

## Guest Editorial

# Claiming and Framing Youth in the Public Domain during Times of Increasing Inequalities<sup>1</sup>

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This special issue aims to offer fresh empirical comparative analyses, based on original data, of the ways in which young people as well as issues concerning them are dealt with in the public domain, with a specific focus on times of increasing inequalities. There is notable absence of research on youth representation in the mainstream media and their presence as collective actors in the public sphere. The special issue investigates how youth-related claims are raised in the media by youth but also by nonyouth actors against a period of increasing inequalities and social and political exclusion in a context of austerity, how young people's ways of doing politics are dealt with in the media as well as to what extent organized youth and contestation are visible in the public domain.

In delving into how young people are able to reinvent democracy and to refresh political practices, it is increasingly important to study the transformative impact of youth activism in the media as well as how other actors make claims on youth. The special issue aims to understand

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<sup>1</sup> The data used by all the papers in this special issue were collected in the context of the collaborative project "Reinventing Democracy in Europe: Youth Doing Politics in Times of Increasing Inequalities" (EURYKA), funded by the European Commission and (for the Swiss case) by the State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation (SERI), under the H2020 research and innovation program (Grant Agreement Number 727025).

how claims for tackling inequalities and bringing about political change are expressed in the public debate by youth actors in the public sphere. It will furthermore evaluate how policy-makers perceive and frame issues of democracy and political representation relating to youth in a context of austerity and crisis so as to assess consistency between actual policy responses and policy rhetoric. These two dimensions are of crucial importance to understanding the ways in which our political life is conducted from the viewpoint of young people themselves, and how policy unresponsiveness is affecting their prospects for social and political participation. It also points to the urgency, and difficulty, of the challenge this issue poses for politicians and political parties in terms of giving rise to a more differentiated, youth-sensitive policy approach.

Starting from the general question of the presence and framing of young people in the public domain in times of increasing inequalities, the papers included in the special issue address a number of key aspects about the presence of youth in the public domain, whether as subject, addressed, or object actors. This includes general assessments of such a presence as well as more specific issues such as the process of depoliticization of youth by the ways other actors deal with them, the gender bias in reporting youth-related issues, the role of crime and violence in public discourse about young people, or the spatial dimension of youth-related claims.

Concerning young people themselves, we start from the assumption that what youth say in the media is a means to communicate their affirmation of, or discontent with existing policies, national governments, and the EU and thus to express themselves politically. Young people's political claims are their vehicles to bring about political change and to tackle inequalities, but at the same time they can serve as indicators of unequal access of young groups to the public sphere. Furthermore, we also acknowledge that policy-makers' rhetoric, their responses to youth demands as well as their unresponsiveness are shaping the political life and affecting the prospects of the youth's social and political participation.

The papers are all based on a unique dataset consisting in a random sample of political claims dealing with youth issues in nine European countries (Britain, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland) covering the period spanning from 2010 to 2016.<sup>1</sup> The data were retrieved by content-analyzing several newspapers in each country and include about 4500 claims (500 per country). An integrated methodological approach has been adopted in all countries with respect to sampling and coding, so as to allow for cross-national comparisons.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, media particularities in the countries under investigation, with respect to the traits of press media (e.g. geographical level of coverage, balance in ideological orientations, and reporting style) have been taken into consideration. The sources used are daily newspapers of as high circulation as possible and of different political orientations, during the period of interest, with continuous coverage of the whole study period. Five newspapers were selected in each country, aiming at a representative and unbiased sample. Table 1 lists all the newspapers selected. The articles were sampled from all sections of the selected newspapers, excluding the editorials and sports sections, through key words searches. All articles containing any word derivative of the words <young> or <student> or <teenage> were selected in the home language. Applying the method of political claims analysis, we systematically studied the claims – that is, strategic interventions, either verbal or non-verbal, in the public domain made by a given actor on behalf of a group or collectivity and which bears on the interests or rights of other groups or collectivities (in other words, the expression of a political opinion by verbal or physical action in the public domain) – pertaining to youth and more specifically actors intervening in public debates, the issues they address, their policy positions, and the frames justifying their claims and positions. The data were collected in the context of the collaborative project “Reinventing Democracy in Europe: Youth Doing Politics in Times of Increasing Inequalities” (EURYKA), funded by the European Commission and (for the Swiss case) by the State Secretariat for

Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) under the H2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement number 727025).<sup>3</sup>

The papers included in this special issue address different aspects pertaining to the presence and representation of youth in the media. The first four papers offer a general context of analyses of youth-related claims by youth and nonyouth actors, focusing on the diverging presence of youth in public discourse, the depoliticization of youth in the public domain, the misrepresentation of youth in mainstream newspapers and whether the political leaning of newspapers affects youth representation in the public debates.

Christian Lahusen and Johannes Kiess analyze the construction of youth in public discourse in the nine countries covered by the data. Noting that youth is a recurrent topic of public debates, as it is visible in almost all issue fields discussed in mass media, not only educational, but cultural or criminal ones. This general observation raises questions about how “youth” is featured by public debates. . More specifically, they aim to identify the contextual factors that determine the extent to which youth actors actively participate in public discourses. In particular, they wish to assess whether the discursive inclusion or exclusion of youth is patterned along countries and policy fields. They show that policy fields are the most important contextual factors explaining such discursive exclusion. Public debates about youth are rather similar between the nine countries in terms of issues and actors, suggesting that public debates about youth are patterned by a similar, cross-national differentiation along policy-domains.

Marco Giugni and Maria Grasso look at the ways in which collective actors frame youth in the public domain in the same nine countries and how this may provide discursive opportunities in the sense of the extent to which public discourse portrays young people as agents of social change. They argue that young people undergo a process of depoliticization in the public domain, meaning that public statements and more generally public discourse about youth

tend to depict them as actors who do not have political aims or, perhaps more precisely, they tend to focus on other characteristics and categories than political ones. Their analysis shows that, while youth are fairly present as actors in the public domain, they only rarely are dealt with as political objects and, when so, in rather negative terms, they make few political claims, and are seldom framed in political terms. At the same time, they observe important cross-national variations in the extent to which this depoliticization process in the public domain has taken place. The latter, in turn, has important implications on their potential for acting as political agents and for their political activism.

The paper by Ludovic Terren, Anna Clua Infante and Nuria Ferran Ferrer examines the extent to which the mainstream press relays social media-based youth political claims, the nature of these claims and the prominence of young people's voice in the press, once again in the nine countries covered by the study. Despite the idea that social media and digital technologies more generally are changing the way news are sourced and produced as well as power relations in terms of who gets to say what, they find that youth political activity on social media rarely transpires in mainstream newspapers, even when looking exclusively at articles containing youth-related keywords. The press does not seem to take into account or relay what have become characteristic forms of youth participation and organization. It rather present young people as apathetic and disconnected from democratic practices. Therefore they offer support to scholars such as Chomsky and to Mouffe who point to the need to address unequal access to the public sphere. The authors conclude that, if the current democratic system has to be reconfigured to be more representative, receptive and adaptive to new youth practices, so do the production routines of the mainstream press.

Lorenzo Bosi, Anna Lavizzari and Stefania Voli focuses on mainstream media coverage of youth. They analyze more specifically how newspapers of center-right and center-left political

orientations represent young people in the public debate in Greece, Italy, and Spain, aiming to challenge the idea that there is only one way through which newspapers cover youth actors, they show that the representation of young people in the public debate is very similar if we compare newspapers of center-right and center-left political orientations. This implies that the social construction of the concept of youth dominates in mainstream media dominated by the adult world, regardless of any political differences. At the same time, even more interesting is their finding that newspapers of center-left political orientation more likely seem to report claims made by young people, providing them with opportunities to express and to represent themselves in the public sphere.

The paper by Katherine Smith and Valentina Holecz focuses on the representation of young women and their political interests in the public sphere. To do so, they assess the presence of young women in the public sphere, the ways in which they are addressed therein, and their framing. They find that the main qualities of representation confirm patterns within existing literature, with a centrality of young women's bodies within our sample, and a low level of agency or "active" role for young women within claims relating to their own interest. Furthermore, we empirically confirm trends which offer examples of more progressive representations of young women and their interests, including the significance of civil society actors in promoting the rights of young women and the theme of gender (in)equality in professional life, which enables space for a greater level of agency for young women than most other debates.

Katrin Uba and Ludvig Stendahl examine the role of crime and violence in relation to youth presentation in the media. They investigate which actors make political claims about youth criminality and violence, how much the voices of young people are represented in such processes, and how the varying patterns of this representation of youth relate to the policies

towards juvenile crime. Their analysis points to a strong presence of an “adult view” when different actors make claims about youth related crime and violence in all nine countries included in the study. However, there are content-related differences, as state actors talk about crime committed by minors, while youth actors mainly focus on violence against minors. More generally, claims are rarely made in the interests of youth actors, and there is much stronger tendency to attribute blame to youth actors in the crime and violence related claims than in other political claims. They also note some country differences, for example with regard to the blame attribution. They conclude that young people might face a notable bias when claims about criminality and violence are made in public sphere.

The paper by Angelos Loukakis and Martín Portos focuses on claims made by young people themselves. More specifically, they analyze whether and to what extent young Europeans express their demands via protest claims across the nine countries covered by the study, during a period of increasing inequalities and following the implementation of austerity and neoliberal policies across European countries, especially South European ones. Based on 4525 randomly chosen claims on nine European countries, their findings point out that youth-related protest claims are relatively rare but also highlight factors that make political claims more likely to take protest forms. At the same time, they find considerable variation across countries, actors, issues, and addressees, and point out the importance of institutional and discursive opportunities in understanding whether a youth-related claim takes a protest form or not. They show that, relative to non-protest forms of claim-making, cross-country discontinuities of protest claims’ issues and framing can be explained by changing discursive opportunities.

Finally, Maria Paschou, Maria Kousis, Manlio Cinalli, and Didier Chabanet similarly look at the spatial dimension of youth-related claims. They draw on the political opportunity structure approach to argue that the spatial scope of political debates on youth-related issues are driven by

institutional arrangements reflecting windows of opportunities for the representation of various youth interests. Using the aggregate EURYKA political claims dataset they examine how state configuration and youth regime contexts impact on the spatial scope of youth and nonyouth actors, and furthermore, on specific state, civil society and interest group actors. This exploratory analysis unravels new patterns of country clusters based on specific types of actors making youth-related claims in the public sphere, that reflect the deep impacts of macro-level conditions on youth.

Overall, the eight papers of this special issue offer fresh findings and shed new light on youth-related public discourse in the nine national public domains, using a commonly created comparative dataset. Our research on mainstream national newspapers points to new findings illustrating the presence or absence of youth voices, the exclusion of youth from public discourse, the negative (depoliticized) framing, the significance of policy fields as contextual factors, a low active role of agency for young women, adult bias on youth related criminality and violence, the importance of institutional and discursive opportunities for youth protest, and the extent to which national contexts and youth regimes affect youth related claims of specific groups in the public sphere.

Table 1: Newspapers used as source for the coding of claims-making

<b>France</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>Greece</b>	<b>Italy</b>	<b>Poland</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>Switzerland</b>	<b>UK</b>
Le Figaro Le Monde Le Parisien L'Humanité Libération	Bild Die Tageszeitung Die Welt Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Süddeutsche Zeitung	Kathimerini Makedonia Ta Nea Proto Thema Rizospastis	Corriere della Sera Il Giornale La Nazione La Repubblica La Stampa	Dziennik Gazeta Prawna Gazeta Polska Codziennie Gazeta Wyborcza Rzeczpospolita Super Express	ABC El Mundo El Pays El Periodico de Catalunya La Vanguardia	Aftonbladet Dagens Nyheter Göteborgs Posten Sydsvenskan Västerbottens-Kuriren	Le Matin Neue La Regione Le Temps Tages Anzeiger Zürcher Zeitung	Daily Mail Daily Mirror The Guardian The Sun The Times

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<sup>1</sup> Further details can be found in the EURYKA Work Package 2 Report, available at [www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/euryka/files/4515/3854/9194/WP2Report-1.pdf](http://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/euryka/files/4515/3854/9194/WP2Report-1.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> The codebook created for EURYKA's political claims analysis can be found at: [https://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/euryka/files/9315/2363/9891/Codebook\\_for\\_the\\_Political\\_Claims\\_Analysis.pdf](https://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/euryka/files/9315/2363/9891/Codebook_for_the_Political_Claims_Analysis.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> See the project's website at <https://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/euryka/home/>.