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Young European citizens: An individual by context perspective on adolescent European
citizenship

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Abstract

This study examined the effects of individual, school-level and country-level variables and their interactions on two components of adolescents' active European citizenship: trust in European institutions and participation at the European level. For comparison, country-related institutional trust and participation were also predicted. Using multilevel regression models, we re-analysed a subsample of survey data from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), collected from 14-year-old students ($n=72,466$) in 22 European countries in 2009. Results showed that higher cognitive engagement with politics (e.g., political interest), more opportunities for learning about Europe at school, and country wealth and social equality were positively associated with both aspects of adolescents' active European citizenship. In contrast to country-related participation, the participatory dimension of active European citizenship was also positively related to a higher socioeconomic status of adolescent's classroom and family, an association that was more pronounced in less wealthy and post-communist countries.

Keywords: active European citizenship, adolescence, institutional trust, participation, socioeconomic status

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Active citizenship of youth is believed to be a crucial prerequisite for the functioning of democracy. Thus, it is not surprising that past research paid considerable attention to the question of what individual and social factors shape young people's active citizenship within their countries (e.g., Barrett & Zani, 2015; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006). However, active citizenship can be practiced not only in local or national contexts but also internationally. One example is the European Union, a project aimed at creating a political community that would, at least partially, function beyond the scope of nation states. Yet, can we simply assume that the same factors that predict general active citizenship at the national level will also be predictive of active citizenship at the European level or is there something distinct about European active citizenship?

The concept of active citizenship

The concept of active citizenship has no single agreed upon definition (cf. Hoskins & Mascherini, 2008). In this study, we build on a heuristic (rather than normative) understanding of active citizenship that encompasses two interrelated dimensions: while *psychological citizenship* refers to one's cognitive and affective ties to some political community, *participatory practices* refer to one's active involvement within this community (see editorial of this special issue). Psychological citizenship encompasses a large number of perceptions and attitudes, such as civic identity, sense of empowerment, or perceived citizens' rights and duties. For the purpose of this study, we focus on one selected aspect of psychological citizenship – institutional trust, which not only affects citizens' compliance with public policies (Hetherington, 2007) but also their tendencies toward non-institutionalized political behaviour (Kaase, 1999). Moreover, lack of institutional trust might relate to adolescents' involvement in illegal political activism (Dahl & Stattin, 2016).

Regarding participatory practices, we take a broad understanding of participation as an activity involving regular meeting, communicating and cooperating with people from the wider community (cf. Schulz, Ainley, & Fraillon, 2011). Both institutional trust and participation might be related not only to the national, but also to the European level (i.e. trust in institutions of the EU and participation involving people from different European countries).

Although active European citizenship is widely perceived as a mere higher-level extension of national citizenship, there are some characteristics of European politics making this analogy questionable. For many adolescents, European institutions and their structures might be less familiar and comprehensible compared to country-related institutions. In the same vein, European-level participation might pose more barriers and demands, such as the need to gather more information, spend more resources, or establish cross-border collaborations. Consequently, the relative importance of particular predictors of national versus European citizenship might be different, too.

Predictors of active citizenship at the local or national level

According to ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) individual development is embedded into multiple systems that interact with each other and influence one's development. Some systems of influence are proximal, that is formed of people and institutions with whom a person directly interacts (e.g., school or family), while some of them are shared by the whole society (e.g., a country's history or economic situation; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Wilkenfeld, Lauckhardt, & Torney-Purta, 2010). Based on these considerations, at least three types of factors influencing adolescents' active citizenship can be distinguished: (1) individual psychological factors supporting or hindering trusting attitudes and participatory tendencies, (2) social factors formed by the characteristics of adolescents'

schools or families, and (3) macro factors formed by the country-level characteristics (cf. Barrett, 2015).

In the present study, we consider the effects of two broad individual factors. One of them is cognitive engagement with politics, understood as paying attention to and being interested in public affairs (Zukin et al., 2006). Using both adolescent and adult samples, previous studies have shown positive links from political interest or following political news in the media to trust in institutions (Catterberg & Moreno, 2006; Claes, Hooghe, & Marien, 2012; Šerek & Macek, 2014) or civic participation (Pasek, Kenski, Romer, & Jamieson, 2006; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). On the border between social and individual factors, positive associations have been also shown between political discussions with parents or peers and civic participation (McIntosh, Hart, & Youniss, 2007; Zukin et al., 2006). The second individual factor is post-materialist value orientation, emphasizing autonomy and self-expression, and manifesting itself, for instance, through the support for equal rights of different social groups. People with such values are expected to be more involved in non-institutionalized civic participation (Theocharis, 2011) but to have rather critical and negative views of public institutions, hence a rather negative effect on trust can be expected (Catterberg & Moreno, 2006).

Among social factors, we focus particularly on those related to school. First, there is a well-known link between open classroom climate, characterized by the possibility to engage in respectful debates and to freely express opinions, and students' higher political trust (Claes et al., 2012) or participatory tendencies (Campbell, 2008; Manganelli, Lucidi, & Alivernini, 2015; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013). Second, we expect that students' trust and participation, particularly at the European level, will be enhanced by opportunities for learning new information about European issues (cf. Claes, et al., 2012, Torney-Purta, Barber, Richardson, 2004). From the macro level perspective, we assume that citizens' institutional trust is eroded

by worse living conditions in the country (cf. Torney-Purta, et al., 2004) or great social inequalities (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). In a similar manner, poor economic conditions and social inequalities might pose a barrier to adolescents' participation (Solt, 2008). Another country-level factor in the European context is a communist past of the country. Even though current adolescents do not have direct experiences with authoritarian communist regimes, certain tendencies such as distrust in public institutions might still be present in and passed on through political cultures of the post-communist countries (e.g., through political socialization by parents and teachers).

Finally, an important source of differences in adolescents' active citizenship is their status in the society, defined by their gender, socioeconomic situation, or migration background (cf. Verba et al., 1995). For instance, willingness to participate is lower among young people coming from low status families (Gaby, 2016) or first-generation immigrant youth (Lopez & Marcelo, 2008). At the same time, social and macro factors might moderate the consequences of social status on active citizenship. As noted above, adolescents' development is embedded in multiple contexts (cf. Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that interact with person's individual characteristics such as social status. Hence, due to person-by-context interactions, the impact of adolescents' individual status might have different forms and extents across contexts. For instance, although young people from immigrant or ethnic minority groups have generally lower rates of civic participation than native and majority youth, data from different European countries show that this pattern might be absent or even reversed for some groups in specific countries (Barrett & Zani, 2015). Similarly, certain contextual characteristics of the classroom (e.g. open climate) are expected to mitigate the gaps in active citizenship stemming from students' socioeconomic background, although these moderation effects have not been convincingly demonstrated yet (Castillo, Miranda, Bonhomme, Cox, & Bascopé, 2015).

The present study

Due to the lacking knowledge on the predictors of adolescents' active citizenship at European level, this study takes an exploratory approach employing the predictors that were previously described for the national level. The main goal is to assess individual, school/classroom and country-level predictors of European-level institutional trust and participation and to differentiate European from general active citizenship. At the same time, we aim to test whether potential effects of person's social status are moderated by higher-level variables (i.e. person-by-context interaction). Overall, we assume that active European citizenship is predicted by similar variables as national active citizenship although the effects in the former case might be weaker due to supposed adolescents' less frequent and less direct experience with the European versus the national level. However, it may be that at least some factors are more predictive of national than of European level citizenship and vice versa.

Thus, it may be that migration background is negatively associated with national and positively with European citizenship, as previous studies have shown that ethnic minority members are more likely to identify with the EU, but are less likely to identify with their nation (Hadler, Tsutsui, & Chin, 2012). This is presumably because the EU pressures member states to give more rights to ethnic minorities. Socioeconomic status may also relate more strongly to European than to national-level citizenship because social and economic elites gain the most from new opportunities arising from European integration (e.g., traveling freely, studying abroad; Hadler et al., 2012). Post-materialist tendencies such as granting equal rights to different groups (e.g., to immigrants) should also be more strongly related to European level citizenship as the EU advocates and enforces policies meant to guarantee equal rights to different groups much more strongly than its member states. Lastly, opportunities for learning about Europe should most strongly be associated with European rather than with national citizenship.

To distinguish whether the effects established by our study are specific for European active citizenship, or whether they concern active citizenship in general, we will include both European and country-related trust and participation as outcome variables. In addition, we will control for county-level trust when predicting European level trust and for country-related participation when predicting European level participation.

Method

Participants and procedure

We reanalysed survey data from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) conducted in 2009 in 38 countries across the world. Questionnaires were administered in schools to eighth-graders (50% females) who were on average 14 years old. Only one classroom per school was sampled (Schulz et al., 2011). For our analyses, we used a subset of 22 countries that were members of the European Union and where a module on issues relevant to Europe was administered. Data had a three-level structure: a total number of 72,466 students (level 1) were nested in 3,632 classrooms (level 2; mean classroom size was 19.62) that were nested in 22 countries (level 3). Due to occasional missing data, the final numbers of analysed participants differed slightly from analysis to analysis¹.

Measures

If not stated otherwise, we used scales developed and provided by the authors of the ICCS. Using item response modelling, they computed the total scores of these scales from the items based on the weighted likelihood estimates (logits) of the latent dimensions. The scales were transformed to have an international average of 50 and a standard deviation of 10 (these values were slightly different in our study because we used a subsample of 22 countries). For more details see Schulz et al. (2011).

¹ Data used in this study are publicly available from the IEA Study Data Repository (<http://rms.iea-dpc.org>). Description of the steps through which we created the working dataset, used in our paper, can be found in the Masaryk University Repository (<https://is.muni.cz/repo/1387306/en>).

Trust in country-related institutions. Participants indicated how much they trusted in six institutions (a four-point response scale from “not at all” to “completely”): national government, national parliament, local government, courts, police, and political parties (country-level Cronbach alphas ranged from .76 to .89; $M=49.57$, $SD=9.57$).

Trust in European institutions. Using the same response scale, respondents indicated how much they trusted in European Commission and European Parliament. We computed the total score by ourselves by averaging the items (inter-item correlation was $>.70$ in all countries). For the sake of consistency with other outcome variables, mean was transformed to 50 and SD to 10.

Participation in the wider community. Participants were asked whether they had participated (“never”, “more than a year ago”, “within the last 12 months”) in seven different organizations, clubs or groups in the wider community (e.g., environmental organization or a voluntary group doing something to help the community; alphas from .60 to .80; $M=48.18$; $SD=9.25$).

Participation at the European level. With the same response scale, participants indicated their participation in eight activities involving another European country (e.g., activities in local area that involve meeting people from other European countries or school trips to another European country; alphas from .63 to .83; $M=49.78$; $SD=9.79$).

Migration background. A categorization of participants based on the country of birth was provided by the ICCS. We transformed this categorization into two categories: a person and at least one parent born in the country (=0; 91%), a person and/or both parents not born in the country (=1; 9%).

Socioeconomic background. The ICCS provided the index of socioeconomic background derived from parental highest occupational level, parental highest educational

level, and the approximate number of books at home (the score was standardized to have national means of 0 and *SDs* of 1).

Political interest. Using five items, participants assessed their interest (a four-point scale from “not interested at all” to “very interested”) in local, national, foreign and international political issues and national social issues (alphas from .82 to .92; $M=48.58$, $SD=10.17$).

Discussing political issues. Using four items, respondents assessed the frequency of their participation (a four-point scale from “never or hardly ever” to “daily or almost daily”) in discussion with parents and friends about political or social issues and international events (alphas from .63 to .81; $M=48.95$, $SD=10.07$).

Watching news on TV. One item measured the frequency of watching television to inform yourself about European news (a four-point response scale was from “never or hardly ever” to “weekly”; $M=2.80$, $SD=1.10$).

Post-materialism. Post-materialist value orientation was indicated by two scales (four-point response scales from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). Support for equal rights for immigrants was measured by five items (e.g., immigrants should have the opportunity to continue speaking their own language; alphas from .74 to .89; $M=.49.00$, $SD=10.08$), and support for gender equality was measured by six items (e.g., men and women should get equal pay when they are doing the same jobs; alphas from .73 to .87; $M=51.47$, $SD=10.16$).

Open classroom climate. Students’ perceptions of openness in classroom discussions (a four-point response scale from “rarely to “often”) was measured by six items (e.g., teachers encourage students to discuss the issues with people having different opinions; alphas from .66 to .81; $M=50.55$, $SD=9.68$).

Opportunities for learning about Europe at school. Using nine items, students indicated (a four-point response scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”) how much opportunity their school gives them for activities such as finding out what is happening in other European countries or meeting young people from other European countries (alphas from .78 to .85; $M=50.11$, $SD=9.78$).

Country-level variables. Country’s wealth was represented by its gross domestic product per capita (GDP) standardized according to the European Union average (Eurostat, 2009a; $M=101.27$, $SD=41.56$). Income inequality was indicated by the GINI index (Eurostat, 2009b; $M=0.29$, $SD=0.04$) and gender inequality by the Gender Inequality Index (GII; UNDP, 2016; $M=0.14$, $SD=0.06$). Communist (=1; eight countries) or non-communist past (=0; 14 countries) was indicated by a dichotomous variable.

Data analysis

Data was analysed using multilevel linear regression models in Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2015). Sampling weights at levels 1 and 2 recommended by Brese, Jung, Mirazchiyski, Schulz, & Zuehlke (2011) were used.

For each outcome, several three-level models were estimated using the maximum likelihood estimator with robust standard errors (MLR). First, an intercept-only model without predictors was estimated to decompose individual-level, classroom-level and country-level variance (M0). Second, we added three individual sociodemographic status predictors (gender, immigration and socioeconomic background; M1), and, after that, we added the remaining seven individual predictors (political interest, discussing political issues, watching news on TV, support for equal rights for immigrants, support for gender equality, subjective perceptions of open classroom climate, and subjective perceptions of opportunities for learning about Europe at school; M2). All non-dichotomous individual-level predictors were grand mean centred. Third, three classroom-level predictors were added: classroom average

socioeconomic background, classroom average perceptions of open climate, and classroom average perceptions of opportunities for learning about Europe (M3). Fourth, four country-level predictors were considered. Because of the small sample size at level 3 ($n=22$), country-level predictors were tested individually in separate models (M4a-d). Finally, country-level trust or participation were added as control variables into the models predicting European-level trust and participation (M5a-d).

For statistically significant level 1 and level 2 sociodemographic predictors with non-negligible effect sizes ($\beta > .10$), cross-level interactions were tested. First, we estimated a random-slope model for the predictor to test whether its effect significantly varied at higher levels (this model included all level 1 and level 2 predictors and the most important level 3 predictor). If the variance was significant, we tested whether it could be explained by higher-level predictors (i.e. cross-level interactions). For the sake of easier interpretation of significant interactions, simple slopes were computed for higher-level units with lower (25th percentile), median (50th percentile), and higher (75th percentile) levels of moderator variable (Aiken & West, 1991). For specific values of the moderator, see Table A3 in Online Appendix.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Intercept-only models showed that the variance in outcome variables was attributable mostly to differences between individuals (see Notes in Tables 1-4). Differences between classrooms were the most pronounced for European-level participation (10%), while differences between countries were the strongest for trust in country-related institutions (7%). There was a strong correlation between trust in country-related and European institutions ($r=.60$) and a moderate correlation between community-level and European-level

participation ($r=.26$; see Online Appendix A for the full correlation table and country-level descriptives).

Predictors of trust

Trust in country-related institutions. On the individual level, trust was not associated with gender, migration or socioeconomic background (M1 in Table 1). After other individual predictors were added, significant effects of seven predictors appeared (M2). Standardized coefficients revealed that most of these effects were negligible except for the effects of political interest ($\beta=.26$) and opportunities for learning about Europe ($\beta=.16$). On the classroom level (M3), students in classrooms with a higher average socioeconomic background expressed a lower institutional trust ($\beta=-.19$). Finally, on the country level (M4a-d), institutional trust was higher in countries with a higher GDP ($\beta=.56$), smaller economic ($\beta=-.55$) and gender inequalities ($\beta=-.45$), and without communist past ($\beta=-.55$).

[Table 1]

A random-slope model showed that the effect of classroom socioeconomic background significantly varied across countries ($\sigma^2=2.44$, $p<.01$) and interacted with GDP (unstandardized $B=0.02$, $p<.05$), income inequality ($B=-15.89$, $p<.05$) and gender inequality ($B=-17.33$, $p<.01$), and communist past ($B=-2.23$, $p<.01$). Specifically, the negative effect was present only in countries with a lower GDP ($B_{25}=-1.31$, $p<.01$; $B_{50}=-0.56$, $p<.05$; $B_{75}=-0.12$, $p=.74$), greater income inequality ($B_{25}=-0.08$, $p=.83$; $B_{50}=-0.51$, $p=.08$; $B_{75}=-1.07$, $p<.01$), gender inequality ($B_{25}=0.27$, $p=.18$; $B_{50}=-0.54$, $p<.05$; $B_{75}=-1.39$, $p<.01$), and with communist past ($B_{\text{non-postcommunist}}=0.23$, $p=.32$; $B_{\text{postcommunist}}=-2.00$, $p<.01$).

Trust in European institutions. On the individual level, trust was positively but only marginally predicted by male gender and socioeconomic background (M1 in Table 2). After other individual predictors were added, all of them had significant effects (M2). However, most of them were negligible except for the positive effects of political interest

($\beta=.26$) and opportunities for learning about Europe ($\beta=.12$). On the classroom level (M3), there was a significant but rather negligible ($\beta=-.09$) effect of opportunities for learning about Europe at school. Finally, trust was higher in countries with a higher GDP ($\beta=.29$) and smaller income ($\beta=.36$) or gender inequalities ($\beta=-.46$; M4a-d). Random slopes of sociodemographic predictors were not tested because their main effects were negligible.

[Table 2]

When trust in country-related institutions was controlled for (M5a-d), it had a strong effect on trust in European institutions ($\beta=.57$). All other previous effects became negligible except for the effect of political interest that became considerably smaller ($\beta=.12$). At the same time, two new effects appeared: on the country level, trust in European institutions was higher in post-communist countries ($\beta=.48$), and on the classroom level, trust in European institutions was higher for students from classrooms with a higher average socioeconomic background ($\beta=.29$). An additional random-slope model showed that the effect of average socioeconomic background significantly varied across countries ($\sigma^2=0.57$, $p<.01$) and interacted with GDP ($B=-0.01$, $p<.01$). Specifically, the effect was stronger in countries with a lower GDP ($B_{25}=0.84$, $p<.01$; $B_{50}=0.58$, $p<.01$; $B_{75}=0.42$, $p<.01$).

Differences between effect sizes. The effects of migration background ($\Delta\beta=.03$), individual socioeconomic background ($\Delta\beta=.04$), support for immigrants' rights ($\Delta\beta=.00$), support for gender equality ($\Delta\beta=.05$) or opportunities for learning about Europe (individual $\Delta\beta=.05$, classroom $\Delta\beta=.04$) in M4 were similar when predicting trust in country-related versus European institutions. However, the effects were different for classroom socioeconomic background that predicted negatively country-related but not European-level trust ($\Delta\beta=.25$).

Predictors of participation

Participation in the wider community. On the individual level, there were positive effects of female gender and socioeconomic background, but both these effects were negligible (M1 in Table 3). After the addition of other individual variables, seven predictors were significant (M2). According to standardized coefficients, most of these effects were negligible except for the effects of political discussions ($\beta=.18$) and political interest ($\beta=.12$). On the classroom level (M3), students from classrooms with a higher average socioeconomic background participated less in the wider community ($\beta=-.14$). On the country level (M4a-d), participation was higher in countries with greater gender inequalities ($\beta=.46$).

[Table 3]

According to a random-slope model, the effect of classroom socioeconomic background significantly varied across countries ($\sigma^2=0.85, p<.05$) and interacted with GDP ($B=0.01, p<.01$) and communist past ($B=-1.07, p<.01$). The negative effect was stronger in countries with a lower GDP ($B_{25}=-1.04, p<.01; B_{50}=-0.69, p<.01; B_{75}=-0.48, p<.01$) and with communist past ($B_{\text{non-postcommunist}}=-0.30, p=.16; B_{\text{postcommunist}}=-1.37, p<.01$).

Participation at the European level. On the individual level, participation was positively predicted by socioeconomic background ($\beta=.19$) and marginally positively by immigration background ($\beta=.06$; M1 in Table 4). After other individual predictors were added, we found positive effects of seven predictors (M2). Most of these effects were negligible, except for the effects of opportunities for learning about Europe ($\beta=.22$) and political discussions ($\beta=.11$), and still a considerable effect of socioeconomic background ($\beta=.17$). On the classroom level (M3), we found positive effects of average socioeconomic background ($\beta=.32$) and opportunities for learning about Europe ($\beta=.19$) and a negative effect of open classroom climate ($\beta=-.15$). Finally, participation was higher in countries with a higher GDP ($\beta=.65$) and smaller income inequalities ($\beta=-.53$; M4a-d).

[Table 4]

A random-slope model for individual socioeconomic background suggested that the effect significantly varied between countries ($\sigma^2=0.13, p<.01$) but not between classrooms ($\sigma^2=0.01, p=.91$). Significant cross-level interactions further suggested that the effect of socioeconomic background interacted with GDP ($B=-0.004, p<.05$) and communist past ($B=0.36, p<.05$). Specifically, the positive effect of individual socioeconomic background was stronger in countries with a lower GDP ($B_{25} B=1.54, p<.01; B_{50}=1.40, p<.01; B_{75}=1.31, p<.01$) and with communist past ($B_{\text{non-postcommunist}}=1.27, p<.01; B_{\text{postcommunist}}=1.63, p<.01$). A model with a random slope for classroom socioeconomic background showed significant variance across countries ($\sigma^2=1.08, p<.01$), but no interactions with country-level variables were found.

Finally, when participation in the wider community was added as a predictor (M5a-d), it had a moderate effect on European participation ($\beta=.24$), while all other effects remained similar to the previous model (the most notable changes were a slight increase of the country-level effect of gender inequality that became significant at the .05 level and a slight decrease of the individual-level effect of political discussions that became negligible).

Differences between effect sizes. The effects of socioeconomic background (individual-level $\Delta\beta=.12$, classroom-level $\Delta\beta=.46$) and opportunities for learning about Europe (individual-level $\Delta\beta=.13$, classroom-level $\Delta\beta=.20$) in M4 were stronger for European-level participation than participation in the wider community. The effects of migration background ($\Delta\beta=.06$), support for immigrants' rights ($\Delta\beta=.01$), and support for gender equality ($\Delta\beta=.01$) were similar for both types of participation.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to find out whether active European citizenship can be separated from general active citizenship by examining differences in predictors of institutional trust and civic participation at the national versus the European level. Our

findings point out that it is possible to distinguish between general active citizenship and European citizenship on the participatory dimension but not on the psychological dimension of trust. More specifically, results indicate that the participatory dimension of EU citizenship depends to a large degree on socio-economic resources at the individual, school, and country level. In addition, findings point to the important role of adolescents' cognitive political engagement, and school opportunities for learning about Europe as predictors of active EU citizenship.

Distinguishing between national and European active citizenship

With regard to institutional trust, a comparison of the models predicting national versus European level trust revealed, with two exceptions, few differences in predictors. By far the biggest influence on trust in European institutions was trust in national institutions, which accounted for a large share of the variance. This suggests that once we can explain institutional trust, we can also explain trust in European institutions. Such a finding is insofar surprising because one could assume that in countries with a negative discourse towards the European Union (e.g., Greece) trust towards authorities of the nation state (e.g., government, courts, police) need not necessarily be related to trust in institutions at the European level. Of course, we need to take into account that 14-year-old adolescents may not be politically savvy enough yet to make clear distinctions between institutions at the national and the European level. Thus, future research should examine whether the distinction between national and European institutional trust is equally small among adults.

One exception to this pattern was that students in classrooms with higher than average levels of socio-economic background had lower trust in national institutions but, controlling for country-related institutional trust, higher trust in EU institutions. Notably, this tendency was present only in less wealthy, more unequal and post-communist countries. A possible explanation is that national institutions are generally less trustworthy in these

countries and students from more educated backgrounds and privileged schools (e.g., higher track schools) are more aware of that fact. Consistent with this explanation, the distrust of these students was primarily oriented towards national but not European institutions, which were perceived relatively positively. The second exception was a finding that students in countries with a communist past expressed lower trust in national institutions but, controlling for their country-related trust, they expressed higher trust in European institutions. Again, it seems that adolescents living in post-communist countries trust in institutions less than their peers living in countries without a communist past but their distrust pertains to national rather than European institutions. A relatively more positive image of the European Union among young people from new (i.e. mostly post-communist) versus old member states has been already found by other studies (Eurobarometer, 2007) and it is probably associated with positive perceptions of the European Union enlargement in 2004 (Nancy, 2016).

When comparing the models predicting participation at the national versus European level, results revealed more notable differences in predictors than in the models predicting trust. Thus, both socio-economic background and opportunities to learn about Europe were more strongly related to participation at the European level than at the national level, both at the individual and the classroom level. Importantly, controlling for participation at the national level did not lead to substantial changes in the relationships to other variables. This indicates that participation at the European level may indeed be substantially different from participation at the local or national level, and that European level participation cannot be sufficiently explained by knowing what drives local or national participation. Thus, as the relatively weak association between participation at the wider community and participation at the European level suggests, different from institutional trust, both levels need not go hand in hand. This maybe because actually participating at the European level poses greater challenges to 14-year-olds than trusting institutions at the European level does. It likely

requires prior knowledge about how one can participate in activities at the European level and where to find them. This may also explain why socio-economic resources at the individual, school- and country-level are so strongly related to participation at the European level.

The contributions of predictors at different levels of analysis

For all dimensions and levels of citizenship, at least five sixths of their variance was attributable to the individual level. It means that the differences between students in both national and European active citizenship were primarily given by individual-level factors. School- and country-level factors were not negligible, but their roles were less pronounced.

Results on individual psychological predictors showed that adolescents' active European citizenship was primarily associated with their greater cognitive engagement with politics. Institutional trust was positively related particularly to political interest, suggesting that adolescents high in political interest might have more information on the positive aspects of European institutions and thus a more positive view of them than those low in political interest. At the same time, European-level participation was associated with political discussions with parents and peers that are likely to stimulate adolescents' further engagement in the public realm (McIntosh et al., 2007; Zukin et al., 2006). On the other hand, post-materialist values did not considerably contribute to any component of active European citizenship. It is possible that the effects of post-materialism on trust and participation are rather complex and cannot be described by simple linear trends (e.g., European institutions might be positively perceived as advancing some post-materialist values such as gender equality, but distrusted due to their alleged bureaucracy). The overall patterns of psychological predictors were similar to country-related trust and participation, suggesting that similar psychological processes operate in the expression of active citizenship at both the national and European level.

In the school context, active European citizenship was positively related to opportunities for learning about Europe. This effect was found for adolescents' subjective perceptions of these opportunities and, in the case of participation, also for average perceptions within classrooms. These results suggest that school civic education targeting European issues might contribute to the development of trust and participatory tendencies at the European level. On the other hand, no support was found for the positive effect of open classroom discussions, which were only negligibly related to trust and had even a negative association with participation. Although some previous studies have found links between open classroom and young people's active citizenship, these studies often found relationships of open classroom with cognitive variables (e.g., civic knowledge) or participatory intentions (Torney-Purta, 2009; Torney-Purta, Lehman, Oswald, & Schulz, 2011) rather than with participation itself (Jugert, Eckstein, & Noack, 2016). Hence, it is possible that an open classroom climate, particularly at the relatively low age of 14, affects cognitive predispositions of active citizenship, but that the direct effect on its participatory dimension is less visible because young adolescents have limited opportunities to act upon their knowledge or intentions.

Next, lower levels of both components of active European citizenship were found in less wealthy countries and in countries with greater income or (in the case of trust) gender inequality. This is in agreement with the expectation that the contexts characterized by economic problems and social inequalities undermine young people's institutional trust and pose a barrier to their participation in cross-border activities (cf. Solt, 2008; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Consistent with this explanation, the same country-level factors were found to undermine country-related institutional trust, and, as suggested above, the negative perceptions of European institutions in less wealthy and more unequal countries were an expression of a general distrust in institutions rather than a distrust in European institutions as

such. On the other hand, country-related participation in the wider community was only poorly explained by the examined country-level predictors, which suggests that a different set of factors plays a role here. Based on the indication that country-related participation was slightly higher in more unequal countries, one of these factors may be collective grievances (Walker & Smith, 2002).

Regarding individual social status, no substantial differences in trust in European institutions were found between males and females, people with and without immigration background, or adolescents from different socioeconomic conditions. Also, no gender or immigration-based differences were present for European-level participation.

However, we found that adolescents coming from families with higher socioeconomic status, compared to those from low status families, tended to participate more in European activities. This effect interacted with country-level context and was specifically pronounced in less wealthy and post-communist countries. Moreover, the effect was present also at the school level, suggesting that European-level participation was limited in schools with higher proportions of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Hence, poor socioeconomic conditions in multiple contexts seem to add up to limit adolescents' opportunities for meeting and cooperating with people from different European countries. Consequently, participation in European-level activities is probably, to a large extent, facilitated by privileged socioeconomic conditions, in which an adolescent lives and studies.

On the contrary, the negative effects of individual and contextual socioeconomic conditions were not present for national active citizenship. Moreover, in less wealthy, post-communist, and (in the case of trust) less equal countries, the effect of classroom average socioeconomic background on country-related trust and participation was even negative. Together with the abovementioned finding that country-related participation was slightly higher in less equal countries, the tendency of students from classrooms with lower average

socioeconomic background to participate more in their communities might indicate that country-related participation in the wider community often addresses the grievances and everyday problems in one's surroundings. Such motivations are probably not common for the participation at the European level that has rather positive associations with socioeconomic conditions.

Limitations

Three limitations of this study should be mentioned. First, our analysis intentionally focuses only on two components of active citizenship. The inclusion of other components, such as national/European identity or participatory intentions, could bring further details on studied predictors. Second, the data is cross-sectional, hence causal interpretations should be made only with caution. Finally, following Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, some developmental contexts are considered only marginally in the data, specifically adolescents' parents and their attitudes.

Conclusion

Overall, our findings suggest that active European citizenship is different from general active citizenship on the participatory dimension but not on the psychological dimension of trust. Moreover, adolescents' active European citizenship can be boosted if school curricula involve ample opportunities for students' learning about Europe. This also implies that schools, particularly those with large proportions of students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, need to be sufficiently resourced to offer opportunities for student exchange with other European countries. Finally, it seems that the gaps in adolescents' active European citizenship can be reduced by decreasing income and other (e.g., educational) inequalities at the country level.

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Tables

Table 1. Multilevel linear regression model predicting trust in country-related institutions ($n=67,035$).

	M1		M2		M3		M4a-d	
	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β
Individual level								
Gender (Female)	0.26 (0.20)	0.01	0.02 (0.23)	0.00	0.01 (0.23)	0.00	0.01 (0.23)	0.00
Migration background	-0.64 (0.36)	-0.02	-1.82 (0.41)*	-0.06	-1.86 (0.42)*	-0.06	-1.86 (0.42)*	-0.06
Socioeconomic background	0.08 (0.15)	0.01	-0.21 (0.11)	-0.02	-0.11 (0.09)	-0.01	-0.11 (0.09)	-0.01
Political interest			0.23 (0.01)*	0.26	0.23 (0.01)*	0.26	0.23 (0.01)*	0.26
Discussing political issues			-0.05 (0.01)*	-0.05	-0.05 (0.01)*	-0.05	-0.05 (0.01)*	-0.05
Watching news on TV			0.25 (0.07)*	0.03	0.24 (0.07)*	0.03	0.25 (0.07)*	0.03
Equal rights for immigrants			0.08 (0.01)*	0.08	0.08 (0.01)*	0.08	0.08 (0.01)*	0.08
Gender equality			-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01
Open classroom climate			0.06 (0.01)*	0.07	0.06 (0.01)*	0.06	0.06 (0.01)*	0.06
Opportunities for learning about Europe			0.14 (0.01)*	0.16	0.14 (0.01)*	0.16	0.14 (0.01)*	0.16
Classroom level								
Classroom socioeconomic background					-0.67 (0.34)†	-0.19	-0.67 (0.34)†	-0.19
Open classroom climate					0.02 (0.02)	0.05	0.02 (0.02)	0.05
Opportunities for learning about Europe					0.02 (0.02)	0.05	0.02 (0.02)	0.05
Country level								
Gross domestic product per capita							0.04 (0.01)*	0.56
Income inequality							-39.52 (11.78)*	-0.55
Gender inequality							-22.05 (8.58)*	-0.45
Communist past							-3.14 (0.87)*	-0.55
Variance explained								
Individual level	.00		.13		.13		.13	
School level					.04		.04	
Country level (M4a)							.31	
Country level (M4b)							.30	
Country level (M4c)							.21	
Country level (M4d)							.31	

Note. Variance components in the intercept-only model (M0): individual level – 81.53 (88%), classroom level – 4.95 (5%), school level – 6.40 (7%). Unstandardized regression coefficients, standard errors, and standardized coefficients are presented. Country level predictors were tested one at a time in separate models (M4a-d). Since regression coefficients and standard errors of individual and classroom-level predictors were almost identical, only values from M4a are presented. * $p < .01$. † $p < .05$.

Table 2. Multilevel linear regression model predicting trust in European institutions ($n=66,749$).

	M1		M2		M3		M4a-d		M5a-d	
	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β
Individual level										
Gender (Female)	-0.94 (0.18)*	-0.05	-1.52 (0.16)*	-0.08	-1.52 (0.16)*	-0.08	-1.52 (0.16)*	-0.08	-1.52 (0.10)*	-0.08
Migration background	0.42 (0.28)	0.01	-0.84 (0.27)*	-0.03	-0.83 (0.27)*	-0.03	-0.84 (0.27)*	-0.03	0.30 (0.20)	0.01
Socioeconomic background	0.76 (0.08)*	0.08	0.35 (0.06)*	0.04	0.32 (0.05)*	0.03	0.32 (0.05)*	0.03	0.38 (0.06)*	0.04
Political interest			0.26 (0.01)*	0.26	0.25 (0.01)*	0.26	0.25 (0.01)*	0.26	0.12 (0.01)*	0.12
Discussing political issues			-0.02 (0.01)*	-0.02	-0.02 (0.01)*	-0.02	-0.02 (0.01)*	-0.02	0.01 (0.00)	0.01
Watching news on TV			0.35 (0.06)*	0.04	0.35 (0.06)*	0.04	0.35 (0.06)*	0.04	0.21 (0.05)*	0.02
Equal rights for immigrants			0.08 (0.01)*	0.08	0.08 (0.01)*	0.08	0.08 (0.01)*	0.08	0.04 (0.01)*	0.04
Gender equality			0.04 (0.01)*	0.04	0.04 (0.01)*	0.04	0.04 (0.01)*	0.04	0.05 (0.01)*	0.05
Open classroom climate			0.06 (0.01)*	0.06	0.06 (0.01)*	0.06	0.06 (0.01)*	0.06	0.02 (0.01)*	0.02
Opportunities for learning about Europe			0.12 (0.01)*	0.12	0.11 (0.01)*	0.11	0.11 (0.01)*	0.11	0.03 (0.00)*	0.03
Trust in country-related institutions									0.58 (0.01)*	0.57
Classroom level										
Classroom socioeconomic background					0.18 (0.21)	0.06	0.17 (0.21)	0.06	0.57 (0.15)*	0.29
Open classroom climate					0.00 (0.02)	0.00	0.00 (0.02)	0.00	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.05
Opportunities for learning about Europe					0.03 (0.01)†	0.09	0.03 (0.01)†	0.09	0.02 (0.01)	0.08
Country level										
Gross domestic product per capita							0.01 (0.01)†	0.29	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.37
Income inequality							-15.74 (7.72)†	-0.36	7.63 (6.10)	0.26
Gender inequality							-13.66 (5.06)*	-0.46	-0.55 (4.66)	-0.03
Communist past							-0.74 (0.66)	-0.21	1.12 (0.41)*	0.48
Variance explained										
Individual level	.01		.14		.14		.14		.42	
School level					.01		.01		.09	
Country level (M4a)							.09		.13	
Country level (M4b)							.13		.07	
Country level (M4c)							.21		.00	
Country level (M4d)							.05		.23	

Note. Variance components in the intercept-only model (M0): individual level – 92.86 (93%), classroom level – 4.30 (4%), school level – 2.84 (3%). Unstandardized regression coefficients, standard errors, and standardized coefficients are presented. Country level predictors were tested one at a time in separate models (M4a-d; M5a-d). Since regression coefficients and standard errors of individual and classroom-level predictors were almost identical, only values from M4a and M5a are presented. * $p < .01$. † $p < .05$.

Table 3. Multilevel linear regression model predicting participation in the wider community ($n=67,109$).

	M1		M2		M3		M4a-d	
	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β
Individual level								
Gender (Female)	1.47 (0.21)*	0.09	1.63 (0.19)*	0.09	1.63 (0.19)*	0.09	1.63 (0.19)*	0.09
Migration background	0.62 (0.51)	0.02	-0.12 (0.47)	0.00	-0.15 (0.47)	-0.01	-0.15 (0.47)	-0.01
Socioeconomic background	0.50 (0.08)*	0.06	0.19 (0.07)*	0.02	0.27 (0.06)*	0.03	0.27 (0.06)*	0.03
Political interest			0.10 (0.01)*	0.12	0.10 (0.01)*	0.12	0.10 (0.01)*	0.12
Discussing political issues			0.16 (0.01)*	0.18	0.16 (0.01)*	0.18	0.16 (0.01)*	0.18
Watching news on TV			0.10 (0.05)	0.01	0.10 (0.05)	0.01	0.10 (0.05)	0.01
Equal rights for immigrants			-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01
Gender equality			-0.04 (0.01)*	-0.04	-0.04 (0.01)*	-0.04	-0.04 (0.01)*	-0.04
Open classroom climate			0.02 (0.01)*	0.03	0.02 (0.01)*	0.03	0.02 (0.01)*	0.03
Opportunities for learning about Europe			0.07 (0.01)*	0.08	0.07 (0.01)*	0.08	0.07 (0.01)*	0.08
Classroom level								
Classroom socioeconomic background					-0.56 (0.20)*	-0.14	-0.56 (0.20)*	-0.14
Open classroom climate					0.03 (0.02)	0.05	0.03 (0.02)	0.05
Opportunities for learning about Europe					-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01
Country level								
Gross domestic product per capita							0.00 (0.01)	-0.05
Income inequality							17.31 (9.89)	0.34
Gender inequality							16.14 (6.57)†	0.46
Communist past							0.78 (0.82)	0.19
Variance explained								
Individual level	.01		.10		.10		.10	
School level					.02		.02	
Country level (M4a)							.00	
Country level (M4b)							.11	
Country level (M4c)							.21	
Country level (M4d)							.04	

Note. Variance components in the intercept-only model (M0): individual level – 75.14 (88%), classroom level – 5.72 (7%), school level – 4.90 (6%). Unstandardized regression coefficients, standard errors, and standardized coefficients are presented. Country level predictors were tested one at a time in separate models (M4a-d). Since regression coefficients and standard errors of individual and classroom-level predictors were almost identical, only values from M4a are presented. * $p < .01$. † $p < .05$.

Table 4. Multilevel linear regression model predicting participation at the European level ($n=67,162$).

	M1		M2		M3		M4a-d		M5a-d	
	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β
Individual level										
Gender (Female)	-0.44 (0.17)	-0.02	-0.14 (0.14)	-0.01	-0.13 (0.14)	-0.01	-0.13 (0.14)	-0.01	-0.52 (0.15)*	-0.03
Migration background	1.97 (0.22)*	0.06	1.36 (0.23)*	0.04	1.42 (0.22)*	0.05	1.42 (0.22)*	0.05	1.43 (0.25)*	0.05
Socioeconomic background	1.77 (0.06)*	0.19	1.59 (0.08)*	0.17	1.40 (0.07)*	0.15	1.40 (0.07)*	0.15	1.33 (0.07)*	0.14
Political interest			0.07 (0.01)*	0.08	0.07 (0.01)*	0.08	0.07 (0.01)*	0.08	0.05 (0.01)*	0.05
Discussing political issues			0.11 (0.01)*	0.11	0.10 (0.01)*	0.11	0.10 (0.01)*	0.11	0.07 (0.01)*	0.07
Watching news on TV			0.00 (0.07)	0.00	0.01 (0.07)	0.00	0.01 (0.07)	0.00	-0.02 (0.07)	0.00
Equal rights for immigrants			-0.02 (0.01)*	-0.02	-0.02 (0.01)*	-0.02	-0.02 (0.01)*	-0.02	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.02
Gender equality			-0.04 (0.01)*	-0.04	-0.04 (0.01)*	-0.05	-0.04 (0.01)*	-0.05	-0.03 (0.01)*	-0.04
Open classroom climate			-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01	0.00 (0.01)	0.00	0.00 (0.01)	0.00	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01
Opportunities for learning about Europe			0.21 (0.01)*	0.22	0.20 (0.01)*	0.21	0.20 (0.01)*	0.21	0.18 (0.01)*	0.19
Participation in the wider community									0.24 (0.01)*	0.24
Classroom level										
Classroom socioeconomic background					1.48 (0.20)*	0.32	1.48 (0.20)*	0.32	1.62 (0.21)*	0.35
Open classroom climate					-0.09 (0.03)*	-0.15	-0.09 (0.03)*	-0.15	-0.09 (0.03)*	-0.16
Opportunities for learning about Europe					0.12 (0.05)*	0.19	0.12 (0.05)*	0.19	0.12 (0.04)*	0.20
Country level										
Gross domestic product per capita							0.04 (0.01)*	0.65	0.04 (0.01)*	0.65
Income inequality							-35.40 (9.20)*	-0.53	-39.49 (9.02)*	-0.58
Gender inequality							-18.32 (9.37)	-0.41	-22.10 (9.39)†	-0.48
Communist past							-1.54 (1.13)	-0.29	-1.73 (1.16)	-0.32
Variance explained										
Individual level	.04		.13		.12		.12		.17	
School level					.15		.14		.17	
Country level (M4a)							.43		.42	
Country level (M4b)							.28		.34	
Country level (M4c)							.16		.23	
Country level (M4d)							.09		.10	

Note. Variance components in the intercept-only model (M0): individual level – 84.87 (85%), classroom level – 9.50 (10%), school level – 5.45 (5%). Unstandardized regression coefficients, standard errors, and standardized coefficients are presented. Country level predictors were tested one at a time in separate models (M4a-d; M5a-d). Since regression coefficients and standard errors of individual and classroom-level predictors were almost identical, only values from M4a and M5a are presented. * $p < .01$. † $p < .05$.