experiences become more and more absent in parliament.

The form that is taken by political debate is commented upon negatively: 'I like all of politics. I just do not want to listen to it because it is like a bunch of kindergarten kids who try to put each other out of the game' (Vera, Øst).

Again, political discussion is perceived as a kind of game instead of being a discussion that follows the principles of conversation. One of the respondents imagines this being replaced by an ideal speech act situation in which interlocutors engaged in a robust exchange of arguments, aimed to achieve mutual understanding and eventually reached an agreement based on compromise.

5.6.3 Politics and the media

The internet has changed the reception of politics and the news, and this is reflected among respondents. Many view webpages regularly and a few are high volume users:

I: So it is at all possible times of the day. It's part of your lifestyle?

R: Yes definitely. My homepage is the New York Times, so I open that, simply, and then I see the latest news and perhaps read an article. So it is a constant part of my life.

(Brian, Centrum)

The internet is the predominant medium. The traditional print and broadcast media gain less support, although they still have users. It is less obvious whether they have strong supporters. One respondent claims that the media trivialise political discourse:

² Megafon is a polling agency that is often mentioned in the media. The context indicates that the respondent is actually talking about polling agencies in general, not just this specific agency.

Before I thought it was quite interesting to see Clement with the debate program, but I just got so tired of the way they promote their message. They say, 'you're stupid and you're stupid and'... Instead of saying what they mean, they try to say what the other believes and why that is stupid. (Hanne, Øst)

The type of debate is equated to what is heard in early school years, where the predominant mode of discourse is the repetition of banal arguments.

Respondents with immigrant backgrounds feel stigmatised in the media. They have the impression that exceptional cases are used to categorise immigrants as a whole: 'You always hear that 'Mohammed and his cousin Ali knocked Mrs Jones down'. The story is always about this. ... I think that success stories in the media are too few and far between' (Ida, Øst).

Respondents are reluctant to suggest how to tackle the media. On the one hand they are very critical towards the role of the media; on the other hand, they are not sure how this can be changed:

They set the political agenda in many ways, I think. It can be problematic because there are many things that it might be important to focus on, which do not come into focus. (Brian, Centrum)

But in general, I see DR1 [the national television channel] as political. I think they are, I don't know. I am irritated that I have to pay a license fee to someone who has ulterior motives in everything they do. I really think it is annoying, really. (Iben, Centrum)

Respondents seem to be trapped in a false perception of the role of the media. The relationship between the media and the government is based on the principles of freedom of the press, because from a constitutional perspective, the media are the critical watchdog on behalf of citizens, and they serve as means of political debate among citizens. When respondents feel that the media do not fulfil this obligation, but instead have turned into a fifth societal power, which at best promotes its own political interests, then they are cautious in their critique, because the media has the image of being untouchable: 'I do not know how to do it without limiting them. And this is not allowed - one must not restrict the media' (Brian, Centrum).

5.6.4 Political attraction

Some respondents state that their party preferences are based on basic ideology:

Basically, I would say I vote based on something ideological, because I do not think that what is going on politically, the things that are pushed through, are important enough to determine who I vote for. (Elin, Centrum)

Those referring to general ideology might have little interest in specific political issues, but they want to support a party that has the same approach to social problems and political issues as themselves. Others have the direct opposite approach. They mention how a specific candidate's view on specific issues of importance for the respondent was the determining factor in winning

their vote: 'There are many factors that come into play, and it is just whatever the issue is when you have to vote' (Leif, Centrum).

This approach to how political preference is constituted might also explain why it is possible to vote for a left-wing party at one election and for a centre-right party at the next. Such changes are not perceived as crossing borders between political camps, but as making the optimal decision to serve one's own interests.

For many respondents, political affiliation to a specific party is not strong, although it would be a considerable step to switch from one bloc to the other in parliament:

I: Do you feel particularly associated with this party?

R: No, not beyond that I would not completely switch bloc, if you can put it like that, but I would vote for one of the other parties. Depending on their positions ... with which I am most similar ... depending on the party. (Doris, Centrum)

Respondents have high demands of politicians. Certain role models are emphasised for fulfilling their expectations:

I: What is it about these people that appeals to you?

R: They are good in the media and good in the way they come out with their views and concerns. They seem sympathetic and knowledgeable. (Hans, Centrum)

The perfect politician needs to be both extrovert and possess a sound and solid personality core. One respondent points to charm and beauty as a quality that cannot be denied.

Not all politicians live up to the criteria, it is evident from respondents' narratives. One respondent's very negative opinions about politicians can be summed up as 'they are liars':

Liars. Some who try to speak well and things like that, and as soon as they are elected, we do not matter. Then we can mind our own business and they can sit for four years, and hope that it goes well next time. (Leif, Centrum)

This respondent goes on to refer to the discussion about the breach of promises that occurred after the most recent national election.

One respondent has a negative perception of the abilities of politicians, because they are recruited from a very narrow social segment:

But, politicians do not know what is going on in the world, because they have not been there. They have sat on their school bench, and have gone through all that ... they have never been much in the labour market. (Kevin, Centrum)

The perception is that politicians should represent the population; they should form a representative sample, so to speak. Other examples are mentioned of bad decisions made in the parliament that contribute to the bad reputation of politicians.

Respondents who have never been attracted to one specific party may argue that they have a pragmatic approach to politics, and they make their decision about who to support just before the election:

I: But have you ever felt that a particular party met your taste?

R: No, I have not. I have voted differently in the elections I have been involved in. I just go in and look at their attitudes and opinions, and so I think about what appeals to me most. There is not a particular party I feel an affinity for. There is not. (Egon, Centrum)

A substantial proportion of respondents fall into this category. They make a decision every time there is an election. Only a minority make a long-term commitment while a few never decide.

Some political leaders mobilise and recruit because of their charisma. A former party leader had such influence:

He was charismatic. I liked him. He was the epitome of what I meant. I did not have to get to grips with the political situation before I could take a position on it. I could simply throw myself into it. (Brian, Centrum)

However, the typical respondent is not attracted by charismatic leaders. The leader is seen as a front person who represents the politics of the party. Therefore, the leader should be able to communicate with different target groups. The respondents mention examples of successful and less successful leaders. The preferred qualities are not emotions or rhetoric, but sincerity: 'She often says some sensible things that I agree with: I also thought that she seems sincere' (Ida, Øst).

This is a general pattern. Respondents avoid blind trust, but trust sincere politicians with a message that corresponds to their basic values.

Some respondents deliberately make their decisions about political preference based on the personal qualities of the politicians:

I never vote for a party. I always vote for a person, because I have looked at the people running for election. Then, I have taken a position and I have chosen the person who was most in accordance with who I am as a person. (Leif, Centrum)

Several respondents have participated in election campaigns for leading candidates during the most recent national election. One of these was not convinced about supporting the party in general, but had no reservation about supporting the candidate.

Respondents have rejected parties because of their policy. The general impression of politics is constructed out of a lot of specific cases, where a party has expressed its opinions in the media:

'[The party] has an ideology that does not appeal to me at all. So yes, I could not think of voting for them in any way' (Patrick, Centrum).

The rejection of parties may also be based on evaluation of other criteria. There are a remarkable number of expressions suggesting that negative evaluations of the visual appearance of politicians play a crucial role in deciding against support for a party. Lack of competence is also immediately judged by respondents, and candidates felt to lack competence are rejected:

And they have a prominent member [...] who is allowed to speak infinitely when the stuff he says is not always sensible. [...] There will always be someone who votes for this type. (Elin, Centrum)

Critical remarks are found also in relation to parties that respondents feel positively about or even supported. However, the general picture is that respondents are really negative about parties that they disagree with; those usually positioned in the other half of the political spectrum: 'Enhedslisten, I think they have such a childish way of being angry and expressing themselves' (Iben, Centrum).

The respondents were asked whether they had rejected a party because of its leaders. In response, they willingly mention leaders of parties from the opposite end of the political spectrum that they dislike. One former party leader is mentioned more than most. There are also a few cases where the leader has been the determining factor in opting for a different, but similar, party instead. However, there are no examples of respondents being deterred from joining a party that they felt was the only, or the very best choice, because of the leader. In general, the respondents dissociate themselves from the idea of the importance of the leader: 'No, not really. I do not think so. There have no extreme cases with such leaders. Leaders, it sounds a bit like But no, I have not' (Hans, Centrum). While Hans struggles to articulate his thoughts, it is clear that 'strong leaders' are associated for him with a form of political thinking that he does not want to adopt.

5.6.5 Political alternatives

Political problems are to some degree viewed as technical problems. To solve them, is simply a case of identifying practical solutions. One respondent does not hesitate in proposing longer prison sentences to solve problems with criminality:

Oh, I think it can be solved easily. With crime, it is not that hard. Immediately it is just to put the sentence up, but it would then require that more prisons were provided. Because there will be more overcrowding, but one has to live with that. (Nils, Centrum)

Another respondent cannot see how politicians can do anything to stop criminality in society. Since, as respondents note, legislation is already in place, other interventions are needed but respondents do not trust politicians are able to handle this. More police is another alternative solution that is supported by more respondents:

In my world you should be able to sit down and talk about it. This nobody is able to do this. I think more police would be a good thing. What they would do, I don't know. But I think the police could play a major role. (Egon, Centrum)

One respondent considers that working towards a career in management might be worthwhile, because high ranking civil servants have influence: 'I also see it as an option when I start working. I would like to have a slightly higher position that will give me the opportunity to influence ...' (Sanne, Øst)

Those respondents who have not decided to support a political party distrust the ability of the parties to influence the development of, and solve problems in, society. Typical answers are that the respondent cannot see that parties are doing something to change the situation. One respondent mentioned some parties being better than others, but were unable to explain how this worked: 'They at least say that it is not good enough. Whether they will go in and do something about it, I do not know' (Brian, Centrum).

The parties on the wings have followers. There are a few dedicated followers of the Danish People's Party, but more have sympathy for some of their key issues. Of the two main issues in the Danish People's Party's political programme, it is only the immigration issue that either attracts or repels respondents. The welfare dimension seems to be ignored. Concerning Enhedslisten, there are more dedicated followers, but also here we find respondents that do not support all of the party's politics. They have sympathy for some issues or for the way the party communicates its political views.

Respondents vary in their answers when they are prompted for political alternatives outside parliament. In general, they have no specific knowledge about radical political groups. Some know that they exist, but do not know the details. The typical respondent defines the political field as that which is constituted by the political parties in parliament. Some respondents include new politics in the definition of the political; others perceive social movements as not being political.

Reflections upon the individual's political action range across the whole spectrum. At one end, respondents evaluate the possible outcome of their individual political efforts, and conclude that it will have no visible impact. At the other end, respondents see themselves as part of a movement, where every individual counts:

I: What do you feel that you can do to improve the situation that you have described here? What can you do as a private individual?

R: I don't know. I could imagine joining a party again. (Finn, Centrum)

Respondents lack the belief that as individuals they are able to change society. One respondent observes that current politics are going in the wrong direction. What is needed is a complete turn-around:

I: What can someone like you do to improve the situation?

R: I could be more politically active and inform myself better about what the different parties do and say and stick with those that make a difference and have it as I would like it. That is probably what I could do. (Carlo, Øst)

The typical respondent knows that it would be possible to be more active than they are and is aware of what sort of activities are available. All sorts of political activity are mentioned, from voting, petitions, using Facebook, demonstrations or joining a political party.

5.6.6 Political extremism

The respondents are divided in their view on political extremism. For one group, it is not part of their vocabulary. They use the word as a synonym for abnormal behaviour. As one respondent says, extremism means that ideas cannot be put into practice. Some might even call such politics wishful thinking.

The other group uses the word to characterise positions furthest away from the political middle. Therefore, the meaning of the word is dependent on how wide the horizon of perception is. None of the respondents express knowledge of forms of extremism that is beyond the ordinary political spectrum.

When respondents mention extremist parties, it would be more correct to call them parties that hold extreme views. Interviewees mention only three parliamentary parties. Dansk Folkeparti is characterised as extreme by several respondents because of their immigration policy. One respondent perceives their rhetoric as counterproductive, if the claim is to improve integration of immigrants in Danish society. Another thinks the party has ignored reality and closed its eyes to the necessity to turn immigrants into productive citizens. Another respondent characterises Dansk Folkeparti as a party that holds both acceptable and unacceptable views, but not views that in any way are covered by the definition of extremism:

I can understand some of their attitudes. Then there are others that are far removed from me. It is not necessarily an extremist party, because to be that it would have to be moving towards Nazism or, in the other direction, entirely into communism. (Ida, Øst)

Enhedslisten is perceived as extreme because it proposes changes in society that are perceived as unachievable. One respondent comes close to characterising the vision of a revolution as extremist, but they stop short because it is seen as so ridiculous that it could not be taken seriously:

I thought it was very extreme that Enhedslisten began to talk about the revolution that should come within the next 30 years, or whatever they said. I thought it was so far out that I began to laugh. It was so ridiculous and I could not take it seriously at all. (Ida, Øst)

Although the economic policy of Liberal Alliance, and especially its tax policy, is perceived as very extreme, even by its own supporters, nobody labels it as extremist.

The respondents do not interact with extremists. The most extreme encounter is one respondent's friends who are described as using racist arguments in their political support for Dansk Folkeparti:

R: I know some who have an interest in Dansk Folkeparti anyway.

I: Do you understand what motivates them to participate?

R: No, I do not understand their thinking. They have some very racist arguments for why they are in favour of Dansk Folkeparti. And I disagree. (Chris, Centrum)

Another respondent has friends who support Enhedslisten, and they express very radical views, which the respondent cannot identify with, because she thinks society is functioning well:

I have some friends who are almost Communists at some level and talk of overthrowing society and the state and anarchy, etc. I cannot really relate to that. I find that this [society] works quite well. (Ida, Øst)

Many respondents do not express attitudes to real extremism, because they are not aware of it. One respondent adopts a pragmatic approach to explaining why more extreme views have not gained ground; their policies, she suggests, are dismissed as wishful thinking:

I: You have never been attracted by some of the wings?

R: No

I: No, how could it be?

R: I think that, maybe I think a little more rationally and judge the outer wings to be very dreamy and idealistic. Often it seems to me that their policies are wishful thinking. (Lis, Centrum)

Another respondent explains why he never felt attracted by extreme activism, preferring the desktop:

Those youth organizations are very activist. They are out with their banners throwing paint and things like that. Maybe I was not quite geared up for that. So it never really said anything to me. (Finn, Centrum)

Respondents have a very clear conception of democratic constitutional principles. Some accept that parties that clearly act against the law could be forbidden, but they react against even forbidding parties that build on Nazism or fascism, because freedom of speech only allows prosecuting concrete breaches of the law:

As long as you keep within Danish laws, I do not think one should be prohibited. You have to be allowed to have the opinions you have. But I do not necessarily mean that they are beneficial to society, but you should still be allowed to have them and express them. (Ann, Centrum)

5.7 Conclusion

The respondents that participated in the WP5 interviews represent a cross-section of young people in the selected field sites. The 60 individuals are not representative, they cannot be representative, and representativeness was not intended. The aim was rather that respondents should represent the variability among young people in the field sites. It seems that this criterion has been reached.

The analysis has shown the diversity among youth in the field sites. It has shown how social conditions influence the life situation and expectations of the young. The youth cohort does not constitute one coherent youth generation, but different segments of young people whose social position are highly determined by social conditions. Such differences influence attitudes and behaviour and, consequently, respondents position themselves across the political spectrum. However, the lack of a fine meshed diversification of parliamentary political parties makes it difficult for young people to find the perfect match. Commitments exist, but party membership is not typical. Party loyalty is more common, but party preferences are continuously evaluated.

Life cycle effects influence political engagement. Leaving upper secondary school is a turning point for many respondents. While, prior to this, often they have been active participants in different forms of political activity, afterwards, it seems that engagement is reduced significantly. Their convictions remain, although some positions become less pronounced.

The majority of respondents have open minds. They have their opinions, but they do not let strong convictions restrict their social interactions and their friendship circles may be politically diverse. They also manage to navigate in social settings that are politically diverse.

There appears to be less difference between the respondents in the two field sites than expected. It appears that the high representation of students in the sample has levelled out the differences between the two field sites. Differences are nonetheless in evidence. The field site Øst includes respondents with immigrant backgrounds who narrate experiences that contribute to a feeling of being stigmatised. The field site Øst also has more respondents that have little knowledge of, or interest in, political issues. The field site Centrum provides more respondents combining a higher middle class background with political sympathy for neo-liberal and centre-right parties. In the field site Øst more respondents are affected by the financial crisis.

The respondents are dedicated democrats and committed supporters of parliamentary democracy. They demonstrate strong support for voting and a strong belief that political engagement matters. There is a strong dominance of views that perceive society as a community, and politics as ideally a consensus-seeking negotiation process. A balanced welfare society is an underlying ideal, but the idea of what welfare is, how it should be provided, and how it should be accessible is in the process of being reformulated.

6 Future analysis

This WP5.3 delivery is the first broad analysis of the WP5 interviews. Further and more in-depth scrutinizing of the data certainly will disclose new layers of information, which have not been possible in this first stage of analysis. The thematic analysis has revealed variable representativeness.

In future analysis, lack of representativeness needs to be included. By using cross-case methodology, in-depth analysis of single dependent variables and key independent variables including all respondents can be carried out (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Further analysis to be performed may take a biographical approach to the interviews. The significance of life cycle transitions has been an explanatory factor in the analysis of respondents' political engagement. Further analysis along this line and by adopting a multiple variable approach might reveal new insights as to how individual political biographies are constructed.

Finally, triangulation of data from WP4 and WP5 is an important next step in the analysis of the MYPLACE data. The two data sets have been gathered concurrently. Therefore, none of them have priority in the methodological design. They might both serve as exploratory and explanatory variables in the research design. Such analyses need to be carried out by using all items that are represented in both data sets (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007).

A first triangulation will be carried out by addressing the role of family communication and socialisation in developing political attitudes among the respondents. Such an analysis will test existing theories about how political values and beliefs are transmitted inter-generationally in family socialisation, and with the father as the predominant socialisation agent. Subsequent analyses will be able to include data from the intergenerational interviews from WP2.

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