



promoting youth involvement and
social engagement

PROMISE: Promoting Youth Involvement and Social Engagement: Opportunities and challenges for ‘conflicted’ young people across Europe.

Report of national context in ten participating countries (level 1)

Summary: This report brings together reviews of academic literature, statistical data and discussions of policy and practice from the ten PROMISE partner countries. The report provides an overview of developments in the last 15 years with reference to key historical changes that have shaped the unique political, social and cultural climate in each country.

The individual contributions also provide context for the two or three case study groups that will be the sites of ethnographic fieldwork conducted as part of PROMISE.

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Background and Aims of PROMISE

PROMISE explores the role of young people (aged 14 to 29 years) in shaping society; past, present and future. It addresses their engagement with social, environmental and political issues and the potential, across Europe, for youth involvement in positive social action and sustainable change.

Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, PROMISE focuses specifically on young people ‘in conflict’ with authority (and usually, therefore, in conflict with social norms), who are seen to be the most ‘problematic’ in terms of positive social engagement, often triggering negative and punitive responses from authority, in turn furthering marginalisation and stigmatisation. The negative effects of stigma and marginalisation reduce opportunities for young people to engage positively in social action, and as a result, much of the creativity, innovation and energy within these groups is directed away from positive social change. Such ‘conflicted youth’ present significant opportunities for change and should therefore be the prime focus of policy makers and practitioners. PROMISE will explore the opportunities and means for converting conflict into positive social achievement amongst conflicted youth across Europe. Our overall aim is to unlock the potential and ‘promise’ of Europe’s youth.

The aims of PROMISE are:

- To provide a picture of the nature and extent of the multiplicity of young people’s involvement in society, barriers and opportunities to participation and future potential for engaging in social change.
- To identify and analyse the particular conditions that encourage or prevent youth participation.
- To explain the nature of relationships that present barriers for socio-ecological transition in diverse groups of young people across Europe.
- To identify and analyse the unique context of conflicted youth that contributes to the creation of youth on the margins across Europe.
- To provide an analysis of normative responses to the conflicts young people face.
- To understand the role of gender in youth participation: specifically to understand the experiences of young women and girls and how this can be addressed.
- To understand the roles of generation, ethnicity, class and other areas of diversity in youth participation and how these can be addressed.

The objectives will be achieved through analysis of existing data, and through of new data collected in the ten participating countries.



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**Authors: Raquel Matos, Filipe Martins, Alexandra Carneiro,
Luísa Ribeiro, Luísa Campos and Mariana Negrão**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Portuguese 20th century was deeply influenced by a conservative dictatorial regime that lasted from 1933 to 1974, leading to a significant underdevelopment in economy, welfare, education, health and social equality, when compared to other European countries achievements, especially after WWII. During this period, it was not possible to identify youth as a widespread social category, as the life of most Portuguese youngsters was defined by very short educational paths, early work and, for many, emigration.

It was only after the 1974 democratic revolution that the country started to reach European socioeconomic standards. In the years that preceded and succeeded the revolution, a minority of upper class university students was pivotal in promoting political change in the country, thus remaining in the Portuguese social memory as an exemplary generation in terms of youth social and political engagement. From the 1980s onwards, however, the massive expansion of schooling access and duration, as well as a broader contact with international consumer goods, information and cultural tendencies, quickly favoured the emergence of specific youthful sociabilities and lifestyles within a wider and diverse group of Portuguese youngsters. Nevertheless, during these decades, the Portuguese economy and society maintained structural fragilities that led to the rapid aging of the population and made youth transitions to adulthood growingly difficult and de-standardized. This tendency was particularly enhanced after the 2011-2014 economic crisis and subsequent austerity policies, favouring the rise of youth unemployment and the re-enactment of youth emigration.

The emergence of Portuguese youth as a social category originated different public representations of youth, particularly since the 1990s, many of which tended to stress its negative or vulnerable features. On the one hand, youth was pictured as overly focused on the present, social apathetic and engaging in excessive, threatening or risky behaviours related to body image, sexuality, drug use or delinquency. On the other hand, youth became represented as a socially and economically vulnerable group with no future perspectives which, therefore, needed to develop new competences and become more active in order to succeed in the globalized knowledge economy.

Youth social action, however, has been present in Portugal from the end of the dictatorship up until the present. Intergenerational solidarity within families and emigration are examples of youth individual actions. Youth collective actions became more visible since the 1980s, both at community level, through arts, non-formal education or volunteering, and through engagement on national or international social causes or movements. More recently, technological entrepreneurship has also become a growing form of youth social engagement.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

The 20th century in Portugal was deeply marked by the *Estado Novo* period, a right wing dictatorial regime that lasted from 1933 to 1974. During a period of remarkable political, social and cultural changes all around Europe and most of the world, especially after WWII, Portugal remained a marginal and stagnated country, characterized by a conservative, religious and familiaristic culture, a protectionist economy mostly based on subsistence agriculture and incipient industry, and a majority of rural illiterate population (Barreto 2002). During the last decades of this period a massive emigration flux, mainly composed of young

people that left towards more affluent countries like France, Switzerland, Germany, Luxemburg, Brazil, Venezuela and U.S.A., greatly affected the already impoverished Portuguese socioeconomic landscape (in 1966 120239 people emigrated). From 1961 to 1974, the Independence Wars in many of the Portuguese African colonies at that time (Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau) forced many young men to enrol in the military forces and, consequently, contributed to enhance emigration movements and the social and economic depression of the country (Arroteia 2001; Matos 2016).

After the democratic *Carnation Revolution* of April 25th 1974, however, great efforts were made to reduce poverty and social inequalities, enhance economic growth and rise the educational standards of the general population. Welfare policies have been implemented since the 1970s, alongside universal public health and educational systems, dramatically raising the population's general wellbeing and social mobility aspirations (Barreto 2002). The population of the country has strongly increased during the whole 20th century (from 5423132 in 1900 to 10358076 in 2015) (INE 2016; FFMS 2016), but this growth was particularly evident during the 1970s (15% of increase) (INE 2016) because of the intense reduction of the infant mortality rate and the growth of life expectancy. However, birth rates rapidly decreased after the 1980s and the Portuguese population is increasingly aging since the 1990s (in 1961 there were 27.5 people over 65 for each 100 youngsters under 15; in 2015 this number was 143.9) (FFMS 2016).

These changes were accompanied by improvements in the gender balance in education, in labour market, in law and in family life. In fact, after the 1974 revolution, several efforts were made towards women's greater social, cultural and political participation in the Portuguese society. For example, the careers in the public administration (e.g., diplomatic and judicial careers) have opened up to women's inclusion, several rights of men over women were abolished and women had finally the right to vote without any restriction. Nevertheless, significant gender inequalities in income, job opportunities and family responsibilities still remain, as evidenced, for example, in the differentiated access of men and women to top positions either in the private or in the public sector (Matos 2011).

After joining the European Economic Community (now European Union) in 1986, Portugal sought to modernize its public administration system and its communication, transport and, to a lesser degree, agricultural and industrial infrastructures. It also invested in massive construction projects, attracting, over the 1990s and early 2000s, a significant number of immigrants from African Portuguese speaking countries, Brazil and Easter European countries. This tendency, alongside new opportunities for geographical mobility within the EU and other countries around the world, turned the Portuguese population more culturally diverse and more aligned with wide global trends (Barreto 2002).

Throughout the last decades, however, both industrial and agricultural sectors remained underdeveloped and hardly competitive in global terms. The recent increase in educational qualifications, socioeconomic wellbeing and personal aspirations led to an expansion of a tertiary sector labour market which, nonetheless, has a limited capacity of generating employment and sustained social mobility opportunities. Consequently, despite these rapid and dramatic changes, Portugal reached the beginning of the 2010s with educational, social and economic performances still behind UE and OECD average standards (OECD 2010). This socioeconomic fragility made the country particularly vulnerable to the effects of the 2007-2008 global financial crisis that prompted a deep national economic and social crisis since 2010. Consequently, between 2011 and 2014 Portugal was under an international aid programme headed by the EU, IMF and ECB which imposed drastic austerity measures such as a massive tax increase and ample cutbacks in workers' rights, welfare, education and health. During this period, unemployment raised to levels never registered during the democratic period (in 1990 it was of 4.6% and in 2013 it was of 16.2%) (FFMS 2016), consequently leading to a new increase of emigration of young people, but now much more qualified and cosmopolitan

that in the past (Ferreira & Grassi 2012). Since 2014, however, unemployment rates are slightly decreasing (12.4% in 2015) (FFMS 2016) and financial and economic performances are progressively stabilizing.

Young people and social change

During most of *Estado Novo* period, youth could not be established as a defined and distinct social group in the Portuguese society. Widespread poverty, lack of access to formal education and poor economic specialization never allowed most Portuguese youngsters to experience the prolonged formative and experimentalism period between childhood and adulthood (Pappámikail 2011; Vieira 2011). In Portugal, until the 1960s most youngsters rapidly moved from primary school (that could last two to four years) to work in agriculture, small manufactures and stores or, in the specific case of girls, as housemaids (Vieira 2011). Over this period young people were integrated into the adult worlds as soon as possible, taking care of work and household tasks at early ages due to the subsistence difficulties faced by most of the families. Because of these widespread harsh life conditions, the wish to leave the country in search of better life conditions and economic opportunities grew. The political repression and persecution, the absence of freedom of expression, the conservative values and the forced enrolment of young men in the colonial wars in Africa, were also determinant factors that propelled a Portuguese youth “exodus” between the 1950s and 1970s – first young men, latter followed by women and children – mainly towards more industrialized and culturally opened Central European countries (Baganha 1994; Arroiteia 2001).

We can say that these were the major social features that defined youth in Portugal until the democratic turn in 1974, though some state efforts were being made since the 1960s towards the rise of educational access, especially in the major urban settings where high schools and universities were located (Vieira 2011). In these contexts, a minority elite or upper middle class youth could access prolonged school trajectories and get in touch with new experiences and ideas. Such students were particularly relevant in forging and supporting anti-fascist and anti-colonial structures and initiatives in the 1960s and early 1970s. After 1974, university students were again pivotal in social change, engaging in political parties, community level initiatives, cultural collectives and alphabetization campaigns. This was a period where pro-democratic political activism, alongside engaged literature, architecture, visual arts and music, were defining trends of a strongly involved young generation that would become a national symbolic reference in the decades to come (Pappámikail 2011).

Education

From the 1970s onwards, the Portuguese state education system was greatly extended and the period of compulsory education was progressively elevated (from 9 school years in 1975 to 12 school years in 2009) (Murtin & Viarengo 2011), making longer schooling trajectories accessible to a growing number of youngsters from all social backgrounds and regions of the country (Vieira 2011). The massive growth of the schooling rate in secondary education (6.1% in lower secondary education and 1.3% in upper secondary education in 1961, and 86.5% and 74.6% in 2015 respectively) (FFMS 2016) is a clear expression of the central role school acquired in Portuguese young people’s lives, consolidating the correlation between being young and being a student (Vieira 2011).

Enrolment in higher education also started to grow since the 1960s, mainly due to the incorporation of the female population in universities, whose presence until then was not significant (Vieira 1995). After the 1980s there was an “explosive” annual growth of students in higher education, also related to the increase in the volume of students enrolled in private and cooperative education (Vieira 1995). Consequently, the percentage of people over 20 years old that reached the graduation level rose greatly in the country (1.5%

of men and 0.4% of women in 1960, and 12.4% of men and 16.9% of women in 2011) (FFMS 2016), and in 2015 31.9% of 30 to 34 year olds had attained a higher education degree (European Commission 2016).

Although all these educational advancements were indeed remarkable, both in extension and in pace, this massive expansion brought new problems to all education levels (Martins 2009) due to the increasing diversification of student population (Almeida, Soares, Guisande, & Paisana 2007; Ransdell 2001) and the inability of the educational system to respond effectively to it. Therefore, school failure and dropping out before concluding secondary education, or even earlier, became persistent throughout the last decades, although continually decreasing (56.2% of boys and 44.2% of girls in 1992; 16.4% and 11% respectively in 2015) (FFMS 2016). Persistent school leaving seems to be mainly motivated by financial issues, lack of support to families, fail to disclosure alternatives and lack of motivation to attend school (Rocha, Ferreira, Moreira, & Gomes 2014). This tendency led a significant number of young Portuguese to unemployment (14.1% of 14 to 24 year olds Not in Education, Employment or Training in 2014) (Rowland, Ferreira, Vieira, & Pappámikail, 2014) or to enter the labour market with very low qualifications, thus being more likely to face precarious labour conditions (Azevedo & Fonseca 2006).

Life style

Along with the massive schooling of Portuguese youngsters, youth life styles changed significantly during the second half of the 20th century due to the continued rising in family's economic conditions and to the country's gradual openness to international cultural trends (cf. Pappámikail 2011). As in many other countries all around the world, youth became a social category by the means of the consumer market, although in Portugal this process was completely established only from the 1980s onwards. It became frequent that young people choose new spaces (e.g., bars, coffees and clubs) where they could drink, dance and hang out with friends away of the eyes of older people. In 1999, almost half of the youngsters in Portugal stated they would rather be with friends when they wanted to have fun. The role of music was central to this process, as international music (mostly American and British rock & roll bands), and also Portuguese bands since the 1980s, became an essential element of youth identities and sociability (Pappámikail 2011).

At the same time, the increasing contact with international fashion trends stimulated the adoption of youthful dress codes (like jeans and leather jackets in the 1980s and 1990s and multiple dress styles onwards) that, when not an explicit image of rebellion, became at least a clear way of differentiating youth from both childhood and adulthood (Pappámikail 2011). The growing access to international films and the expansion of television broadcast at national scale (with national productions boosting since the 1990s) were similarly relevant to the ongoing process of building youth as a social category, as these media helped to explore reality from the point of view of young people and favour collective identification around shared "youthful" experiences. Furthermore, the growing access and use of information technologies and social media, particularly intense from the late 1990s onwards, contributed decisively to shape youth interactions and sociability in an increasingly different way from prior generations. Finally, the rising opportunities to travel that became available since the 1980s, both in the country and abroad, (via rail or plane travelling, international internships, student exchanges or volunteering) made geographical mobility another important feature of a youthful life style oriented towards novelty, pleasure and personal fulfilment (Pappámikail 2011).

Transitions to adulthood

All these trends featured new expressive forms of individualism (Pappámikail 2011) that could also be identified in young people's changing patterns regarding intimate and family relations. In Portugal marriage and parenthood remain important moments of transition towards adulthood, but during the last decades these key events were significantly postponed in young people's biographies (Aboim 2011). While in 1980 the average age of the first marriage was 25.4 for men and 23.3 for women, in 2015 those were 32.5 and 31.0 respectively (FFMS 2016). Similarly, the average age of Portuguese women at the birth of the first child was 23.6 in 1980 and 30.2 in 2015 (FFMS 2016). These tendencies reveal a changing pattern of intimate relationships, as formal marriage, although still relevant, is progressively being replaced by informal conjugal modalities and cohabitation, and parenthood is becoming detached from it (in 1980 only 9.8% of births occurred out of wedlock; in 2015 these were 50.7%, one of the highest rates in Europe) (FFMS 2016).

During this period, an increasing postponement of youth residential independence was also observed. In 2001 the proportion of young adults between 18 and 34 that lived in the parents' house was 45.7%; in 2011 it raised to 47.0% (Nunes 2014). Differently from Northern and Central European countries where young people tend to leave the parents' house in their early twenties, in Portugal this tends to happen, in average, almost at the age of 30 and frequently associated with some form of conjugality (Aboim 2011). This aspect reveals not only the persistence of a familiaristic normativity associated with adulthood (Ferreira & Nunes 2010), but most significantly, the growing dependency of Portuguese youth on their parents and older generations (Pappámikail 2011; Cairns 2010, 2011). In fact, in 2007 two thirds of the Portuguese young adults stated that the main reason for living with their parents was the lack of economic resources (Eurostat 2007). And this tendency became even more evident after 2010, in the context of a major economic crisis (Alves, Cantante, Baptista, & Carmo 2011; Nico 2014).

The remarkable rise of educational opportunities and the consequent growth of a highly qualified work force, together with the increase of the tertiary sector in national economy and its exposure to global markets' deregulation favoured increasingly unstructured, individualized and flexible modalities of work (e.g., short term or part time contracts, informal or illegal work, internships and scholarships) and the expressive rise of unemployment, all these with greater impacts among youth (Alves et al. 2011). In 2015, the Portuguese youth unemployment rate was 32.0%, but in 2013 it reached 38.1% (FFMS 2016). Consequently, in recent decades Portuguese young people's work life became generally defined by precarity, low salaries (FFMS 2016) and uncertainty, in contrast with the predictability and stability that characterized the work experiences and the life expectations of the previous generation (Alves et al. 2011; Nico 2014). This economic vulnerability became the greatest challenge most present Portuguese youths must face. Consequently, young people's autonomies were affected, thus making precarity a long-term way of life to most youngsters (Alves et al. 2011).

When comparing different "transition regimes" to adulthood between European countries, Portugal tends to be placed in the most disadvantaged cluster, the "sub-protective" regime, which is defined by non-selective schools, low standards and coverage in training, welfare mainly based on the family, and a closed and informal employment regime (Walther 2006). Though this classification was made before the 2010-2014 economic crisis, several authors consider it even more accurate nowadays, as labour market became increasingly unregulated, youth unemployment grew expressively and youth supporting public policies in education, housing and employment decrease during this period (Ferreira 2011a; Nico 2014).

The described transformations raised important intergenerational challenges to Portuguese society. In a context of generalised work instability and welfare withdraw, older generations became fundamental, at a family and household level, to youth material subsistence and to sustain possible transitions to adulthood, thus reinforcing intergenerational dependencies and solidarity that can also strengthen relationships based

on affection and mutual respect (Pappámikail 2011; Lima 2016). However, the relation between younger and older generations in Portugal is also characterized by tension or even conflict. The recent demographic turn towards an ageing society, alongside job shortage and low salaries pose serious challenges to national Welfare sustainability and bring intergenerational competition to the labour market and to debates about public spending. Nevertheless, in 2007 the Portuguese state spent 17 times more in old age pensions than in support to families, employment, housing and social assistance, which means that young people only benefit of a residual part of the national welfare expenses (Mendes 2012).

Mental health and risk

Until the middle of the 20th century, health assistance in Portugal was given only to indigents and sick people that asked for help to the Catholic Church. In the second half of the same century the assistance was spread to the general population throughout mutualistic associations though a more organized health assistance was achieved only in the last quarter of the 20th century (Rodrigues, Samagaio, Ferreira, Mendes & Januário 1999). Noteworthy is the rise of psychological intervention in the country in the 1970s, which contributed to an increment in the prevention of physical and mental health, including the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse and risky sexual behaviours (Gaspar de Matos 2008). However, during this long period the focus on young people at risk and their mental health problems and needs was never fully met.

In general, studies on mental health in young people in Portugal have revealed worrying conclusions. A study that aimed to survey mental health problems in 3235 youth from 13 to 15 years-old attending regular schools in Portugal, found high levels of emotional and behavioural problems. It also revealed that girls present more emotional problems and prosocial behaviours, while boys present more behaviour problems and problems in social relations (Gaspar de Matos et al., 2012).

Regarding the mental health of young people in the justice and the protection systems, some worrying data have been highlighted. According to a recent report, 21% of the 150 youths aged 14 to 20 years-old that were placed in the national educational centres of the youth justice system in the last trimester of 2015 were diagnosed with a mental disorder. Besides the diagnoses, many youths were referred to mental health services due to other problems; 62.67% were receiving psychological treatment, 29.33% were having psychiatric treatment, 25.33% were receiving both, and 32.67% were taking medication. Among children and youngsters in the protection system, especially those who are in alternative care, official numbers are also of concern. In fact, recent data showed that 48% of them presented behavioral problems, 15.7% suffered from mental weakness or disability, 3.1% had physical disability, 4.9% suffered from chronic physical illness and 2.5% were reported as having drug addiction. Moreover, around 58.5% had psychiatric or psychological intervention and 23.4% was taking medication (Mecanismo Nacional de Prevenção 2016).

There has been a recent effort to include specific recommendations on the mental health of at-risk youth in public health policies. However, some gaps remain in the response to this type of problems in young people who are under both the justice and the protection systems (cf. Mecanismo Nacional de Prevenção 2016).

In Portugal, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC; UN 1989) was ratified by the State in 1990. This led to a broader evaluation and deep critical reflection on the efficacy and limits of the children and youth justice welfare model, which was in force since 1911 with the publication of *The Childhood Protection Act* (Lei de Protecção à Infância, LPI, Decree-Law of 27th of May 1911). Children under the age of 16 years who have committed offences were removed from the scope of criminal law and become subject to a specialized jurisdiction. Since 1911, there has never been a juvenile criminal law in the country, which differentiates the Portuguese justice system from most of the other EU countries. The system did not undergo significant changes until the end of the 20th century. As a result of the process of reform,

significant changes were made and international standards have been integrated into the legal framework. Current children and youth protection and juvenile justice laws integrate the tools and procedures for exercising formal social control, framed by the definition of criteria and socially accepted norms consecrated by law, embodying the guarantee to protect human rights established, and the State can only intervene in indispensable cases (Carvalho 2014). The new laws approved in 1999 – *the Promotion and Protection Law for Children and Young in Danger* (LPCJP)¹⁷, and the *Youth Justice Act* (LTE)¹⁸, came into force on the 1st of January 2001, and both have undergone changes in 2015. The essential idea was to distinguish the situation of children and youth in danger, that legitimizes a State's intervention of protection (LPCJP), from the needs and situation of the children, between 12 and 16 years old, who commit an offence qualified by the penal law as crime and, as a result, justify another kind of intervention, an educational one (LTE). The set of educational measures established by the LTE, ranging from admonition to custody in an educational centre, aims at the offender's socialization and rehabilitation, "based on the core principle of education in the law" (Rodrigues & Fonseca 2010:1035).

These two laws represent a great change in the traditional justice practice in the country, and became the fundamental pillars of the Children and Youth Justice Reform. The terms 'child' and 'youth' arise in the two new approved legal diplomas representing a new approach in the field of Law. Previously, the term 'minor' was repeatedly used in the legislation and in the justice system, indiscriminately applicable to individuals aged up to 18 years.

Despite following the concept of child defined by the CRC considering the age of 18 years to reach civil majority in Portugal, youth who commit offences at the age of 16 fall under the general penal law and are regarded and judged as adult in common adult courts (Carvalho 2016). There is a Special Penal Regime for Young Adults (Portuguese Law 401/82 from 23 September) which foresees alternative measures and specific detention conditions for youths aged 16 to 20. There has been a controversial debate around the contradiction between the prevailing distinction between the civil majority and the penal majority and in 2010 the Permanent Observatory on Portuguese Justice recommended to move the age of penal responsibility from 16 to 18 years old, in order to meet international standards and avoid the stay of youths aged 16 and 17 in adult prisons. Nevertheless, this change seems far from being accomplished (Matos 2015).

Representations of youth

It was just from the 1960s onwards, and particularly after the 1980s, that a growing number of Portuguese boys and girls from all social backgrounds could enjoy exclusive times and spaces solely dedicated to learning, conviviality and leisure. However, formal or informal work continued to be an important part of many youngsters' lives, even during their student years or as they drop out of school (cf. Almeida & Vieira 2008). This historical process favoured the rapid constitution of a youthful identity focused both on preparing the future and on enjoying the present (Pais 2001; Pappámikail 2011). Furthermore, the consolidation of the social category of youth in Portugal was also the result of diverse national and international scientific developments in medicine, psychology and educational sciences that growingly stressed the specificity of childhood and adolescence experiences and development. In parallel, there were important national and international developments in policy and law that defined children and youths as subjects of rights, protection and participation.

¹⁷ Law N.º 142/2015 of 8th of September, which constitutes the second amendment to Law No. 147/99, 1st of September.

¹⁸ Law N.º 4/2015 of 15th of January, which constitutes the first amendment to Law n.º 166/99 of 14th September.

This rapid emergence and recognition of youth as a distinct social category naturally raised diverse social representations within the Portuguese society, which in turn led to multiple reactions and initiatives directed to young people. A relevant example at institutional level was the creation, in 1987, of the State Secretary for Youth (now Youth and Sports), responsible for the coordination of national youth policies. Since then these policies focused on two main levels: support in the transition from education to employment; and leisure, consumption and mobility opportunities (Pappámikail 2011).

At the level of public opinion, frequently enhanced by media and political discourses, the emergence of youth in Portugal gave rise to diverse and often contradictory representations wavering between hopes and fears about the future and concerns about the present. This was particularly manifest since the 1990s and became epitomized by the widespread duality between “Geração Rasca” and “Geração à Rasca”, a semantic play with similar words but with very different meanings (“vulgar generation” and “generation in distress”, respectively).

“Geração Rasca” – The vulgar generation

“Geração Rasca”, an expression that means coarse or vulgar generation, was first used by the editor of a national newspaper in 1994 referring to a series of nationwide and highly mediatized students’ demonstrations against changes in educational policy. In those public demonstrations, where the youngsters were contesting new evaluation procedures in upper secondary education and new restrictions to access higher education, some used offensive language and symbols directed to the minister of education. The expression “geração rasca” became widely used in the public discourse as an epitome for a new generation that was pictured as overprotected, ill-behaved, passive and ungrateful (Ribeiro, n.d.), detached from the ethical and citizenship ideals preconized by the previous generation, thus becoming a danger to the social and moral order (Pappámikail 2011).

It is interesting to notice that those negative representations were developed from the moral comparison between 1990s’ Portuguese youth generation and the memory of the politically engaged youth generation of the 1970s. Nevertheless, it is important to recall that the 1970s’ young “revolutionaries” were no more than a minority of privileged university students at that time, while the 1990s’ young generation was composed by a much wider and diverse group of young people living in a very different social, cultural and economic context (cf. Pappámikail 2011).

“Geração à Rasca” - Generation in distress

The expression “Geração à Rasca” (meaning generation in distress) was used in the media as an immediate response to the expression “Geração Rasca”, calling attention to the problems that many young people were experiencing in the access to education and to the labour market (unemployment and job precarity), even among the most qualified (Pappámikail 2011). The expression gained momentum again in the 2011-2013 crisis, representing a new young generation in distress. Several media, public demonstrations and cultural interventions used this expression precisely to stress the generalized precarity, lack of hope and uncertain futures of a highly qualified generation as the most dramatic consequences of the major social and economic crisis Portugal faced after the democratic revolution of 1974 (Nico 2014).

The two expressions used to describe the Portuguese youth since 1994 – “Geração Rasca” and “Geração à Rasca” – symbolize two different but complementary ways in which young people tend to be represented, whether in Portugal or elsewhere. On the one hand, a representation of a decadent youth overly focused on the present and whose behaviour is typically excessive, deviant and risky. On the other hand, the

discourse about a socially and economically vulnerable youth with no future perspectives which, therefore, needs to engage more in society.

Body image, sexuality, drugs' use and delinquency

One traditional focus of public concerns about youth is the way by which the “youthful” body is socially produced and used. In Portugal, as in many other countries, the cultural norms by which the youngsters conceive and construct their body image changed significantly and, over the last decades, the Portuguese youth developed a significant concern about the body image (Ferreira 2011b). In 2000 almost 20% of youths referred to be unsatisfied with their own body (Ferreira 2003), and in 2002 50% of youths older than 16 years stated that they would like to change something in their body image (Gaspar de Matos 2003).

At the same time, and in an intimate association with body image and use, Portuguese young people changed their customs and moral constraints regarding sexuality, specifically about the age of the first intercourse and the existence of multiple sexual partners, rising concerns about sexual transmitted diseases (Ferreira 2011b, 2011c). By the end of the 1980s a national survey revealed that youths attributed higher importance to body image and to sex, when compared to older generations (Conde 1989). One decade later, in a representative study on the Portuguese youth, similar results were reported, corroborating the idea of the overvaluation of the body (Ferreira 1998).

Globally, the growing concerns about the youthful body were also related to behaviours linked to the physical and social risks youths could incur (Ferreira 2011c). As in other countries, youths were associated with addiction and transgression of legal limits (Pappámikail 2011).

Similarly to what happened across Europe, drugs' use in Portugal has been changing throughout the years. In the 1980s there was a clear dichotomy between hard and mild drugs, the use of heroin increased and there was an association between youth, crime and urban insecurity. By the end of the 1990s the use of heroin started to decrease and many wondered if it was disappearing from the relegated urban areas. It has been later evidenced that even though heroin did not disappear in recent years young people started to make greater use of other types of drugs, such as cocaine and synthetic drugs, in different contexts (Carvalho 2007; Trigueiros & Carvalho 2010; Pappámikail 2011).

Nowadays, Portugal presents one of the lowest rates of drugs' use (1.2%) in Europe. However, it is important to highlight that this low prevalence might be the result of the adoption of a drug use decriminalization policy since the 1990s, thus becoming an international model in this domain. Despite this, in the last decades drugs' use has been associated with youngsters, because its public visibility occurred in the period of emergence of youth as a social category. Therefore, the “problem of drugs” was synonymous of “youth problem” for several years (Fernandes 2009). Moreover, despite the confirmation that not only youngsters use drugs, this became a social image associated to this developmental stage (Carvalho 2007).

In fact, the idea of rebellion and attraction for new experiences and risk is one of the most distinctive images of youth (Lerner et al. 2010), and many researches have studied the association between behaviour problems and drugs' use in youngsters. In Portugal, Fonseca (2013) found a prevalence of co-occurrence of 8% in adolescents aged 14 to 15 and 11% in those aged 17 to 18. Despite the social idea that drugs use is associated with deviant behaviours, the same study reported that drugs use is a weak predictor of deviant behaviour in youths aged 17 to 18. Accordingly, Trigueiros and Carvalho (2010) found that only very few young drug users present criminal behaviour, and when they do, it consists of minor offenses.

Along with the growing urbanization in Portugal over the last decades, since the 1990s the insecurity felt by those who live in the city increased significantly (Fernandes 2008). This phenomenon can be partly

explained by the expansion of social housing neighbourhoods and their association with drug trafficking, as well as with the growing visibility of social actors that prompted insecurity rumours (e.g., car ushers, prostitutes, junkies, beggars) (Carvalho 2013). Moreover, the growing of urban juvenile marginal and threatening subcultures also contributed to the association between youth and social disorder (cf. Fernandes & Pinto 2008). Despite the lack of evidence from the official numbers, which revealed variations in juvenile delinquency until 2008 and a decrease since then, in 2009, according to the European Social Survey 2008-2009, in a representative sample, 50% of the respondents in Portugal reported to be afraid of the crimes committed by young people (Marques 2011).

Uncertain features and the urge to individual agency

Particularly after the 2000s, the growing socioeconomic difficulties faced by the Portuguese young people in the transition to adulthood became widely recognized and discussed in the media, the social sciences and the political discourses. However, many political and institutional responses to such difficulties tended to focus less their socioeconomic structural causes and more the youths supposed apathy and lack of initiative (Alves 2007). This was closely linked to the idea that young people's educational and work difficulties or failures were greatly explained by personal (or familiar) inabilities or social disengagement, thus reinforcing a logic of "privatization" of social problems (Alves 2007).

Another related representation about the Portuguese youth has been the lack of concern about public life, namely on political and social issues. In fact, in the political domain, studies on Portuguese youths reveal that they tend to reject activities that they perceive as *political*, being this a domain that they don't understand and from which they tend to alienate (Ribeiro & Menezes 2002). Many other forms and contexts of youth civic participation have emerged over the last decades (cf. next section) (Ribeiro et al. 2015; Menezes 2012; Magalhães & Moral 2008). However, public, institutional and sometimes young people's discourses tend to de-politicize such practices in favour of a more individualized perspective that emphasises its potential for personal development, employability and social cohesion (Walther 2007).

All these tendencies, which followed international policy trends in economy, welfare and education, resulted on a moral and institutional emphasis on "youth agency" as the main way of solving youth problems (Nico 2014). Therefore, the notions of competence, employability and entrepreneurship became the quintessential traits Portuguese young people should strive to acquire if they want to succeed in the globalized knowledge economy (Azevedo & Fonseca 2006; Alves 2007; Fernandes 2012).

Paradoxically, the idea that Portugal had an excessive number of graduated people became widespread during the last decades, although national higher education completion rates have always remained lower than EU average (in 2015, 31.8% of young adults aged 30 to 34, comparing to 38.7% in the EU) (EC 2016). Nevertheless, taken together with the focus on youth agency, this representation made its way up to the political level and favoured several austerity policies after the 2010 crisis that affected youth particularly. Some examples are the cutbacks in education and scientific investigation public budgets, the reduction of labour rights and social benefits for independent, part-time or term contract workers, many of them youths; or the government's appeal to young unemployed emigration in order to find better job opportunities (Nico 2014).

Youth actions and innovation

Although the social image of the Portuguese youth since the 1980s tended to stress its apathy, hedonism and social detachment, the concrete actions that young people have undertaken during this period show a different perspective. At a personal level, the development of new intergenerational caring relationships

and material interdependencies within families (part-time jobs, caring for children or elderly, carrying out housework) are immediate and concrete examples of youth (re)actions to the increasing vulnerability in education and work and to the progressive erosion of social rights and welfare benefits (Lima 2016).

In many cases, youth (re)action in face of vulnerability also took the form of emigration projects. Particularly in late 2000s and early 2010s, a significant number of young people (more than 6000 aged 15 to 24 by 2010), both boys and girls and with low and high qualifications, moved away from Portugal to find better job conditions and opportunities in other countries (Ferreira & Grassi 2012). In 2011 this tendency made of Portugal, among countries with more than 1 million inhabitants, the one with the 12th greater emigration rate in the world (20,8%), and the first in the EU (Pires 2015).

Regarding the collective social involvement of young people, their movements only started to gain ground and visibility after the end of *Estado Novo* (Hespanha et al. 2000). Although formal and conventional forms of political participation (e.g., discussing politics, voting in the elections, being a member of a political party), seem to be less important to the Portuguese adolescents, they show a clear interest in the social dimensions of citizenship, such as helping other people, being a good parent, or being a good worker (Ribeiro & Menezes 2002). Nevertheless, after the 2000s, some youth collective actions against precarity and austerity (e.g. <http://www.precarios.net/>) revealed the Portuguese youth potential for politically (though non-party) engagement, being the massive intergenerational public demonstrations against austerity, in 2011 and 2012, clear examples of this (Nico 2014; Soeiro 2014; see also <http://councilforeuropeanstudies.org/critcom/anti-austerity-protests-in-portugal/> or <http://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/portugal-the-crisis-and-new-actors-against-austerity/>).

Many public and private institutional initiatives have been developed since the 1980s focusing on social, economic, territorial, or educational vulnerable young people, mostly aiming to promote the development of skills that would allow youngsters to successfully integrate the labour market. From the expansion of vocational training opportunities in the 1980s and 1990s to more recent employability and entrepreneurial courses and support structures (e.g. <https://gulbenkian.pt/iniciativas/cidadania-ativa1/projetos-apoiados/projetos-dominio-atuacao-d/>), young people have been participating greatly in diverse training initiatives, although with variable and sometimes unclear results.

During the same period, other programmes have been developed with a general focus on youth empowerment and social inclusion. These “youth work” programmes (though in Portugal this has only been recognised as a specific field of work in 2015), typically developed at community level in urban settings, tended to adopt a more participatory methodology that values young people’s own skills and interests (e.g., music, sports, traveling, social issues) and reinforces the positive role they can have in the community (e.g., <http://www.programescolhas.pt/>) (Martinho, Marcos, Parente, Cruz, & Amador 2014). Some of these initiatives highlighted and supported specific cultural expressions under development in Portuguese cities since the 1990s, like rap music, Brazilian funk, graffiti and hip-hop dance, thus favouring the construction of positive identities of often stigmatized and undervalued youth groups and territories (Fradique 2003; Raposo 2010).

During the last decades most Portuguese youngsters also became more aware of social and global challenges. Even if youth social engagement tended to assume less structured and more individualized forms, there has been evidence of growing youth involvement in social and cultural initiatives and causes (Pappámikail 2011), like gender equality (e.g. <http://redejovensigualdade.org.pt/blog/quem-somos/sobrenos/>), fight against discrimination (e.g. <http://www.odionao.com.pt/>), environmental campaigning (e.g. <http://jra.abae.pt/project/campanha-litter-less-2017/>) or fostering organic and local economy (<https://movingcause.org/>), as well as in global causes like poverty reduction, fair trade or education for all.

Volunteering has become a central way through which youths are taking a more active role in their community or even around the world, highlighting the initiative spirit and solidarity in local communities (e.g. <http://www.udip.porto.ucp.pt/pt/caso?msite=3>) or abroad (e.g. <http://gasafricaporto.page.tl/P%E1gina-Inicial.htm>). When volunteering is done in Portugal, youngsters show preference to dedicate time in firefighting corporations or in youth associations (Proact 2012). At international level, a growing number of youth organizations has likewise become engaged in intercultural, global citizenship and human rights training and volunteering programs, most of the times with the support of international agencies like the United Nations, the Council of Europe or the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme (formerly Youth in Action programme).

This growing engagement in social initiatives at both national and international levels led Portuguese youths to value such experiences not only for their expected impact on social change, but also as learning opportunities that could enhance the personal development of all participants. Consequently, many Portuguese youth organizations, like many European counterparts, have been pushing towards the recognition of Non-Formal Education as a rich and diverse learning field within youth social action, complementary to formal education (e.g., <http://www.cnj.pt/beta/index.php/o-que-fazemos/educacao-formal-e-nao-formal>). At the educational level, a parallel movement can be identified in the growing involvement of Portuguese young adults in the creation of alternative schooling initiatives, evidencing a desirable shift towards more free, active and cooperative learning experiences (<http://www.educacaolivre.pt/mel/>).

The recent developments in technology mediated communications and social networks have had a major impact in youth sociability and social participation (Simões & Campos 2016). If in 2000 6664951 mobile phones were being used in Portugal, in 2014 this number had raised to 18973597 (almost more 8 million than the national population). In 2002 53.4% of high school students had a computer with internet connection at home, and that rate increased to 87.8% in 2014 and nowadays almost 100% of young people use computer (FFMS 2016). On the other hand, technological innovation has also become an economically attractive field for youth entrepreneurial engagement. The number of technological start-up enterprises, led by Portuguese youths, has increased greatly in the last decade, as well as many public and private support programmes and expertise services directed to young technological entrepreneurs (e.g. <https://startups.ativarportugal.pt/>). A good example of this tendency was the recent worldwide event "Web Summit" (<https://websummit.net/>) that took place in Lisbon in November 2016. This summit attracted many young Portuguese participants that, despite the excessive cost of tickets, offered to volunteer in the event in search for an opportunity in the business world of technology.

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