# VSSN Day Seminar

University of Birmingham

Young Feminists online: political and social participation, social action and feminist activism

- This paper draws on research undertaken by Dr Grainne McMahon,University of Huddersfield and Janet Batsleer,Manchester Metropolitan University in the context of the Partispace Project (www.partispace.eu)

- It is work in progress……
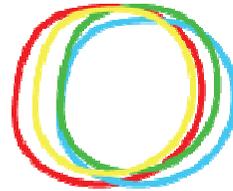
PARTISPACE

SPACES AND STYLES OF PARTICIPATION

Formal, non-formal and informal possibilities of young people's participation in European cities

http://Partispace.eu

VSSN University of Birmingham November 22nd 2016

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The assumption and the question

The project starts from the assumption that all young people do participate while not all participation is recognised as such. The study asks for the different ways in which young people participate in decisions "which concern them and, in general, the life of their communities": How do 15-30-year-olds engage with the public in formal, non-formal and informal settings and how is this supported or inhibited by local youth policies and youth work?

The cities
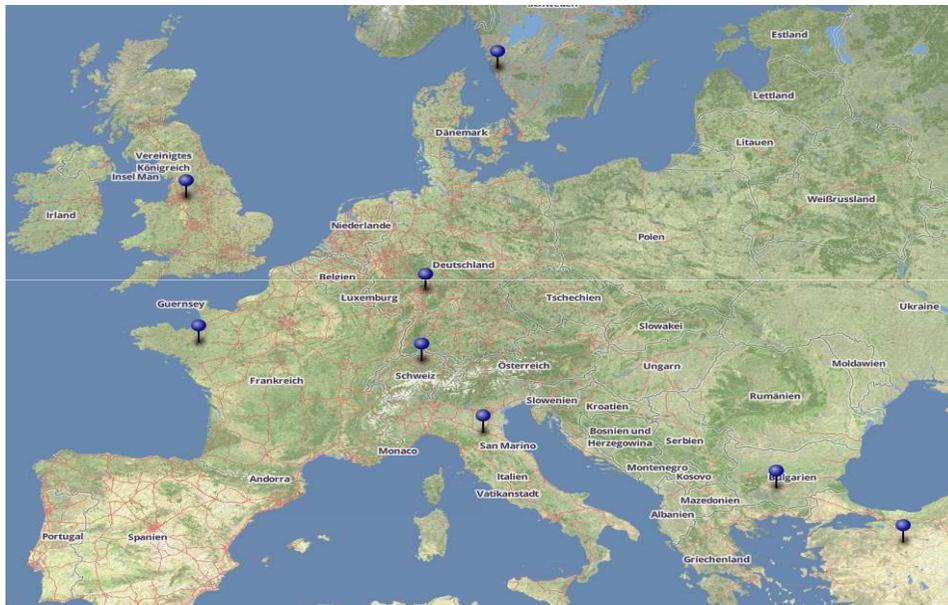
The partners

- Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main (GUF), Germany
- Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Santé Publique (EHESP), France
- University of Cergy Pontoise (UCP), France
- Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), UK
- University of Huddersfield (HUD), UK
- University of Bologna (UNIBO), Italy
- University of Gothenburg (UGOT), Sweden
- New Europe Centre for Regional Studies (NEC), Bulgaria
- Yeditepe University (YU), Turkey
- University of Applied Sciences St. Gallen (FHS), Switzerland

The design

PARTISPACE Design

WP 1 Management
Administrative management, communication and knowledge management, monitoring, organisation of meetings, preparation and launch

WP 2 National contexts:
Literature review, discourse analysis, policy examples, Description of studied cities

WP 3 European context
Discourse analysis, analysis of European Social Survey

WP 4 Local case studies

Mapping
Group discussions and city walks with young people (N=15 per city, ca. 100 in total, involving 300-500 young persons)
Expert interviews with key persons and stakeholders (N=20 per city; ca. 150 in total)

Reconstruction
In-depth case studies of formal, non-formal and informal settings (N=6 per city, total 42)
Analysis of individual participation biographies (N=12 per city, 72 in total)

Analysis of local case studies

WP 5 Action research with young people
Encouraging and assisting young people in own research integrated with local case studies

WP 6 Analysis
working groups on:
- Comparative analysis of survey, national contexts, local constellations
- Thematic analysis of formality, practices and forms, biographies, activation

Validation with local actors incl. young people

WP 7 Dissemination
Youth conference(s), EU policy conference, research papers, films, training module, European and local advisory groups, policy brief

In a nutshell

- Mixed methods study (survey data, discourse analysis, qualitative research, ethnography, multilevel analysis, grounded theory);

- Constant exchange with representatives of the youth sector: policy makers, practitioners such as youth workers and young people themselves;

- Bringing together the micro of social interactions with the macro of European policy;

- Open to different theorisations and a questioning of core concepts;

- Young people themselves have a central role in the research – not only as objects of research but as co-researchers;

- Aims at transgressing established definitions and forms of participation which risk excluding activities and practices of young people who have a participatory potential but are not recognised as such → the design needs to be as open as possible;

- Comparison across cities and countries requires a certain degree of functional equivalence and an interpretative model that allows for contextualisation.

The young people

Legend: F=formal, N=non-formal, I=informal; **bold=youth centres**; *italics; youth/student councils* MIG=migration; REL=Religious groups; YC=youth culture; MARG= marginalised group; POL=political activism; ART= artistic production; SPORT= sports activities; VOL= voluntary work; INF=informal (not obviously participatory); ASS=Youth association; ONL=Online

	Bologna	Eskisehir	Frankfurt	Gothenburg	Manchester	Plovdiv	Rennes	Zurich
Top 6 (local priorities)								
1	A Skeggia Ultras I/N YC	***Youth centre** F/N (ministry)*	*Student council* F	*Youth Council F*	*Youth council* F	Post-Cultural Stage I ART YC	LAP artistic laboratory N ART	Wild card: Episodic I POL
2	**Labas Social Centre** I/N	Street Musicians I INF YC	Left wing group I POL	Frilagret **cultural centre** N / Fryshuset **youth centre**	Young student activists POL ONL	Ecological network I/F POL VOL	French salafist group I POL REL	**Youth centre** visitors N
3	*Fermi High School* F	*GHD **youth rights NGO** N POL*	Informal group I INF	Creol/ Panthers association N MIG INF	Cultural music scene ART INF	Bulgarian **Red Cross** N VOL	**Youth service cooperative** N	Parcour I YC
4	Young Muslims N REL MIG	RC student volunteers FN VOL	Residential care F/N MARG	Young Agents female VOL volunteers IN	Contact Theatre N ART POL	*Univ. student council* F	Nuits debout I POL	Scouts N ASS
5	*Student Network* F/N	ES-ES T Football fans N/I YC	Skaters I YC	Action Hall/ Park N SPORT	**Youth club** young Roma N MARG	Youth section Socialist Party F POL	*Youth Projects Brittany* F	*Youth parliament* F
6	OZ extreme sports association N SPORT YC	***Youth centre** F/N (municipality)*	**Youth centre** N	Nordstan peer group in shopping mall I INF	The Men's Room N MARG	Bauerzax NGO entrepreneurship N PROF	Maze (web) magazine N ONL ART	Wild card: migrant autonomous school F/N

Context setting

- Existing literatures on participation which highlight gender suggest gendered inequities (intragenerational as well as intergenerational) remain.

- This is a way of approaching the issue of social power, participation and social action.

- The formation of social spaces, the division between the private and the public, the legitimation and delegitimation of spaces, are key focusses for thinking about participation.

- The impact of sexist discourses in thinking about character and virtue is directly made visible and unsettled in this enquiry, where the key emerging issues are of sexual violence and consent, and of control of public spaces.

Spaces Studied

- - NUS women (part of the National Union of Students and women-only space which campaigns for women's issues on campus, e.g. lad culture)

- - Yes Matters (women-only group which campaigns primarily around issues of sexual consent, objectification of girls)

- - REIGN (survivor group which campaigns around child sexual exploitation (CSE))

- - Women in the World (group which is active in global issues for women and girls)

- - Girltalk, Hideaway (group of young Muslim women which campaigns against Islamaphobia)

Online Spaces

- Prochoice Movement

- Everyday Sexism

- Consent Campaigns

- University specific spaces

Women's spaces, activism on (and off)line

'Heat of the moment, passionate, angry, and you make this post, yeah, under my real name, revealed a lot of stuff about yourself, hit share, and you've got the whole of the rest of the day going, 'Oh my god,' I've put all of that out there. [...] With the online community and the possibility of anonymity, actually a lot women choose to be themselves, very authentically, online, and that's quite a vulnerable place to be in.' (Julia, Manchester)

Women's voices; women's liberation

- Need for 'safe spaces'
- *Key: Meaning* of safety for women (Lewis et al., 2015):
  - Safe **from** misogyny, harassment, abuse, assault and victimisation in *un*safe spaces
  - Safe **to be** *'fully human'* and *'to speak and be heard, to learn and develop cognitively, to be emotionally expressive'* (p.7)

Women's spaces, activism on (and off)line

- Online activism:
  - Enormous potential for mobilisation, engagement and working towards social change for women
  - Young women see their online work as political and active participation and central (crucial) to feminist movement
  - Possibilities are endless (but also limited) - must be coupled with more traditional forms of activism (e.g. street protests, lobbying and petitioning)
  - Opening up participation to everyone in 'normal, everyday spaces' (but still possibly places of privilege and power?)

Issues of social and cultural capital, the role of youth workers, the role of celebrities.....

- It is interesting to compare sites where self-organisation is strong with those which have been facilitated by youth workers/social workers.

- Similar issues and similar fragilities but different framings and shapings

- The complexities of safety/risk and the meanings of feminist adventures....

- The accepted channels of advocacy (Pioneers, Champions, and what is put at risk,.....
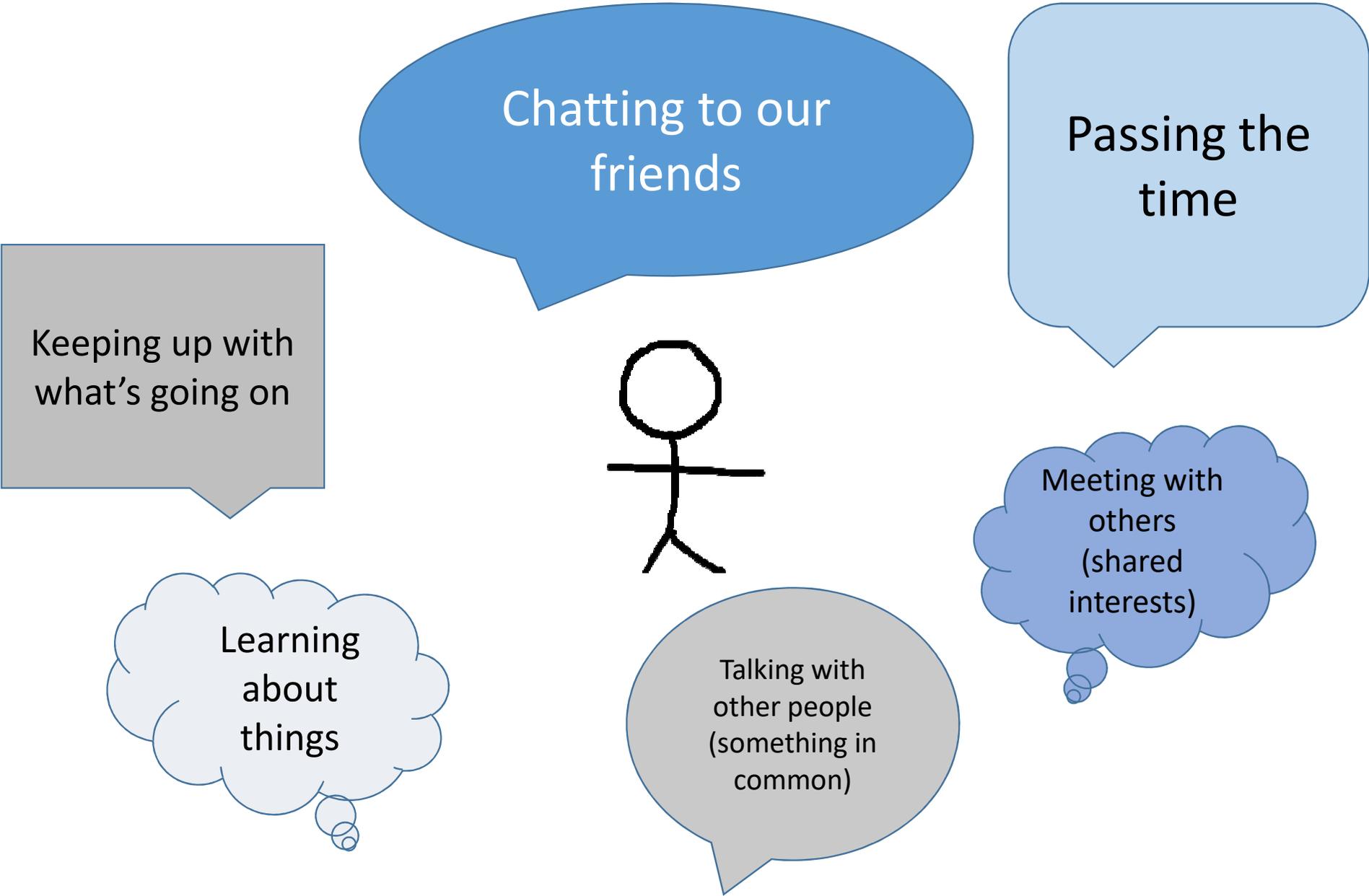
Opening up dialogue, voice for everyone

Also chatting to friends

Also meeting with others (shared interests)

Also learning and keeping up (debate)

Mobilising, engaging and organising

"Consciousness-raising" and "speaking bitterness"

Also talking with other people (something in common)

Young women share their experiences, beliefs, aspirations, concerns, frustrations, lobby politicians, campaign, protest, and tell their stories

PERSONAL IS POLITICAL *(and political is personal)*

This is participation

Not easy work:
"I was really worried about what people were saying back to me."
"I am always exhausted."

"I think this is where a lot of this online stuff comes in; it's experience-sharing."

"It is a personal transformation."

Feminist activism and participation online

- Debate and learning ('awakening')

'You get to a certain stage in feminism when you do start to think about certain structures that are in place but you don't necessarily start there. And I think this is where a lot of this online stuff comes in; it's experience-sharing. And one of the interesting things for people then is that gives them some tools, some vocabulary, to start understanding and rationalising these experiences as part of those structures where previously they were victim-blaming themselves, feeling guilty and I think that's what gives those places a lot of emotive power because it is a personal transformation.' (Julia, Manchester)

Feminist activism online

Tara Flynn @TaraFlynn · Sep 11
We won't be bullied or shamed into silence anymore. You'll only make us louder. #repealthe8th

Tara Flynn @TaraFlynn · Sep 10
Yes. It's time to talk. Silence has got us nowhere. March for Choice Sept 26. Dublin. #repealthe8th

Mara Clarke @maraclarke
Can't wait to share a stage with @sineadredmond @TaraFlynn @freesafelegal & more. LET'S MAKE SOME NOISE.
twitter.com/freesafelegal/ ... ...

Ailbhe Smyth @ailbhes · Sep 10
What happens after Repeal? Join Lawyers for Choice workshop at #repealthe8th conference this Saturday. @NWCI @fletcher_ruth @ICCLtweet

The revolution will be/ will not be tweeted (delete as appropriate)

'As the communications landscape gets denser, more complex, and more participatory, the networked population is gaining greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action' (Shirky, 2011, online)[†]

'[The] Internet has fragmented and decentralised the context in which communication occurs' (Williamson, 2009, p.515) [††]

[†] Shirky, C. (2011). *The Political Power of Social Media. Foreign Affairs. Available: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2010-12-20/political-power-social-media [Accessed 31/ 05/ 2016].*
[††] *Williamson, A. (2009). The Effect of Digital Media on MPs' Communication with Constituents. Parliamentary Affairs, 62, 514–527.*

Opening the space…..

- The idea of this presentation is to open up a space within prevailing professionalised discourses concerning young people and participation and to develop a discussion of space and power in a wat that does not remove young people from the social world ….

- Hope has two lovely daughters, courage and anger.

- THANKYOU