

A Generation Separated by Shared Experience – Young People’s Individualized Relation to Politics

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We have, in our own capacities, previously contemplated the nature of the generation which has gone through its youth in the time following Finland’s economic recession. The idea of the *mandatory individual choice generation* (Hoikkala & Paju 2002, 26–29) is based on the premise that young people in 21st century Finland can no longer be referred to as a collective generation which is brought together by a political experience shared by all (cf. Mannheim 1928/1952). Required individualization as a situation of young people refers to the mass society where, in order to be successful, everyone must be a youthful and somehow unique individual. Individualism also means that strong collective identities do not form in the same way that they used to. The individual’s experience of society is fragmented – shaped in different ways and on different levels so rapidly that keys to building common thought patterns later in life (world views) no longer form so easily in the lives of teenagers.

The term *portfolio generation* (Paakkunainen 2006) is used to refer to the situation in society where, at numerous key points in the process of becoming an adult, the individual must present documentation of his or her particular abilities: a sort of portfolio of skills. The functionality of the society and economy is safeguarded by enterprising, innovative and risk-taking individuals, who provide the basis for the competitive economy and competitive society to function efficiently. Young “DIY” citizens in a way “customize” their own lives and biographies. They invest in their immediate social environment. Trust is required and trust itself requires some personal contact. Paradoxically, these extremely individualized people also produce the society they live in. Thus they take part in creating their own failure, as a portion of young people cannot handle the competition and start to drift into self-condemnation as a result.¹ In their book about the MeWe generation, Lindgren, Lüthi and Fürth (2005, 44) describe the situation in the following way: “The good life is already there; there are no excuses if you do not get what you want.”

As societal and ethical decisions are individualized, young people must – even though they may not be so inclined – take an individual stand and take responsibility for society’s value decisions, problems and risks. According to the responsibilities of the portfolio society, young people both react as a matter of necessity and within the framework of their own biographies they politicize with their choices as citizens, consumers, students and professionals. In the

¹ The individual decision and responsibility perspective would appear to be getting stronger also on the basis of a perusal of survey data. In the late nineties well over 90 % of even unemployed young people agreed to some extent with the statement, “Success in life depends on the individual himself/herself” (NUORA 1999). At the very beginning of the eighties (in a study published in the monthly supplement of the *Helsingin Sanomat* for February, 1980) just over 80 % of young people surveyed believed that a person’s life and success are more dependent on the individual than on conditions in society.

portfolio society many young people think that entrepreneurs and active citizens grow on the same tree, from the same doctrines – every one of us has at least an entrepreneur and decision maker within.²

The big question is, does an individualized (and individualizing) society lead to the corrosion of participatory citizenship? If so then individualism would mean some sort of ego protection, fate and forced adjustment to the economic and workforce requirements of a competition society and to consumption. Or can we find societal doubt and critique among young people which leads to looking for a better life, life politics and issue- and situation-specific cooperative action towards those ends (cf. Beck & Gernsheim-Beck 2002)? How can “individualistic solidarity” (Suurpää 1996) or “altruistic individualism” (Beck & Gernsheim-Beck 2002) be seen in political participation and (generational) power negotiations? There is obviously a huge leap from holding individual attitudes to taking collective action.

In this paper we distinguish between the ways in which the individualized generation and the age groups (those born between 1978 and 1989) relate to political participation and power. We contemplate whether, in spite of everything, we can still speak of generational policies or politics. As national *child and youth policy development programme* is under construction in Finland, the policy dimension also awakens some interest. We are not the only ones confused by the interpenetration of policies and political issues in this process.

Politics live on and idealism flashes within a sheltered environment

Although young people’s foundational values have become more individualized, and both materialistic and societal law-and-order values appear to be strong, in many youth groups social ideas, equal rights, anti-marginalization attitudes and the critique of market forces that goes with them hold sway. Young people living in conditions of temporary jobs and uncertainty also define themselves as opposed to the large post-war generation³ in terms of struggle for advantages and political power. This is a sign that value debates and consideration and evaluation of social advantages on a collective level are not lost arts. However, in an individualized society, at least in Finnish context, this “war” between generations seems to be one almost without fronts. Osku Pajamäki’s *Greedy Generation* (2006) is one of the exceptions here. His book draws clear lines between the interests of the young and the middle aged, but as the author himself is 35 years old, he can hardly be a spokesman for youth in the traditional sense.

Finnish young people can be divided up into different groups in terms of how they consider their political possibilities to improve the world (see EUYOUNGART 2006). According to the Finnish national answers in this European comparative study, the average Finnish young person does not see politics as having any use in building careers, skills or advantageous relationships. In the comparison the political concept of sheltered Nordic young people seems appropriate. Politics are seen as less of a cheap business or an object of reproach – corrupt

² In a survey conducted in 2005, a strong majority of young people believed that, “*everyone has his/her own portfolio; it is not the exclusive right of entrepreneurs,*” and nearly half of the respondents believed that “*entrepreneurs and active citizens are raised using the same methods*” (though over one third to some extent disputed this idea: Paakkunainen 2006).

³ . Those born in the years 1945–1950 are here defined as the large post-war generation, also known as “baby boomers”. The rise in birth rates following the Second World War was not as prolonged in Finland as in most Western countries, and therefore in our sociological literature this designation is used to refer to a more specific group than it would refer to in an Anglo-American context.

promise breaking or a dirty game – than in any other countries in the comparison. Finns tend to have a rather naïve perspective towards politics. Conflict-aware idealism blossoms in young people’s rhetoric; they think that the world must be improved and that politics are a brutal part of the circuit for dealing with issues and resolving conflicts. According to the survey results, young people regard questions of social advantage, environmental protection and global risks with a strong awareness of the conflicts involved. At the same time young people believe in the possibilities of expanding politics and democracy in confronting risks (factor analyses based on attitude statements and political positions taken by respondents in EUYOUNG 2006). Consequently we draw a cautious conclusion that politics, in terms of values and ideals, is present in young people’s minds. The big and so far open question is whether they might also have some adequate policy measures in mind.

A sort of cautious idealism is reflected in the political values and attitude tendencies of Finnish young people. Finnish “Matti” and “Maija” are not part of decisions by their European brothers and sisters in favor of “law and order” or tighter racist border defences. Liberal economic policies (*New Public Management*, NPM) for dismantling the European welfare state are not so influential in Finland. Caution also has another face: the average Finnish young person has a colder regard for global anti-liberalism and equal-rights feminism than those in the other countries in the comparison. Overall Finnish young people see themselves as Europeans, but they have very little interest in European politics. Young people are wary of becoming masters of big things: the voice of major powers is listened to and anticipated (factor analyses based on attitude statements, EUYOUNG 2006).

A land of “normal” social organizations and individual politics

Finland is seen in the EUYOUNG comparative study (2006) as having a “normal” political youth culture. In terms of quantitative measures of political youth culture, Italy, Germany and Austria are more active than Finland (see tables 1-3 below). Young people in Estonia, Slovakia and Great Britain, on the other hand, are more passive than young Finns in terms of political participation in traditional and more individual forums (points comparisons between the countries, tables 2 and 3). French young people are less active than Finns in terms of conventional participation (political institutions and powers, organized activities), but in terms of more irregular actions (legal and illegal protests, unofficial and individual communication and statement making) the French are more powerfully expressive. All in all, illegal and legal forums are not an either/or matter. Active countries are usually active and passive ones passive in both ways. The thesis of the accumulating activity has been around for decades, so this phenomenon is hardly any kind of news.

One important finding is that Finnish young people rarely find their place along the lines of the traditional dividing line between left wing and right wing politics. Nevertheless representative institutions and political powers of the traditional democratic system (organizations, conferences, publications, etc.) tend to mobilize young Finns better than they do the young people of most other countries. It would not be correct to speak of either totally conventional or totally revolutionized forms of political action. So far we suggest a conclusion that conventional forms are finding their ways into new arenas, which is in most cases involves the Internet. Young Finns also know and understand the operational principles and phenomena of the political system relatively well, as do the young people of Germany and Austria. Many grown ups in Finland sincerely vote “for a candidate” unaware of d’Hondt’s system (Jefferson’s system).

On the other hand voting activity in Finland is rather weak by European standards. This is remarkable in that normally a rising level of education has a direct effect on electoral behavior, but in the Finnish case this link seems to be broken (see Wass 2007). The younger generation is better educated than any previous generation, and this appears in political activity, but not particularly noticeable ways. Interest in parliamentary elections here among 18-30-year-olds seems to have been on the rise in the beginning of the twenty-first century (1999: approximately 53 %, 2003: approximately 54 % and prediction for 2007: 56 % – see Paakkunainen 2003 and Peltola 2007), but Finnish young people’s election participation still remains about 10 % behind the European average.

Table 1. Popularity of various forms of political action in eight countries: by rates of participation (EUYOUPART)

Have you ever...? (Positive answer percentage)	Finland	Overall
1 cast an ineligible ballot in an election	1.7	4.7
2 refused to vote in protest of the election	5.0	6.0
3 contacted an elected official	12.0	7.7
4 participated in a political public gathering *	21.7	21.5
5 signed a petition*	33.2	27.7
6 gathered signatures	7.3	7.4
7 given a political speech	4.1	2.7
8 handed out tracts containing a political message *	5.1	5.7
9 boycotted a product for political reasons	28.0	13.9
10 purchased a particular product for political reasons *	33.8	18.6
11 written political graffiti on a wall	3.6	3.4
12 worn a political button on your shirt/jacket	10.1	9.4
13 participated in a legal public protest	10.5	18.6
14 participated in an illegal public protest	1.8	4.9
15 participated in a strike*	5.7	14.4
16 donated money to a political cause	8.1	6.7
17 participated in political discussions on the net *	16.9	9.5
18 written an article for newspaper or Internet publication	6.3	6.3
19 forwarded political messages by e-mail	10.2	8.4
20 participated in action which destroyed property	1.2	1.5
21 ... in action involving violence towards the police	1.5	2.7
22 ... in action involving violence towards opponents	0.8	1.6
23 seized control of a building	1.6	5.0
24 blocked/seized control of a street/rail line	3.5	2.7

** indicates forms of political action in which there are unique national factors involved which affect potential comparisons*

Table 2. Country-specific rates of conventional political participation ⁴

INDEX OF CONVENTIONAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION	Italy + 26	Germany +17	Austria +14	Finland +12	Slovakia -13	Estonia -13	France -14	UK -27
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Table 3. Country-specific rates of non-conventional political participation

INDEX OF NON-CONVENTIONAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION	Italy +50	Austria +30	Germany +20	France +19	Finland +10	Slovakia -28	Estonia -35	UK -62
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In the European comparative study 59 % of the Finnish respondents (18-25 years old) claimed to have voted in the 2003 parliamentary elections (the average for all eight countries was 70 % and the realized voting percentage in Finland was 53-54 %) and 40 % of the Finnish respondents claimed to have voted in the 2004 EU parliamentary elections (eight country average: 51 %). This result can be interpreted as saying that Finnish young people have a more straightforward and individualized way of relating to elections than those in other countries where voting is more of a *requirement*. In countries with high voting percentages young people tend to clown around and protest by casting unacceptable ballots, and when they move out of their family homes they often stop voting entirely. For us voting is more of a personal choice, and as young people get older and start families of their own they become increasingly likely to vote. Having a say in local public services such as school, daycare and medical centers is a very good incentive for those who need and use those services to get politically involved. When the moral code of a voting requirement starts to break down, voluntary and more individual choice based voting increases in value.

Young people's more casual relationship with parties

Finland is still the promised land for organizations and foundations, which also applies to youth. At the top of the heap of organizational activities we have, surprisingly, religious and trade union activities, followed by organizations with nature related themes, human rights and charitable organizations, and cultural and sport societies. A good level of organization in a trade union does not, however, mean that young people are politically active in the union field:

⁴ The rate of participation indexes for tables 2 and 3 were formulated so that national differences could be seen as clearly as possible. Forms of participation (measured in the battery of questions in section 13 of the EUYOUNG 2006) can easily be divided into categories of conventional action (election, political party and organizational activities: "old politics") and non-conventional action (individual and radical unofficial activities: "new politics"). When a country is the most active in some particular form of participation, it is given four positive points; second most active, three points, and so on. The fifth most active in each measure then receives one minus point, and so on down to the least active receiving four minus points.

15 % of the young people surveyed were members of Finland's especially well mobilized and unified trade union organizations, 4 % had participated in their activities during the past year, and 0.5 % had done volunteer work (EUYOUPART 2006).

Still party loyalty, organization's active membership and long-term commitment to civic organizations have been declining throughout Europe. This trend concerns all age groups, but especially young people. Aging and exclusive elites and the failures of party democracy are being critiqued in other countries than just Finland. Political parties and their supporting, in varying ways autonomous political youth organizations are in serious trouble – party democracy serves poorly as a trunk for parliamentary democracy. In the European comparison 1.9 % of Finnish young people (eight country average: 2.4 %) say that they have been involved with political party youth organization activities during the last year. Political party activities involve 2.9 % of all young people in Finland (eight country average: 2.5 %). The survey data which ties together all of the articles in this book tell us that about every hundredth Finnish young person is actively involved in party membership, with another 5 % of respondents stating that they are interested in parties and their youth organizations and that they would like to be part of them. In general, it is normal for Finnish parties to have about 30 times more voters than members.

Party activities tend to be avoided, but young people's party allergy (Paakkunainen 1991) is not as absolute as 15 years ago. Even though young people's basic evaluation of electoral democracy and party politics is rather critical (see Paakkunainen and Myllyniemi 2007) in the European comparative survey, it is clear that many young people still want to participate in party activities by way of supporting candidates, campaign activities and other forms of party contact. Relations to political parties are not an on/off matter. A significant number of young people are also individually interested in collective forms of political protest without wanting to be tied to a particular party for life. Not all young people are still moralizing against political games and group leverage, all forms of collective politics and party discipline. The phenomenon is an expression of the development of individualization. It can thus be seen in young people's relations to parties. The way young people relate to political groups, collectives and group discipline has become looser and more issue-specific. Commitment is light; young people judge collectiveness on the basis of individual criteria. As Leena Suurpää (1996) has written concerning individual solidarity, we (Kari Paakkunainen, Tommi Hoikkala and Petri Paju) now write – 10 years later – about individual collectiveness. This last statement can also be seen as a challenge to political powers and parties: can they dismantle their decision making hierarchy for young individualists.

The new order of individuality and collectiveness

In Finland heavies don't turn to means of violent protest in party and civic action. This is so even though the effectiveness of extreme action under conditions of an aging and constipated democratic system are theoretically known to Finnish young people. The unpopularity of illegal and functional action is clearly seen in Table 1. Instead we have the rise of young people's modern, individual culture of participation (see Table 1 above and the EUYOUPART 2006 factor analysis for categorizing activeness; also see Hoikkala & Salasuo 2006).

Politics among young people is not dead, but many political institutions and collectives have lost their position as political authorities and action forums. More individualized forms of action have arisen. This phenomenon became recognizable already in the 1980s (e.g. Jääsaari & Martikainen 1988; Pesonen 1958; Pesonen & Sänkiaho 1979; Paakkunainen 1991, 1993).

Finnish young people's own political symbols, petitions, direct contacts with politicians, youth publications and participation in campaign finance were noticeable in the European comparison. Young people's "my candidate" speeches, unofficial contacts with politicians, pressure moves, opinion page articles and net-democracy initiatives are replacing and pushing aside older forms of participation. These are means by which young people attempt to break through the blockages in representative and formal democracy. Finnish young people's desire to politicize by means of their consumption is unique in the European comparison; this refers to boycotts and young people's purchasing decisions based on political considerations. The most important voting paper is the kind people carry in their wallets (see Lindgren, Lüthi, Fürth 2005). Finns in general are extremely active buyers of "fair trade" products, for example. This is a matter of life politics. Beyond that, together with Estonians, young people from our "Nokia-Wunderland" stand out in terms of using the new communality of the Internet enthusiastically also in politico-ethical matters. Political polemics are conducted, messages exchanged, articles written, organizing carried out and petitions electronically signed on the net. The structure of the net is international, extending beyond nation-state borders (EUYOUPART 2006; Yndigegn, Waara & Paakkunainen 2005; Hoikkala 2006).

The survey data from 2006, which has been analyzed for this paper too, have the same message. One third of the respondents (34 %) reported that political considerations and values have affected their consumer choices (with 54 % remaining indifferent in this matter). The same amount (34 %) of young people use net connections to pass on ethical or political messages (62 % do not). Using the net's political arsenal somewhat more passively or informatively are those young people (71 %) who have at least once tried the so-called election machines to select their candidate for up-coming parliamentary elections (only 17 % were positive that they had not visited such sites). Over half of the respondents (51 %) may have filled in on-line election or political research forms while visiting candidates' web pages (30 % had no interest in such).

Personalizing politics

Finland is still a party-based democracy. Parties and their parliamentary delegations have a near monopoly on creating election alternatives and wielding parliamentary influence. It might be asked, how does the young Finnish individual relate to party action? How does the fore-mentioned openness or room for play appear in the direction of party politics? Table 4 shows in an interesting way that politically independent young people know parties better in terms of the individuals and images seen in party functions than as institutions, ideologies and methodologies. Thus politics have become personalized, even though elections still take parties as a point of departure.

Young cohorts are able to take advantage of party candidates and fractions in their political choices, their voting and their contacts with politicians. Nearly 60 % of the survey respondents select a candidate before deciding which party to vote for (Table 4 below). On the other side nearly a third thinks of the party before the individual candidate in the voting booth. However party election positions are now less clear or irrelevant to many; the number of "cannot say" responses has grown. The younger the age groups in question, the more their election decisions were made on the basis of the individual candidate. As level of education increases and young people become more interested and active in politics, the candidates' identities start to fade into the background and the party identity becomes more clearly established. Here it is not only a question of attitude, but of basic understanding as well. Any reasonable voter who knows how votes are counted considers party to be a vital factor.

Young people see the parties as basically the same, mixing together to form a political porridge, with differences between candidates and fractions within parties playing an increasingly important role. Party chairmen successfully or unsuccessfully project the party image in the public. Similarly charismatic and charming politicians and candidates shape the parties internal tensions and groups in a media democracy. Parties' internal differences can be greater than differences between parties.

Table 4. "Which is more important to you, party or individual candidate?"

	Survey data among 18–30-yr.-olds, 2006	Survey data among 18–30-yr.-olds, 1991 ⁵	Survey data among all eligible voters, 2003 ⁶
Party	31 % (n. 148)	42 % (n. 100)	49 % (n. 500)
Candidate	57 % (n. 268)	53 % (n. 127)	47 % (n. 480)
Cannot say	12 % (n. 58)	6 % (n. 14)	4 % (n. 41)
Total	100 % (n. 474)	100 % (n. 241)	100 % (n. 1021)

For young people the internal life and scope of the parties is a relevant matter. They do not read the party platform statements but rather recognize the political alternatives personified through the media and are motivated by the charm of a presidential candidate, for instance. Young people distinguish poorly between the parties (Jukarainen 2004, 158–168). This confusion results from the shrinking differences in party life and all of the pleasant image building, as well as young people's lack of history, fragmentation and remote understanding of party ideologies. Many of the position differences in "new politics" do not relate to the old left/right divide between parties. Political tensions over tolerance or pluralism, for instance, are more defined through different types of candidates. Nearly all parties have their own liberals or red-green pluralists and their own rednecks which are afraid of homosexuals, immigrants and all forms of international protesters.

Young people do not think of (individual) candidate selection as a superficial matter, and one important factor is the preformed positions of the party which the candidate stands for. The general ideals of political democracy and parliamentarianism – the idea of candidates having mutual positions, ideologies and abilities to channel interests and values (Jansson 1969, 64–85) – are at the forefront in young people's fresh responses. These ideals appear to also be a suitable basis for individual choice.

Backing a party

⁵ Comparative data from Pesonen, Sänkiäho & Borg 1993.

⁶ Paloheimo 2005, 213–214. A candidate-centered election party culture among the electorate as a whole was in force in 1995 (50 % preferring to choosing on an candidate basis) and 1999 (59 % choosing by candidate). In 1991 in a sample of the whole population 51 % chose by party first and 43 % by candidate. The re-emphasis on party in the first decade of this century has been explained in terms of voting for a cabinet of ministers. Voters think about party because this influences who is chosen as prime minister and what parties become part of the government coalition.

Backing a party is a looser level of commitment to party action than membership or direct support. It is an important link in the political system. By backing a party a citizen can at least imagine that he/she is influencing the balance of power. On the other hand, the cabinet and the parliament can justify through their actions before the rest of the population in terms of the support they have been given by parties and their backers – they can claim to govern democratically through organized people-groups.

Over a third of the young people (37 %) presently back some political party (see table 5). Nearly half (48 %) claim that they are not sweet on any particular party, leaving about a seventh (15 %) uncertain about their party feelings. Even though party slogans do not create strong collective identities or divisions among young people, we can interpret this as saying that even light party loyalties have an influence on structuring the world of political attitudes. For that matter perhaps some party slogans do appeal to young people; the problem is how to decide between “responsibility” and “caring” and other commonly accepted terms which parties use in their slogans.

Young people are variable actors in their backing of parties. A clear majority of young people (57 %) may change which party they support between elections (table 5). Every fifth (21 %) respondent expressed a more stable and long-term relationship with their party of choice. Among those who claim party loyalty at this point, a third (32 %) would – if necessary – in the interest of power change which party they give their backing to. Half (49 %) of those backing a particular party at the moment are sticking to their choice. Thus 18 % of the young people have a steady party relationship. “Turning one’s coat,” or the possibility of doing so, has shaped young people’s political mainstream. Calling someone a “turncoat,” on the other hand, is part of the rhetoric of the older generation. For young people, as the choice between candidates and parties has come more and more to resemble any other choice in the world of consumption; changing candidates is more like loading new music into their MP3s. Nor is political mobility as such a new phenomenon. After their great victory in 1966, Finland’s Social Democrats picked up lots of new members, as did Finland’s Center Party after their victory this year. Some people’s so-called loyalty is, and always has been, rather opportunist.

Variable party backing politicizes elections. Major shifts between parties and their fractions can occur in changing (electoral) conditions. According to many analysts the highly politically mobilized Finland was in some ways quite dull; between the time of the first autonomous House of Representatives at the beginning of the twentieth century and the 1970s the balance of power between left and right changed by just a few percentage points. Politics was the image of the collective mobilization of the social world, which was intentionally consolidated to maintain internal and external balance. Twenty-first century young people are not committed to this consensus.

The research data and information from the EUYOUNG project bring out young people’s flexible individual and cautious attitudes towards party action in a fascinating way. Party-faithful young people interested in political campaigns and background influence account for far more than a couple percentage points. In this data set 5 % were interested in party organization. But are the parties interested in recruiting young people into party activities by adopting themes and candidates which appeal to them? Unlikely, in that over the past couple of decades the core elite within parties have become fewer in number, following a trend across Europe. The parties’ ideological remnants are not enough to awaken party loyalty with the dawning of thematic and content rich dialogue with young people. Ready made candidates and rank and file election workers are welcome to join the party bases. Parties are election organizations; they plan their slogans and campaigns on the basis of marketing research and

advertising agency brochure planning. Openly using an advertising agency would have been a scandal in the 80s; today campaigning without one is more like political suicide. Lindren, Lüthi and Fürth (2005,123) take the comparison between commercial and political products even further; they call the core of political credibility a “Trustmark” – the political equivalent to a trademark. Election work does not offer opportunities for the long-term socialization of young people into the party. Presidential election campaigns are an exception here. In President Tarja Halonen’s re-election campaign, for example, otherwise politically independent young people took on the role of campaign activists. They were drawn in more by Halonen’s personal charisma and the issues she represents than by any Social Democratic Party ideology.

Table 5. Party backing and its stability (data 2006 n=475)

		Between elections I may well change which party I support.			Total
		agree	disagree	cannot say	
Do you see yourself as backing some particular political party at this point?	Yes	55 32 %	86 49 %	33 19 %	174 (37 %) 100 %
	No	170 74 %	6 3 %	53 23 %	229 (48 %) 100 %
	Cannot say	45 64 %	8 11 %	17 24 %	70 (15 %) 100 %
Total		270 57 %	100 21 %	103 22 %	473 100 %

Individual, issue-specific and thematic political consideration and forms of responsibility are developing among young people. These may come together, for example, in politically hot and rapidly changing, wave-like discussions and statements, movements, fronts and reference groups in the media and on the Internet. In this way parties, their active members and discussion forums are included in the sphere of action. Party politicians can do much for multi-party democracy by means of issue campaigns, opening support groups and (election) projects. What young people are looking for is formed in issue-specific projects and actions: “It must be shown that politics make a difference and have consequences.” Trust and enthusiasm grow as the young persons sees that she/he has an influence, for example, in a particular candidate being elected to parliament; or in having contact with an elected official regarding local matters and seeing that official take concrete action. The political program and party platforms gain content; political action yields results. Backers and party rank-and-file also have their significance when the parties set their agenda and balance out their stands on issues. On another level there is the question of basic trust with regard to public political actors’ (election) promises. The verbal image of “promise breaking” was the most common reason given in open responses for remaining distant from politics. Politicians’ overly familiar presentation and speaking styles and vain promises have bothered young people for years (Paakkunainen 1991).

A study of young people’s participation in municipal elections (Paakkunainen-Myllyniemi 2005, 105-8) showed that the city fathers’ use of power, their economic and administrative steamrolling, needs reform. Small steps are needed. Those would be, e.g., contact with citizens, thematic projects in schools and work places, youth councils in which present and teach politics, provided that they offer real power and resources for young people to use. Forms of party action can in themselves become individualized and open doors to active participation for those with interests in the municipality and region. Particular and general interests can in this way become objects of common multi-generational polemics.

Overly familiar politicians and critical young people

Finnish young people define themselves individually as responsible actors in the political system.⁷ On the other hand young people really do not believe that they have possibilities to change things. Young people's experiences of their own personal leverage and that of their candidates in pushing forward and finding solutions for issues of importance to them have not been encouraging. Nevertheless, many young people still take up their role as politically active citizens in their own everyday choices. Four out of five respondents were prepared to define their specific political qualities through taking everyday responsibility. Young people are politically influential citizens in the decisions they make in their school and working lives. Yet they find it difficult to expand their responsible action in the direction of party democracy and elections. Besides making promises which turn out to be empty, Finnish politicians seem to be attempting to placate young people: three out of four respondents believe that politicians try too hard to please people; they do not stick to the principles, positions or independent viewpoints they present or are believed to hold.

Previously there was much discussion of how politicians are alienated from the public. The current problem is that politicians get "too close" to those they represent, in the same way as advertising campaigns fine tuned through market research. Voting machines hardly make this dilemma any easier, since they turn a candidate into a bunch of opinions. Politicians lack the distance, desire and ability to make their own quick evaluations on behalf of their constituents – that which would be the very savor of the political expression of representative democracy. The representative's interpretations and presentations to the people and on behalf of the people have been set aside. The representative may attempt to be as similar as possible to those in his/her constituency, but the representative should also an alternative interpretation of reality in addresses to that constituency (Ankersmit 2002; for interpretation see Pekonen 2006⁸).

The conflict between words and deeds, and politicians' lack of desire to act on behalf of principles and convictions to be shared with the public, is a principal reservation concerning party elections. The majority of youngsters confirm that there is a sense of basic similarity between the parties, of the differences between them being clouded by their shared hunger for power and of the overuse of populist labels calling what party blocs stand for into question.

A significant portion of young people strongly dispute the functionality of the political system. Either the political or the economic power elite exercise the real power, or they are able to squeeze parliamentary power down to a bare minimum. On the other hand, critical young

⁷ Women believe more firmly in their individual everyday political actions than men do (see the article by Paakkunainen & Myllyniemi in this volume). The regional variations here are particularly interesting: Ostro-Bothnian young people in the province of Western Finland are particularly self-confident – 83 % agreeing with the proposition: "Even young people can have political influence and act as responsible citizens through their everyday decisions in school and at work." Young people from the province of Southern Finland (81 %), and those from Lapland, Oulu and Eastern Finland (75 %) were less likely to see themselves as having an influence in their everyday actions.

⁸ F.R. Ankersmit (2002, 110–112) and Kyösti Pekonen (2006, 84–86) attach models problematizing the difference and distance between the representative and the constituency to the idea of two traditions of representation. In the mimetic tradition representation is understood as action in which the representative strives to have a similar identity with those represented. In esthetic political representation it is believed that re-representation produces the reality of those represented. Thus a perspective arises in which reality must be addressed and operational alternatives become possible. On the basis of Ankersmit, Paakkunainen (2002) has developed stylistic categories of political speech and irony as part of young people's political culture. Styles open up a critical distance from the reality of political actors and create alternatives to this reality.

people have realized how modest and momentary the influence of voting is; the act of voting gives only a glimpse of real power (Brotherus 1924). Many significant decisions take place “on the other side” of the act of voting. The elected candidate can soon forget what is important to those who voted for him/her and new loyalties and jockeying for a personal position in government start to control things. If a candidate fails to live up to his or her promises, however, he/she will be gone with the next election. According to these young people, politics in principle involves real power, if they choose to use it – responsibility also lies with active citizens and civic initiatives.

The generational struggle as part of everyday life – the call of those living precariously

The power struggle between generations appears to be increasingly part of young people’s everyday experience. Chauvel (2006, 17) writes that most young employees in many economic sectors are clearly conscious, at the individual level, of the asymmetric generational play in which they are acting. The question and the problem, the very core of our argument, focuses on the missing intermediate between this experience and collective experience or action – what we might call generational consciousness. Until individual experience finds its way into collective action the newest generation is, and will remain, divided by shared experience. Chauvel (2006, 30) suggests that this potential conflict should be given words, concepts and spheres of action now, before (in the French context at least) the conflict turns violent.

Political struggles between generations and divisions between the opposing sides are reflected directly in demands and slogans. In the survey 60 % of young people directly demand that the advantages given to the “boomers” be re-evaluated, thus providing more resources for young people (with only 25 % opposing such measures). The vast majority of respondents (77 %) are afraid of a retirement bomb and payment responsibilities if the payment system among older generations is not reformed (22 % opposing such claims). The claim in power politics that young people suffer the consequences of temporary and part-time work because they lack organization and positions of power found 70 % agreement.

Young people are also discussing the power balance between the active population (working full-time), part-timers and the unemployed. This tension can also in part be identified with the grudges and political struggles with previous generations. One of the strongest (election) slogans for young people is: “Income tax particularly on (temporary) workers with low income should be reduced.” Four out of five young people support this statement, with only 12 % opposed (Paakkunainen and Myllyniemi 2007).

Likewise two thirds of young people are ready to march under the banner, “Temporary work should be legally restricted!” At the same time the government receives worm level ratings from young people when it comes to helping temporary workers – only one in ten give the administrative powers that be a positive rating for effort in this area. Governmental and youth policy programs have long tried to help young people at risk of marginalization with individually tailored forms of assistance, and resources have been pledged to this work. As the young people were faced with the claim, “The government has insured that there are functional resources for providing flexible and individually appropriate support for young people suffering from life management problems.” 57 % were critical of those in power in this regard, with 17 % showing some level of support for them (Hoikkala and Paakkunainen 2007). The critique of the government regarding policies to address temporary work and poverty are quite relevant findings, even if the questions concerning solidarities among the young are far more complicated than this.

Conclusion: Kairos

Kari Palonen has written about the political kairos-situation (Palonen 2006, 64–77). Kairos refers to the predominantly bald Greek goddess which would rush past people so that she could not be caught by the hair on her forehead. In politics kairos refers to a quickly passing time to be politically taken advantage of – which passes quickly if it is not recognized. This article's subject matter can be summarized from this sort of perspective. It is a question of intensifying generational conflict. The empirical analyses in this text tell of young people's own politics, which find no direct equivalent in the agenda of the political elite or the party elite. Young people's individual grasp does not come out. Young people have a distinctive ethical-political mind – always searching, shuttling between political powers, changing party loyalty and experimenting. Young people commit themselves to each other's ways of operating and to combinations of innovative modern power cultures which are generally considered to be mutually exclusive: *“egoism and altruism, self-fulfillment and active sympathy and self-fulfillment as active sympathy.”* Parties as formal institutions of representative democracy appear, from young people's perspective, to be zombie institutions: they are half dead, and yet in some ways still alive and challenging (Beck & Gernsheim-Beck 2002).

Conflicts of interest between generations also arise clearly in this analysis. Three out of five young people directly demand that the acquired advantages of baby-boomers be re-evaluated, thus securing advantages for young people. Seven out of ten agreed with the statement that young people end up suffering the effects of temporary and part-time work because they do not have strong organizations and positions of power. The slogans of the politically precarious (temporary workers) were quite popular. If election campaign slogans for young people are built from the survey results, at least the following demand is relevant: *“Particularly for low-paid (temporary) workers income tax must be reduced!”* Four out of five of our young survey respondents supported it.

In the beginning of the article we asked, does the individualization of society lead to the collapse of citizenship? Our answer is as follows. The world view of Finnish young people these days opens individually; succeeding or failing in life are largely dependent on the individual herself or himself. Society has become individualized, but at the same time individualizing – risks in Finland are born in the last instance oneself, and alone. Nor do all have the same sort of capital to learn to choose wisely, and the skills to express their unparalleled individual value in the forums of getting by in one's lifetime. Younger generations are divided up on the level of portfolios and cultures of participation into the winners and losers of modernization (Lash 1990). The situation does not; however, appear to be leading to the corrosion of political citizenship. Young people define themselves individually as responsible actors in the political system. Responsibility comes from education and working skills and choices.

These sorts of findings make it possible to see signs of kairos. What's more, generational conflict can create an open political situation in which questions of generation are at the center of the debate. This requires that young people are able to look after the individual interests of their generation through their own collective action, that they succeed in reforming modes of operation and that they raise issues to be part of political organizations. At the same time the mandatory individual choice generation must resolve and soothe the division gnawing into it.

As a middle-aged set of youth researchers we suggest to young people of the individual generation: go ahead and take over some larger medium-sized political party.

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