This paper is taken from

Innovative Practice and Research Trends in Identity, Citizenship and Education
Selected papers from the sixteenth Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Academic Network

London: CiCe 2014

edited by Peter Cunningham and Nathan Fretwell, published in London by CiCe,
ISBN 978-1-907675-21-8

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a selection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- The CiCe administrative team at London Metropolitan University
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The Lifelong Learning Programme and the personnel of the Education and Culture DG of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

Kaleidoscopic identities: young people ten years into the European Union

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This is part of a conversation I had with some young men – 17 year olds – in a suburb of Istanbul. I asked them how they would describe their identity.

Vasıf	It wouldn't be true to describe myself with only one word. What can I say? Should I say I'm Turk, Kurdish, or should I say I'm Alevi? It's not that I'm only one thing. I don't believe that I need to describe myself in only one way.
İbrahim	I describe myself as I am, Kurdish. Sometimes my friends ask me 'what's written on your Identity [Card]' and I say 'It's Turkish': then they say 'you are Turkish', but I say 'No, I'm Kurdish'. They say 'You are what is written on your Identity'. I would love to change my identity to prove that I am Kurdish, if it could be possible.
İsmail	I describe myself with more than one identity. First I'm a worker and a revolutionist, and then I'm Alevi and Dersimli. I was told by my family that I needed to hide my identity. Why? Because the police can just take you to prison, or there can be other trouble. Now I put these identities in front of everything.
Vasıf	I'm also Kurdish and Alevi, these things are really different for people when you say this in conversations. They react to you, change their faces, act as if they'd heard some curse.

This lecture is about my study of how young people construct their identities, in particular young people living in the countries that either joined the European Union in the expansions of 2004-13, or that are currently negotiating entry into the European Union. Vasıf, İbrahim and İsmail were not representative - no one is typical - but their comments illustrate the articulacy and responsiveness of many young people to questions about identity. They present themselves as repressed minorities in their country of birth, but willing and able to articulate their sense of difference.

Their descriptions are refracted through the particularities of particular national and regional contexts and experiences, made more complex by intersections of social class, gender, ethnicity and region. These working-class young men were of Alevi or Kurdish descent: other young people in Turkey I spoke with expressed very different identities, competing and independent views, patterned through the prisms of generational change and of Europe.

The conversation has been taken from a study of 974 young people aged between 11 and 19, from fifteen European countries. I carried out 160 focus groups in 97 different

schools in 49 locations across these countries. These discussions form the empiric basis of a study of how young people construct identities in the European context.

The age of these young people and the time of the study are significant. Twelve of these countries are post-Communist states, and this generation are the first to have been born since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and its consequences. The other countries are in various states of social and economic flux. There is a consistent theme of generational change in the ways that they discuss their local, regional, national and sometimes European and global identities. There are also, for many of them, senses of agency and liminality - of being on the threshold of being European - and of the varying nature and degrees of attachment to both their own country and to Europe. They construct their identities kaleidoscopically: there is a degree of liquidity, but this is patterned through a process that is both contingent and consistent.

Much current theorisation of social identities emphasises the self in what are called 'new times' (sometimes termed late modernity, sometimes postmodernity). The concept of a 'modern', fixed and rational identity has been challenged by Foucault (1979) and Derrida (1981): it is now widely maintained that identity matters more because we have more choice. In earlier periods identities were shaped by class, region, family, gender and work: these were largely ascribed, and directed and constrained the individual's life trajectory (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992): the individual now – in our part of the globe - is said to have mobility and choice in what Bauman (2000) has memorably described as 'liquid modernity': he suggests that identity is constructed in a social context and located in contingent and temporal relationships: the past, present, future and location disturb our practice of identity as we ask who we are and who we intend to be:

> One needs [freedom] to be oneself; yet being oneself solely on the strength of one's free choice means a life full of doubts and fears of error. There are many ways in which one can respond to the task of constructing self-identity… Self-construction of the self is, so to speak, a necessity. Self confirmation of the self is an impossibility (Bauman, 1988, p. 62).

This understanding is of identity as multiple and elective: but in sharp distinction to this conceptualisation, there is one particular variety of identity - citizenship - which can be seen as usually singular and arbitrarily ascribed. About 97 per cent of the world's population are citizens by birth: just 3 per cent have changed their citizenship status (Shachar, 2009).

Most people include within their repertoire of identities those that are concerned with their relationship to place, and this is the main focus of this study. Such an identity can be the citizenship of a location: traditionally, as Mackenzie described it, this identity was associated with a shared interest in a place:

> …those who share an interest share an identity; the interest of each requires the collaboration of all. Those who share a place share an identity (Mackenzie, 1978, p. 130).

Citizenship of a state for most people is involuntary: in the classic nation state a person could belong to only one state at a time, and for the great majority of the world's population, citizenship was and remains non-negotiable, immutable. İbrahim clearly not only resented the Turkish civic identity that his identity card prescribed; he was very aware of his inability to cast off this inheritance.

But now many people also might express European identities: here are my Istanbul young men again:

> Furkan When you say 'Europe', it reminds me first of human rights, and of great possibilities for freedom… if I could be in Europe, I could say - everywhere and every time and to every person - that I am Kurdish. I could say in school that I am Kurdish, and there would not be that oppression.
>
> Vasıf When I think of Europeans, I have a picture in my mind of people who cross their legs, sit nicely, and speak nicely, are civilized and cultured - but I don't know actually - I've never been in Europe.

This involves rights, but is also punctuated by acknowledged stereotypes about the other. The distinction between different kinds of European identity has been most systematically analysed by Michael Bruter (2005; also 2003a; 2003b; 2008a; 2008b; 2009), who derives two components of identity with political communities:

> A *cultural* perspective would analyse political identities as the sense of belonging an individual citizen feels towards a particular political group. This group can be perceived by him [sic] to be defined by a certain culture, social similarities, values, religion, ethics or even ethnicity…
> A *civic* perspective would see… the identification of citizens with a civic structure, such as the State, which can be defined as the set of institutions, rights, and rules that preside over the political life of the community (Bruter, 2005, p. 12).

A second dimension of analysis in this study is generational. Fulbrook's study (2011) of German identities suggests that there are not only significant differences in the ways that identities are constructed between generations, but that these are the consequence of political fractures and dissonance in national society. She argues that the age at which people experience key historical moments can be a critical explanatory factor behind an individual or group's 'availability for mobilisation' for political expression.

This social constructionist approach to identity does not accept essentialist categories or core features as some kind of unique or distinguishing property of group membership. Every group is a social artefact, constructed and used within an hegemonic discourse. Phrases such as hybridised identities or hyphenated identities try to capture these complex cultural configurations, and terms such as multiple identities may describe how an individual constructs a range of identities around her or his personal experiences

European identities, as much as national identities, are collective identities that 'are always about boundary drawing and the definition of references to identify with'

(Schlenker, 2007, p. 3). A significant minority of the young people rejected (or were at least uncertain of) the suggestion of a European identity, but the majority did express some sense of Europeanness: Olesia M in Poland (♀12) doing so in language that echoes Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (2006):

> everywhere you go you are surrounded by your friends, people from the same group, natives. …They don't know you, but they know you - you are a like distant relative. In my opinion, being European means that everywhere you have neighbours.

Between January 2010 and October 2012 I carried out focus groups in a mixture of different socio-economic settings. Each group was of about six young people - of young residents of each country, not just citizens, and I tried to include some young people from significant minority groups. But this was, and never could be, a representative sample of young people. To achieve this, a stratified sample of all young people in the country would be required, and brought together from many locations. What I achieved was a sample of the range of potential views across each country: from different regions, social backgrounds and cultural groups.

My focus group discussions were non-directive and asked open ended questions, focusing on locational identities, generational differences and the sense of othering. My opening question challenges them. 'How would you describe yourself? Asking how the young people thought their parents and grandparents thought about these issues allowed them to compare themselves with earlier generations. I invited comments on social and regional differences, and possible minorities. I shifted the discussion to feelings of being European. Finally, I would remind them of their country's membership of the European Union (or of its aspiration to become a member) and then suggest other countries that might wish to join the European Union in the future, and asked whether they would welcome this or not. The countries I suggested varied with the geography and politics of where I was, but everywhere Russia and Turkey were suggested.

The context of these discussions inevitably affected their nature and content. To talk with a male foreign professor in his 60s about such issues - about any issues - was not an everyday occurrence for these young people. Each focus group was a particular kind of performativity: Butler points out, 'identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (1990, p. 25). The data generated in this project is the consequence of particularities that are partially a reaction to the insertion of my identity(ies) (or what the group members constructed as my identities) into the group: it is their retort to that act. But if each focus group had been conducted by a different person we would be no closer to achieving a replicable data set: examining the social construction of identities can only be attempted in a social context, and social contexts cannot be reproduced (Harré, 1989; Shotter, 1990).

Three sources of young people's constructions of socio-political identities are commonly asserted: the school, the family and the media (now including interactive internet-based media. Zorka (♀16) thought much the same: 'my identity has been shaped a lot by the community, my family and high school, and I think the media and the internet'.

Sometimes it was difficult to communicate with older generations. Jolanta P (♀15 Poland) said 'with grandparents ... it is difficult to talk, because they have had traumatic experiences, and they don't like to talk about Russia or Germany.' But talking politics at home could be better than discussion in school or with friends. In Croatia, Dubravka S (♀15) said she talked with her parents on these issues, but 'I don't want to talk about it with my friends'. Various young people remarked on talking with their parents about items on television news bulletins. 'It provokes discussion, so we talk about these - we don't know when to stop!' said Marjeta H (♀11 Czech).

In school, it usually seemed inappropriate for schools to take on political issues or for young people to talk about them. In Budapest, Kinga B (♀13) had 'asked my parents yesterday why can't we talk about politics in school, and they said we are not old enough to have views, and what we say is not our viewpoints, it's only other people's'. In Turkey, Naz K (♀16) said 'in school it's forbidden to speak of politics.' The suggestion that these issues could be talked about with teachers sometime produced near-incredulous laughter. But it was also challenged. For example, Kamilia F (Kraków 15♀) complained 'But if we are to learn here in school, then we *should* talk about this! I miss the opportunity.'

Nation and country

What were my findings? Firstly, what did it mean to belong to or come from a particular country? Here are some Slovenians discussing this:

Izak	That you have a Slovenian passport, that you live in this country: you don't actually live in this country - you can also live in Canada - but you're still Slovenian because your roots come from Slovenia
Nikolina	That Slovenian is your mother language, and you speak it, even in your mind if you live somewhere else
Ožbej	No - you must have citizenship if you want to be Slovenian. A lot of people came here from Bosnia just to work here, but they are not Slovenians.
AR	But they have a Slovenian passport?
Ožbej	Some of them have -
Jernej	- Not all
AR	If they have a Slovenian passport, do they have Slovenian citizenship?
Izak	Yes, that means they are Slovenian.
Veronika	I think your country is where your heart truly lies - it doesn't really matter where you come from - it's where you feel most comfortable, and where you are happy.

This shows various kinds of uncertainty about national identity: is it determined by status as a citizen (being a passport holder), by residence, by one's roots, one's language ('even in your mind'), or by a sense of comfort or belonging?

Most young people I spoke with had not previously given much thought to this aspect of their identity: it was a given. But a dominant theme they gave was the history and cultural practices of the country. In those states with a longer sense of independence - for example, Poland, Iceland, Turkey, Hungary and the Baltic States - history was particularly foregrounded; in some other states dance, music, food and dress were mentioned more frequently. The relationship between the nation and a distinct language was particularly strong in some of the smaller countries - for example, the three Baltic states: Macedonia, Slovenia, Croatia. For many of these language was the defining facet of their unique cultural identity because it was spoken by few others in the world. In Jūrmala, Latvia, Victors said:

> Victors K (♂) We have a unique language - we are the only ones in the world, because Latvia is only 1.6 million people … there only a few Latvians in the world … in the next hundred years there will not be a Latvian language any more.

Another theme was to identify traits in the national character. In some countries the natural environment was stressed - generally its beauty, occasionally as subject to environmental threat.

Many young people drew on cultural practices and historical discourses to demonstrate how these made them feel connected with their country and nation, supported with detailed experiences and observations. The other component of locational identity that was proposed by Bruter was a sense of civic identity. How did political institutions and civic practices contribute to identity with a country?

Many young people showed an intense concern and knowledge of the political life of their country, but they were often highly critical of those engaged in political processes. Their sense of the civic life of their country did not positively contribute to their identification with their nation: among many it seemed rather to create a sense of estrangement or detachment from the political process.

References to the country's politicians were nearly always negative. For example, in the Baltic states they were seen as argumentative and not competent: Hillar S (♂16) said 'they fight each other. They don't agree on important decisions - they are like children. In Iceland Einar G (♂16) ascribed political incompetence to the small size of the population; 'we don't have that many people to choose from - the current mayor of Reykjavík is basically a comedian, who has had absolutely no interest or experience in politics whatsoever.'

Running through many discussions about the faults of civil society were discourses of power and powerlessness. Some young people felt dispossessed, lacking any sense of agency or ability to influence the system. For example, in Latvia, although Klinta C (♀15) was able to say 'I feel satisfied with my country,' she went on 'we cannot change the future of Latvia.' There was sometimes debate about whether political activity was possible, as here in Romania:

Olga M (♀16)	- we don't have the power to change. We've tried to change - but it's still the same.
Mihai B (♂15)	I'm sorry, but we are the people - we have the power - we are democratic, so the power should be with the people.

Most were broadly optimistic, professing faith in the future development of their country. So in Latvia, Anna K (♀13) saw her commitment as personal: 'we are the future of Latvia, and I think we need to do something to make others think the same way.' A group debated this in a school in the Bulgarian capital:

Angel V (♂15)	I think we can change the country, but *all* of the people must change. Like if you're just six people, like we're sitting here now, we can't change the country, there must be more.
Basia K (♀17)	The future of Bulgaria is in our hands, our generation's.
Ivana P (♀17)	Yes. But if you go abroad, you will not change anything.

The possibility of migration within Europe created tensions for many, between personal advantage if they left, and a sense of wanting to contribute to change if they stayed. This prospect provoked greater reflection on what the country meant to them, in terms of identity and attachment. This focus on the cultural rather than the civic, coupled with the respective positive and negative attitudes towards each, created a quandary for those who felt that they possessed agency, or at least that they could contribute to the control of civic structures and political processes.

Overall there were many references to the cultural characteristics of each respective country, framed in generally positive terms. There were fewer references to the civic characteristics, and these were generally more negative. But this was in the early stages of each focus group, when they were asked to comment on how they identified with the country. In doing this, they sometimes 'othered' other residents of the country, whom they felt were in some way not members of the country. These 'internal others' were often excluded: they often included the Roma in many countries, the *russkiye* in the Baltic states, those former Yugolsavs who found themselves in a different state when new borders were established, and those in eastern Turkey. While much conversation focussed on what they felt they had in common, there were also these examples of an alternative and common way of defining oneself, by making a contrast to 'the other' (Habermas, 1998), as here in the Czech Republic in a discussion on local Roma people:.

Eliška	I wouldn't mind them here if they didn't cause that much trouble.
Rostislava	[or] if they didn't move here in such great numbers.
Eliška	Some countries may not want them and so they move … and instead of behaving normally they just make more trouble … they often steal, they damage civic property. And they needn't work! They just rake the leaves, they don't do anything, and they get money for it.
Vincenc	And they are still fat!
Verushka	And they have a lot of children, because they get welfare for them.

Zora They are different from us, and they are vulgar! People should adjust to the majority they live with - the Roma people are very different …

Another consideration of what being a member of a country meant was triggered by asking how they thought that their views on this might be different from those of their parents or grandparents. This question did not, of course, uncover how parents or grandparents *themselves* constructed their national identities, but it showed how the young people constructed these earlier generations as having different attitudes and views: a lens of generational difference in the construction of identity.

In countries that had seen fewer political changes - Iceland and Turkey (apart from the Alevis and Kurdish groups) - there was a particular focus on cultural differences between generations. These were less prominent in other countries, where it was civic and political changes that defined intergenerational difference.

Where major political changes happened with relatively little violence post 1950 (such as the Baltic and Visegrád states, Bulgaria, Slovenia), there was a discourse of difference that emphasised national struggle and independence. Young people were more likely to perceive parental and grandparental expressions of national sentiment as outdated. Thus in Tartu, Indrek G (♂16) said that his parents 'consider themselves more Estonian than the younger people, because they didn't live in an independent Estonia, so they fought for independence. The younger people take independence [for granted] - but in their time, they had to fight for independence.' Patriotism was often seen as being a characteristic of the older generations. Flóra H (♀16, Hungary) described this hierarchically: 'our grandparents are more proud than our parents and our parents are more proud than us.' In Poland this was particularly apparent: Dominik B (♂16) said that parents 'grew up in times totally different from ours, when "patriotism" meant something different - being a Pole involved some patriotic, conspiratorial deeds. Nowadays there's no need any more, so our parents' generation's values sometimes seem to be no longer valid.'

But in countries where there had been wars and greater violence in the late 1980s and 1990s (Romania, Croatia, Cyprus, and to an extent Macedonia) there was greater stress on the impact that this had had on parents and grandparents. In Timişoara in Romania, there had been particular resistance to Ceauşescu's troops: Vladimir T (♂15) described how his father 'was in the group of revolutionaries in the centre of the city. He got shot in the arm - he survived. I was staggered when he told me this - I couldn't believe it!' There were some similar sentiments expressed in Croatia, particularly those whose parents had lived in the war zones of the time. Danica H (♀16) said she was 'proud, because my mum and dad are from Vukovar. My whole family is from there.'

Grandparents in many countries were differentiated by their experiences of the Second World War, with some particularly vivid accounts given by young people from Poland, former Yugoslav states and Hungary. Such experiences affected their sense of nation, many of their grandchildren said, suggesting that a sense of national identity was stronger in their grandparents than in their parents. In all these accounts is the construction of difference from the older generations is striking, sometimes almost with

a sense of loss: 'now we don't feel the necessity of solidarity so much,' explained Jolánka H (♀15) in Hungary. Gosia K's (♀17) account is full of references to grandparents and parents as 'they', and her own generation as 'we':

> maybe not our parents, but our grandparents feel the most Polish, because they or their parents were fighting for Poland in the wars … my grandma and my grandfather … tell me about the wars and how they lived - how it was hard, and how Russians came to my grandfather's house and stole everything. I think because of these moments in history they feel the most Polish …. We've got an easier life - we can't really understand how hard it was for these people.

Grandparents were perceived as prejudiced against Germans: Jolanta P (♀15) put this succinctly: 'they have a kind of trauma from the past. That suddenly Germans will start to come and will start killing … I think they are still afraid of the unknown. [They] have had traumatic experiences, and they don't like to talk about Russia or Germany. You can easily say something "wrong" and they will be angry'.

Family memories of the communist period were significant in many countries, and many of these centred on changes in economic and social conditions, sometimes prompting debates on the balance between social security and political freedoms.

Europe

What of 'being European'? It was common to associate the European Union with the free market in labour and the opportunities to study in other countries. In the Czech Republic, Kazimir B (♂11) said 'being European means [we] have rights, advantages - we can travel and don't have to show passports.' Most young people saw freedom of movement as positive, the symbol of membership of the community of Europeans: in Poland, Tomasz W (♂17) said 'to really feel that we are Europeans, we will have to wait till we can travel - travelling is the criterion for defining our identity as Europeans.'

Other European institutional practices frequently referred to were economic support structures, seen as an important element of Europe. Miklos S (♂12, Czech) put it, 'for me, Europe means a chance to help a country in need.' Filip D (♂17) spoke of the Union as 'connecting us economically – they helped us building roads, schools or something, to get Poland on the same level as the western European countries - it's a good thing.'

The European Union was also seen as offering security and a sense of solidarity: membership gave status to the country. Security was a particular issue in the north-eastern ex-Warsaw pact countries and the Baltic states. In the Czech Republic, Oldrich N (♂12) thought the EU allowed 'even the grandmothers of the world [to] feel citizens of the world and of Europe - it unites the people.' Bedrich K (♂16) described the European states as 'connected by the umbrella of the European Union - Europe is made closer to the Czech Republic by the European Union - so now we can see ourselves as… someone who takes care of Europe.'

Another often discussed civic component of Europe was the EU's concern with human rights. This was found both within the European Union, and among young people currently outside the Union. In the Czech Republic, Acedia C (♀16) asserted that 'regarding tolerance and liberalism - it's very good in Europe. In human rights and in women's rights, the treatment of women, the conditions of work.' In Hungary, Rudolf T (♂14) listed 'questions of law, capital punishment being abolished, human rights [being] guaranteed' and said 'I think we should thank great Europeans for this.'

Identification with European institutional practices were not all positive. The cultural threat to the country's identity a commonly voiced concern, reflecting the dominant cultural narration of the nation. These were most common in countries yet to join: in Croatia, Gojislav P (♂15) said ' If we continue like this, one day we're going to lose our language, and if we lose our language, we're going to lose our people, we're going to lose our nationality.' In Iceland too, the potential loss of culture was often mentioned. In Turkey, another candidate country, Bugra U (♂14) thought that membership of the EU 'would create cultural damage to the Turkish identity,' and that 'the European identity will force people to forget their Ottoman history and background.'

What was 'Europe'?

Angantýr	I don't feel like the stereotype of a European. My stereotypical European is a Frenchman.
Sigríður	Europe is so many countries, so Iceland and the northern countries in Europe are the same, but the other countries in Europe - I don't care, or at least I cannot relate to - Greece and stuff like that.
Grímólfur	I think we are more European than American … we visit more European places.
Halldóra	Europeans, more -
Rós	European too -
Angantýr	I feel the Nordic countries are the only bit of Europe we're like -
Hámundur	- We're so different from the other countries in Europe … I feel more Nordic than European.

This illustrates how individuals' constructions of Europe can differ and be confusing. Terms like European, Nordic and American contest with each other, overlapping, drawing on competing narratives and definitions. When distinguished from the political construction of the European Union - a legally defined, membership-based institution with known borders - Europe becomes amorphous, perhaps geographically definable, certainly changing over time. I found a variety of narratives that currently construct cultures of Europe and of Europeans, including discourses that deny that there is a European culture: some asserted Europe to be a mere geographical expression, but there were also claims it threatened to erode the local culture. There were qualifications about being part of a European culture: some see themselves as marginally European, some deny it, and others proffer alternative supranational, but sub-European identities (as did Hámundur). There were many debates about the characteristics of European culture, some linking this to stereotyping and othering other cultures (Angantýr), and some denying that there was a distinctive European culture. One way to express dissonance

with Europe was to identify with an alternative regional configuration. Angantýr and Hámundur (and other Icelanders) claimed a Nordic identity.

One particular region was frequently referred to as being different from or not European: the Balkans. 'Because we are Balkans,' said Ljubomir B (♂16) in Croatia; Zvonimira M (♀15) added: 'people from the Balkans have a different culture and other people notice that'; Ljubomir: 'their behaviour is different.'

This was often expressed in terms of a deficit, most frequently of behaviour and attitude. In Macedonia, Fatlinda A (♀17) said 'I don't think the problem is just water and cleaning the streets of stuff - the mentality is the most important thing.'

Tied to this was the belief that they were perceived in this way by the rest of Europe: not just less prosperous, but having different attitudes and behaviour, suffering from the stigma of what Todorova calls 'the balkanist discourse' (2009, p. 19). Some young Romanians and Bulgarians felt that their country's membership of the EU was resented by other members: they 'don't want our country to be members,' said Pavlina P (♀15, Bulgaria). Others suggested anti-Balkan bigotry: in Croatia, Dubravka S (♀15) said others 'think you're primitive, because we're from this part of Europe.'

This construction of not being European meant that 'Europe' was either elsewhere, or that there were two Europes. Many young people described their European status as technical, rather than real. Borislav T (♂16 Bulgaria) described his EU citizenship as 'just a document', while Cristian T (♂16 Romania) allowed that he was European 'technically. On paper.' This sense of not quite yet being European was expressed in Bulgaria by Toma S (♂12): 'I don't think we are Europeans *yet*, - the country is not improved to a European level yet'. The gradient of nesting balkanisms (Elchinova, 2004; Todorova, 2009) was evident: in coastal Croatia Petar M (♂14) saw Slovenia as 'more of a European country than the [other] ex-Yugo countries - they are more developed than us … they moved on.' It was concisely expressed by Andrija P (♂15) in Zagreb: 'no one wants to be part of the Balkans - for Croatians, the Balkans begin in Bosnia; in Bosnia the Balkans begin in Serbia; and in Serbia they begin in Romania - because of the [prejudices] of the western countries'.

Three European cultural characteristics were particularly debated: a sense of a common history, the role of Christianity in defining Europe, and a sense that Europeans were 'White'. None were uncontested.

When considering the characteristics of their individual country, histories were used to distinguish themselves from their neighbours: in a European context, it was asserted that they had a common history. In Białystok in Poland, one 17 year old said that 'European culture comes from the ancient times, the ground that started to build all of Europe', and Ada P (♀17) explained that 'the history of Europe is very rich, more so than other countries.' This (Eurocentric) conception of having 'more' history was used to distinguish Europe from other newer and more distant global societies.

Christianity was sometimes proffered as defining European culture, but this was generally contested by other members of the group. Sometimes a lack of religion (or at

least, less intense religious expression) was seen as a European characteristic: thus in Hungary Kata P (♀13) observed that 'in Europe people are less religious than in other continents,' and in Slovakia Mira M (♀13) said of Europeans 'we have a common faith,' immediately qualified by 'but not all of us'.

A third potential characteristic sometimes offered was skin colour. In Slovakia there were several comments, in different groups, about racial characteristics:

Erik Z (♂14)	Well, Europe is white - there are no Afro-Americans, like Blacks, in Europe … Well, there are some immigrants.
Hedviga G (♀13)	I think a European is one who has a white skin colour, who looks like me.
AR	So if someone is not white, you don't consider them European?
Boleslav P (♂13)	No

The notion of a European identity was largely constructed in terms of a civic identity, rather than a cultural one, while the country was generally constructed as a cultural identity, and the civic or political structures and practices were often seen as less significant. However, these constructions were generally developed over the various conversations as a consideration of Europe, or of the country, in relative isolation from external 'others'. A critical closing element of each conversation was to ask the group to consider countries at what might be seen as the fringes of Europe.

The other

Towards the end of the focus group I asked about 'other countries who are perhaps thinking of joining the European Union - how do you feel about them joining the same Union - how would you feel about [slight pause] say Russia being a member of the European Union? A good thing, a bad thing, wouldn't matter?'

Early in a Romanian discussion – before this question - I asked if, as well as feeling Romanian, they also considered themselves Europeans. There was a general shaking of heads.

Cristian	No, I don't think so. We can't compare ourselves to European countries like Germany, England … we aren't in the same bracket.
AR	But Romania is part of the European Union?
Cristian	Technically. On paper.
AR	Do you all agree with that?
Several	Yes
Beryx	Up till now, I've never felt that I'm European … and if I felt it, I never got help from anybody - nothing changed [when] we integrated into the European Union … it's exactly the same.

Several minutes later, I returned to this point:

AR	You said that you don't think of yourself as being European. What makes Europeans different from everyone else?
Cristian	A sort of breed of efficient people - and wealthy countries - that's about it. Yes, you must have something in common to create a Union. You don't have a culture in common, so what remains in the industry, the economy …
Beryx	In Europe, most countries are at the same level - for example, in Germany, if someone has a problem the State helps him … it's well organised. In Romania, no one helps you … It's not the same, even if we are in Europe. No one helps us.

I then asked the question about the possibility of Russia joining the European Union:

Cristian	I think they can't [join]. Because if we look at the history, they always were different. Being such a big country - sort of hungry for more land, for more power - they wouldn't cooperate well with the European Union. They … I don't see them as people who can obey rules very easily, and have common sense.
Andrei	I also think that it's not possible - because Russia is spread on two continents …
Emil	Russia has their own union.
AR	I'm interested in what you said about Russia being different from - from whom?
Cristian	I think from Europe. Because we try to be sort of politically correct here, and they don't really - they have a sort of - We, we Europeans as well - especially you British people - have a history, a habit, of exploiting underdeveloped countries, colonies and so on. But they have a bigger habit of doing this, and a more recent habit of doing it.
AR	Do you agree with what Cristian T says?
Several	Yes, yes
AR	I'm going to press you on this - you're now talking about 'we Europeans' -
Cristian	Aghr! [humorous exasperation at having contradicted himself]
AR	- but before you said that you didn't feel European.
Cristian	Yes, yes, I know … as a mentality, as a country, I think of us being exactly in the middle - I think we incline to be more European-ish than Russian. We, we evolved towards the European, I think.

Russia is constructed in a political manner - its behaviour in the past, its current structures and policies, its apparent disregard for human rights - and then constructed as an opposite to their own country's political system. Thus their own country, initially constructed as primarily a *cultural* entity rather than a civic unity, becomes a *political*

unit when Russia becomes the other. Europe isn't an entity, a unity, until Russia enters the frame.

Belarus was also constructed as undemocratic and therefore an unsuitable co-member of the European Union. Gosia K's (♀17 Poland) said a 'rule of the European Union is to be a democratic country - Belarus isn't a democratic country, people don't feel free, and they can't join the European Union.' Serbia was not wanted in the European Union for reasons of recent history, rather than of current politics. In Hungary, Alfréd J (♂14) referred to Serbia as 'not a friendly neighbour - they are pretty wild.'

Viewing other states as potential partners in the same Union created different orientations of the other, and different orientations of their own country. Countries with a different political order, civic cultures and values, meant they saw their own countries differently. The country in isolation was constructed in cultural terms, and its political institutions were downplayed - sometimes very critically. But filtered through the lens of potential partnership with certain other states, their country became constructed as political, and civic virtues were paraded to demonstrate difference.

Such comparisons could also lead to new constructions of the cultural characteristics of Europe and the other.

Radoslav	But Turkey's a different thing - I wouldn't take them - they're not European.
Kamila	No, they're not, I wouldn't like them to join.
Mirka	If some state doesn't have money, Europe will help the country - and maybe if we helped Turkey, it would be better.
Kamila	But wouldn't you say Turks are different to us Europeans?
Ctibor	Well, no, they're quite different.
Radoslav	Maybe they have some common customs, but they are very different to us.
Mirka	Well, it doesn't suit me - I do not think they're Europeans.

This group was initially unable to identify any characteristics of a European culture. But when a country such as Turkey became the comparator, there was a shift in language: there was a sudden clarity about the existence of European culture: it could immediately be constructed as 'not Turkish'. This phenomena was seen not only with respect to Turkey, but also in the cultural othering of Russia, the United States, and other countries.

'Turkey isn't a European country! It has so different a culture, it's so different a country,' said Lujza B (♀15) in Hungary. While many young people earlier denied any sense of common culture in defining, considering of Turkey suddenly highlighted a distinctive 'European culture'. Turkey has a totally different culture to the culture of European countries …we would have a weird diversity of cultures … it wouldn't be natural,' said Jarek K (♂13 Poland). In many cases culture referred to religious difference. Agnieszka L (♀14 Poland) said 'Turkey has a special difference - religion. … Turkey [would be] a problem in the European Union.' Many constructed Turkey as essentially Islamic: 'I'd say Turkey is more Arabic - Islam prevails,' said Barbora B (♀17 Slovakia), and consequently, Tomas S (♂15 Poland) argued, 'we are thinking

about morality - the Muslims and the changes of culture.' Islam was constructed as oppositional to Christianity, and to some, perhaps to Europe.

But there were also many who argued that Europe was, and should be, culturally diverse. To some, this attitude was, in itself, one of the defining characteristics of being European. Difference was to be welcomed, rather than tolerated, and therefore potential European countries such as Turkey should not be excluded simply on the grounds of having a 'different' culture. One could be relativistic about issues of culture, but not about fundamental rights, Augustyn Z (♂16 Poland) argued: 'When it comes to cultural diversity …we'll have different cultures inside Europe. The religion in Turkey is different and the culture is different - but the Polish culture and religion is also different. But if human rights are broken, then I don't think they can join.'

Europe could be constructed with a cultural identity in particular situations. Cultural differences with their neighbours had been important in defining a national identity – strong enough to counter suggestions of European cultural homogeneity – but these became less pronounced when cultural diversity became problematic. But, to a significant minority, the cultural heterogeneity of Europe was a positive value, and to this group, adding another very different culture might be a benefit.

Conclusion

Each young person advanced a diversity of identities, changing over the course of each conversation: identities were contingently performed, according to the context of the particular discussion, the historical moment and the specific audience. While there was certainly fluidity in this, to describe identities as liquid, as Bauman has done (2000), is to suggest amorphousness: it implies that the identities constructed were shapeless, subject to physical laws of fluidity, merely filling the available spaces – and it denies agency. Despite the flexibility and acrobatic twists, there were *patterns* in what was said.

The metaphor that I would offer for the process of constructing identities is that of the kaleidoscope. Each individual used a palette of materials, configured in patterns that change as though one is looking through a lens or a filter: light is refracted and reflected in patterns that may be symmetrical, varying as the configuration of the mirrors. At different moments and contexts, the individual's pattern changed - but it remained constructed from the same basic range, some materials more prominent in some patterns, obscured in others. What is seen - the momentary, situational, observer-dependent pattern of identities - is contextually contingent on the lens of circumstance, the audience's perspective, the culture, and the moment of discourse or of performance.

How do these young people differ? Differ as being 'new' Europeans in these countries, or in being a new generation, the post 1989 cohort? My argument has a number of elements.

Firstly, aspects of these countries' status (newly joined, or potentially joiners) of the European Union encourages citizens and residents to reflect on their national or country affiliations, and the nature of their feeling of being part of the European Union. Identities

are reconfigured to include new dimensions and relationships, particularly among this generation.

Secondly, the historical nature of many of these countries leads to particular potential for seeking to be European, being part of western European economy and culture. Both the pre-1945 experience, and surviving the events of 1945-89, have brought most of these countries a shared sense of being denied what they see as the political and economic advantages enjoyed by western European countries from 1945.

These two elements create a consensus and synchronisation: their emergence, post 1989, as independent countries has led them to look westwards to the European Union, and there is a corresponding trend in the identities constructed by these young people.

A third element is that these young people, born post-1989, only have vicarious memories of the first two. The combination of experiences – EU membership, soviet domination and the break of 1989 - have led most young people towards two conclusions. Firstly, they have a strong and sympathetic sense of why their parents' and grandparents' acted as they did, and why these earlier generations constructed the post 1989 states in which they now live; but secondly, they are liberated from the fears, memories and antagonisms that shaped the political orientations of earlier generations.

Their country was constructed, considered in isolation, in positive cultural terms. There was appreciation of the heritage, the language, and the cultural practices of the people, and the natural assets of the country. There were some reservations about the behaviours of some fellow country-people - often described as their 'mentality' - and this was particular evident in the constructions of a 'Balkan mentality'. There was generally a less positive attitude towards the civic elements of the country, and politicians' behaviour often detracted from identification with the country. Some expressed feelings of disempowerment and of lacking agency, and others spoke of their desire to take action - or rather, to take action when adult - to change the situation.

These created a sense of benign patriotic affection for their country: a sense of broad cultural affinity rather than a passionate commitment. This became particularly apparent when they discussed how they felt that their parents and grandparents identified with their country. Older generations, they felt, had a more nationalistic identification, which they frequently ascribed to the older generations' experiences of the Second World War and the communist periods, and the struggles to establish and maintain national identity. There appeared - from the young people's perspectives of their own identities - to have been a generational shift.

Identification with the country was modified when they began to compare their position with other states, particularly to countries that they thought had alternative civic structures and processes. Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus were constructed as being politically different from their country: this was the point at which political rights and freedoms were foregrounded, and their own country's civic institutions were perceived more positively. Enthusiasm for the civic waxed and waned as the lens changed.

Europe, on the other hand, looked at from within, was largely constructed positively in terms of its civic institutions and practices. This was seen both at the personal and instrumental level - the freedom of movement - and at the level of economic and political support. Enthusiasm for the political support of the European Union was expressed sometimes as a bulwark against perceived threats, or as a buttress for democratic processes, or as promoting human rights. These civic features led them to modify their earlier comments on their country's political practices, recasting them more favourably in the context of Europe. There was much less certainty about European culture: in every country there were some expressions of being excluded from European culture, or even whether European culture could be said to exist. It was very hard for most to pin down any specific characteristics of Europe with which to identify: the real Europe, if it existed at all, lay to the west. There were also concern that a European culture threatened their own country's culture. But European culture sometimes emerged when other cultures were defined as non-European, as inappropriate for EU membership.

Young people felt that older generations' views of European identities were constructed within their perceptions of national identity. Many young people saw their parents' and grandparents' identities as constructed by their lived historical experiences of conflict, war and antagonism, which supported both their more nationalist perspective and their sense of distance from being truly European. Many contrasted this with their own sense of being 'true Europeans': making a contrast with another generation shifted and strengthened their sense of European-ness.

Further areas need to be researched. What can be done to recognise, use, value and encourage the complexity and fluency of the young people's ideas? I have been struck by how these young people so often described how they felt alienated from school as a forum for political discussion. Teachers often appeared to be a barrier to discussing socio-political ideas - yet schools would seem to be the obvious institutions in which such learning should be nurtured. Is political discussion irreconcilable with the transmission of information model of education?

If these 'new Europeans' constitute a distinct group in terms of national and European identity construction, then how do young people in 'old Europe' construct their identities? Do young people in the west also perceiving themselves as a distinct cohort from their forebears?

An undemanding east Europe – west Europe dichotomy is probably too simple. The similar narratives of identity found in Cyprus and Iceland (Ross et al, 2012) might indicate that young people in the islands of Europe have a distinctly different narrative to those in continental Europe. There are questions to be explored around the nature of Balkan identities (Ross, 2014a; 2014b): a study of all the Balkan countries might reveal other fractures and unities, politically important in the development of a united Europe.

These young people are adept at managing identities, drawing on sources not limited to the accounts of the school curriculum or of the family. They call on media, including social media, to illustrate and support their constructions, in a way that is sophisticated and global. They construct themselves as different from their parents, with different horizons and landscapes, and alternative narratives of the past. An important part of this

process of differentiation appears to be a different sense of 'being European', which they are able to combine with a continuing sense of affection for their country.

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