

# **Country-based report on cultural literacy practices in formal education**

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## **1.. Executive summary**

This report presents the results of qualitative research conducted within formal education settings in Croatia. Research has been done in secondary schools at three different locations; urban, semi-urban and rural area. Sixty pupils (twenty per school) and nine teachers (three per school) answered a semi-structured interview. Four thematic units were covered through the interviews, and country specific theme was added as a fifth unit. This study analyses students' and teachers' responses to questions related to school experience, understanding of culture and cultural heritage, cultural identity of youth and youth participation in culture. The fifth thematic block in this study refers to history. It was selected as country specific theme because of the different interpretations that exist in Croatian society around contemporary history, regarding different interpretations of crimes committed during the Second World War (by fascists) and crimes carried out in the aftermath (by communists). Croatia is one of the few European countries that has experienced bloody war in the recent past. The War for Independence (1991-1995), in Croatia called 'The Homeland War', strongly marked the process of transition from socialism to capitalism and influenced present-day Croatian society. This study analyses the cultural participation and cultural identity of young people who were born after the war. According to previous sociological surveys, young people in Croatia expressed significant social distance towards ethnicities from former Yugoslav republics, today's neighbour countries. Although this research is not a survey dealing with representative sample and it is obvious that there are no possibilities for generalizations, we were curious regarding aspects of nationalistic and similar discourses among participants in three different locations, knowing that in semi-urban area there is Roma minority and in rural area there is Serbian minority. The results of this research have shown considerable differences from previous sociological surveys measuring social distance. Only few participants from the semi-urban area shared prejudices and stereotypes about the Roma as they exist in the public and parental culture (violence and theft attributed to the Roma). However, most participants in this region have shown a kind of neutrality and awareness of complexity of the issue, while several young people expressed explicit inclusive, positive and empathetic views on the Roma minority. In the rural area, despite the presence of the Serbian national minority, interethnic relations have not emerged as a problem, which can be largely attributed to the economic prosperity of that region based on tourism. When asked about their own definitions of the term culture and the first associations that appear on the term culture, almost none of the young people interviewed linked the concept of culture to ethnicity and religion. In addition, the former subcultural styles characteristic of the urban area during the 1980s and 1990s are slowly disappearing from the youth horizon. Music called *cajka* (new composed folk music, mostly coming from Serbia and a cause of labelling of young people who like it) becomes the main common denominator of the musical identity and leisure time activity of young people involved in this research.

## **2. Introduction**

At the outset of the CHIEF project, Croatia was being rocked by an intense debate on curricular reform. This debate had actually begun much earlier, but as changes in the political parties in power took place the key actors who had created the proposed curricular reform, changed as well. Wars are still being fought in Croatia, even though the last war ended 25 years ago; these are wars in the spheres of culture and education due to differing ideological positions and world views. The school curriculum has also become a major issue on the political scene in right- and left-wing debates. The importance of the curriculum has been emphasised, considering the key role formal education plays in the production and transition of cultural knowledge and the development of cultural literacy among young people. School curricula embody dominant narratives in terms of identity formation processes, relationships to cultural heritage, and inter-culturalism. Accordingly, some of the most frequently

addressed questions in the aforementioned debates in Croatia have been related to interpretations of history, particularly regarding the Second World War, the socialist era, and the Croatian War of Independence in the 1990s, which have been understood as fundamental parts of the national identity. Because of the significance of recent history and its different interpretations and because modern Croatian history is marked by war, we added topics from history as our country-specific thematic unit. The debate on curricular reform brought many people out on the streets; once a rally drew roughly 50,000 demonstrators to Zagreb's main square. It would be logical to think that young people and secondary school students are involved in these divisions and emotionally charged discussions in various ways, if for no other reason than because of the involvement of their parents or teachers in events related to curricular reform. Considering our research tasks in this working package, interviews with students and teachers allowed us to learn how the teaching process is carried out, how students and their teachers perceive the concepts of culture, cultural heritage, and cultural identity, how the life of a culture unfolds in school, in the home, and among peers. The research was performed in three schools located in urban, semi-urban, and rural area.

### **3. State of the Art**

Croatia is the youngest member of the EU, with a population of just over 4 million. In the ethnic and religious sense, Croatia is a fairly homogeneous society. According to the 2011 Census, 99.4% of the population have Croatian citizenship, 90.4% of the population identify as ethnic Croats, and 86.3% of the population declare as Catholic (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Despite this, Croatia has a certain multicultural element: 22 “national minorities”, formally recognised in Croatia's constitution (and other laws), have traditionally inhabited Croatia. This is reflected in how the constitution defines Croatia: as a national state of both Croats and members of national minorities (Croatian Parliament, 2010). According to the 2011 census, the national minorities represented just under 8% of the total population. The largest ethnic groups beside Croats were Serbs (4.36%), Bosniaks (0.73%), Italians (0.42%), Albanians (0.41%), and Roma (0.40%) (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

The status of the national minorities, particularly Serbs as the largest minority group, is an especially sensitive issue in Croatia due to the historical circumstances, marked by the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995). On the eve of the war, Serbs constituted 12.2% of the population. After the war, in which Croatian forces fought against local rebel Serbs and the Serb-controlled Yugoslav people's Army, the total number of people killed or missing is estimated at 20,091 (Živić, 2001). At its peak, the war displaced 550,000 people, resulting in 150,000 refugees moving to different countries (Perković & Puljiz, 2001). The legacy of both the Croatian War of Independence and the Croat-Bosniak Conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina is still felt, creating considerable challenges for policy makers responsible for cultural literacy and inter-cultural understanding. As a result of this context, a particular emphasis has been placed (in all aspects of life) on the Croatian ethnic identity, which potentially jeopardises the implementation of policies regarding respect for diversity and acknowledging minority culture.

In addition to the large number of human casualties, the economy was also severely affected. The State Commission for the Assessment of War Damage puts the direct cost (1990-1999) at 34 billion of Euros; while 180,000 units of housing were also destroyed (Perković & Puljiz, 2001). Since 1991, Croatia has gone through a long (and still ongoing) process of economic and social transformation from socialism to capitalism. This has involved the wholesale privatisation of public companies, the non-transparent manner of which has produced a large class of ‘transitional losers’. These transitional losers, primarily farmers and the former ‘working class’, remain relatively poor and have become less socially mobile as a class (Tucker, Pacek & Berinsky, 2002).

Croatia's current two major political blocs were formed in the 1990s; the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ, the largest centre-right party) and the Social Democratic Party of Croatia (the largest centre-left party). New 'populist' political forces have since emerged, exploiting general dissatisfaction with the established political parties. Their rise coincided with the 2008 economic crisis, which had a severe effect on the national economy and government spending. In 2017, the budget of the Ministry of Culture (0.65% of overall government spending) was lower than it was in 2008, although an upward trend has been noticeable since 2014, when it was at a record low of just 0.5% of government spending (Šugar-Glavaš, 2018). Post-crisis politics has also been characterised by the recurrent collapse of governments and snap parliamentary elections.

Croatian policy documents suggest that policy actors acknowledge deficiencies in the operationalisation of intercultural education in the formal education system. This is reflected in the prevailing view historically taken within the Croatian academic literature. For example, Puzić (2009) notes that intercultural education was not part of school programmes. Accordingly, Lukić (2010, according to Mrnjauš, Rončević & Ivošević, 2013) defines the Croatian approach as ethnocentric multiculturalism – in other words, a very narrow form of multiculturalism – which is consistent with Spajić-Vrkaš's (2002) conclusion that the Croatian educational system implements cultural pluralism in theory only. It has still mainly focused on the preservation of the national identity and is characterised by a monocultural perspective, with only a basic presentation of cultural diversity (Puzić, 2009).

Analyzing policy documents for the purpose of the CHIEF project, Hrستیć, Dergić and Vukušić (2018) note that cultural literacy is not recognised as a specific policy topic in Croatia. Nevertheless, most documents relevant to the topic are underpinned by two organising assumptions – the importance of preserving both national identity and a democratic, non-discriminatory society within which cultural diversity is respected. National identity is given a priority, as is also made apparent by an analysis of key documents; Hrستیć and Marinović Golubić (2018), studying key documents/platforms in the education process such as the National Curriculum Framework, the Civic Education Curriculum, and the National Curriculum for Vocational Education, state that the adoption of the national identity is recognised as the main educational goal from the fifth to the eighth grade of primary school, while the adoption of the European identity or some other international identity is the goal only in secondary education, after the national identity is assumed to have been formed.

Social distance is one of the most commonly addressed issues involving intercultural education in Croatia (Previšić, Hrvatić & Posavec, 2004; Sablić, 2004). Research findings have shown pronounced social distance of majority Croats towards the Serb minority, but also towards Bosniaks, Montenegrins, Slovenians, Roma, and Albanians to some degree (Blažević Simić, 2011). On the other hand, social acceptance has been attested towards Americans, Western European nations, and the neighbouring Italian and Hungarian nations. In discussing the findings, Blažević Simić (2011) suggests that the main reason for social distance towards some of the largest national minority groups and all nations from ex-Yugoslavia lies in the political and social context in general, but specifically in the events of the Croatian War of Independence after the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Stereotypes have been transmitted intergenerationally (Mrnjauš, 2013). However, levels of social acceptance are consistently much higher than levels of rejection/distance. Therefore, some authors conclude that participants do not display ethnocentrism towards national minorities despite high social distance results in some cases (Blažević Simić, 2011).

These studies have also revealed the relationship between the type of education and social distance. Gymnasium students consistently show a higher degree of tolerance and a lower level of social distance than vocational school students (Sablić, 2004). This is interpreted as a

result of gymnasium students' deeper knowledge of the differences between social groups and acquaintance with various aspects of different cultures. Classes on human rights, tolerance, and democracy are included in gymnasium curricula to a greater degree than those of vocational schools. Also, gymnasiums pay more attention to the development of critical thinking than vocational schools (Sablić, 2004).

## **4. Methodology**

### ***4.1. Context and information about fieldwork***

Interviews with secondary school students in Croatia, performed as a part of CHIEF project Work Package 2, were carried out in three locations at three different secondary schools. The towns included in the research were situated in urban area, semi-urban area and in rural area. A total of 69 interviews were carried out, 60 of which were conversations with students (20 each), while the remaining 9 also involved their teachers (3 each). The shortest conversation lasted 33 minutes, while the longest lasted 85 minutes.

The first school selected was in urban area, where we conducted interviews on two occasions, 18th and 19th of October 2019. Our decision to select this school was founded on its large number of students, as well as the fact that a large number of the activities of our non-academic partner on the CHIEF project.

The next secondary school where interviews with students and teachers were performed was in semi-urban region from October 23rd to October 24th 2019.

The last school where interviews were carried out was in rural region. Important factor in choosing this location was the existence of significant Serbian minority. Interviews, were held on 1st and 2nd of October 2019.

The researchers did not find themselves in any ethically questionable positions. All participants in research were guaranteed their anonymity. Some participants choose their pseudonym, and for others researchers selected random pseudonyms. Also, all participants consented to participate in the research (they signed a consent form), and in accordance with the law, they were informed of all the conditions under which their data collected during research would be used. Conversations were recorded using a dictaphone, and were transferred to a secure archive.

### ***4.2. Data analysis***

We used NVivo 12 software for the qualitative analysis of empirical materials collected. At the beginning, we selected three students' interviews (one per school) and two researchers coded them inductively. Although we did not construct any node in advance, it became obvious that most of the nodes will follow the main research questions and our thematic blocks from interview protocol. The five large thematic interview blocks were related to school experience, youth cultural participation, understanding of culture and cultural heritage, youth cultural identity, and history. An analysis of the empirical materials collected within each initial node resulted in the creation of sub-nodes in order to analyse the narratives of secondary school students with the greatest level of detail possible. Regarding interviewed teachers, we coded two interviews separately and then we developed a coding tree based on key questions and thematic blocks. Under the impression of much more extensive and detailed answers we decided to code teachers' interviews in a separate NVivo file.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. School experience

#### 5.1.1 The school experience in general

When asked to discuss their school experience, participants often began from various aspects of schooling. Some of them experienced schooling through the lens of teachers and the materials taught within a particular subject, while others referred to the entire educational curriculum and the way in which classes were taught. A third trend in narratives was also noted relating to the experience of oneself in school through the lens of growing up and changing the views of one's life and surroundings depending on the passage of time. It is impossible to establish whether the participants were generally satisfied or unsatisfied, however it is certainly important to emphasise some comments that repeated throughout the interviews. First, the majority of participants indicated a particular degree of dissatisfaction with school programmes, which they frequently rated as too “fact-based”, theoretically geared, and freed of any practical implementation of the material learned. Despite this, they greatly agree that programmes built in this way result in a wide base of learned material, for example Nives said:

*I think we learn a lot in Croatia through primary and secondary school, we have a very diverse education, we learn about everything. I think it's a fairly good education.* (Nives, female, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia).

However, they are also sceptical towards the use of knowledge learned in this way in further education and in everyday life, like Romana and Miško pointed out:

*I would change all kinds of things. I'm satisfied but I'm not. The system isn't interesting enough for me. I would like more field work, more teaching that would be useful in everyday life. Not just learning by rote.* (Romana, female, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)

*I've been learning something for many years that I'm actually not interested in. But you have to learn it and that's that.* (Miško, male, pupil, rural school, Croatia)

#### 5.1.2 The future of education

One of the topics examined within the interviews of secondary school students in Croatia relates to their view of the future of education and the educational system. Some participants were sceptical towards change and claim that everything will remain as it has been, reiterating the lack of practical teaching and the insistence on theoretical education. Some secondary school students had positive opinions about the process of digitalising education, which they hope will become standard in Croatia in the future. We can by no means leave out those who showed disinterest in discussing this topic, claiming they had either never thought about it or even expressing doubt in the possibility of their influence on the further development of the school system. Goran is a good representative of the first opinion:

*That's all the school's idea, we can't change anything. It's a place where we come to learn. Maybe if we changed our approach, if they made the material more interesting or more interactive, but I'm not sure how.* (Goran, male, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)

Nives is representative of oftenly expressed expectation of broader digitalization:

*Maybe we could try to change something, but I'm certain there won't be as many books, technology will develop more, they will give tablets to all students. It will be easier because everything will be in the same place.* (Nives, female, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)

Tea is expressing the view of very slow and insignificant change:

*Well, I have the feeling that, judging by the appearance of the classrooms, that the school hasn't changed for a long time, or that it practically hasn't changed since it's existed and since my parents, grandmother and grandfather went there. The only thing we have, for example, even though they're not everywhere, is those whiteboards, not the green ones, and we don't write on the board as much, but I think the chairs, desks, everything is the same as 50 years ago, maybe even more, so I don't know if that will change in 10 years, if there will be some major improvements as far as that's concerned.* (Tea, female, pupil, urban school, Croatia)

Teachers make great use of new technologies during the class, from various internet content, video materials, animations, graphic representations, chats, various applications created for teaching, YouTube, etc. Although students are very interested in new ways of presenting teaching content, some teachers emphasize the importance of maintaining a balance with "traditional" methods. Teachers expressed critical attitude towards technology, warning that being digital does not a priori mean that it is the best possible choice at all times.

*"I still believe in the power of conversation and debate, and it does not mean that new modern technology did not open up great opportunities for children, but it's actually within conversation and discussion where most things crystallize and therefore it is still the most important part of teaching."* (Emilija, female, teacher, semi-urban school, Croatia)

### **5.1.3 Subjects**

Discussing subjects, participants referred to teachers who teach them a particular subject, and on the basis of this experience, they construct their opinions about the subjects and material they are learning. Teachers are occasionally emphasised as factors that can make a subject more interesting; conversely, the way in which the subject is taught can also create an aversion towards something students are otherwise privately interested in and suppress their desire to develop in this direction. On the other hand, it is fairly clear that student's experience of a particular subject is conditioned by what they are interested in and what they are good at, and they thus indicate how they intend their education to proceed. Romana shows how teacher could turn her dislike of chemistry: *'Chemistry is my worst subject, but it's interesting because of the teacher'*. (Romana, female, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia). Monika is almost typical example of statement regarding self-understanding: *'And my least favourite... I don't know, the natural sciences, math or chemistry perhaps, because I'm more a social type than mathematical'*. (Monika, female, pupil, urban school, Croatia). Mars is similar, emphasising his interest in society: *'The most interesting of all the subjects I've learned so far... Psychology, ethics, philosophy. They deal with social structures'*. (Mars, male, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)

### **5.1.4 Textbooks and reading materials**

Although the interview protocol was initially intended to examine the opinions of secondary school students about the textbooks they use in the classroom, conversation with them made it

apparent that this thematic unit should be expanded to include the reading materials they read. Students grouped textbooks into three categories – those they like, those they do not like, and those which some students claimed to use exceptionally rarely in certain subjects. Again, similar to impressions of teaching and school programmes, they refer to a high degree of “fact-based learning” in textbooks, considering only a small number of textbooks to have been written in a way that interests them and frequently emphasising the lack of interactive learning that might inspire differently designed textbooks. As a specific part of the school programme within the subject of Croatian language, reading materials are in fact intended to inspire students to read different types of literature in their private lives; however, students assessed them as exceptionally poorly structured and outdated. Students primarily expressed dissatisfaction with how “up to date” the material they read was, and while they expressed “respect” towards literary classics, they were of the opinion that the reading list could be “updated”, as they said, to keep up with the times. Some participants noted reading materials as one factor that makes students averse to reading in general, while others commented on the inability to expand the fund of books depending on individual preferences. Teachers are mostly satisfied with textbooks and reading materials.

*I'm not too satisfied, there's too much information that isn't necessary for our further education, there shouldn't be some kind of minimum. Gymnasiums need more breadth of course, but there has to be something that happens in everyday life, something we'll need later on. (Dora, female, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)*

*There are a few interesting books, but the majority aren't good enough to inspire us to think and make us want to learn. (Dalibor, male, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)*

Nives expressed the importance of teacher's role when it comes to textbooks:

*The content and how current it is, the reading materials are boring to us and we don't understand the language they're written in, it's not clear to us so we need our professor to explain it to us. (Nives, female, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)*

## **5.2. Understanding of culture and cultural heritage**

### **5.2.1 The personal experience of culture and cultural heritage**

In examining perceptions of culture and cultural heritage amongst our participants, it was important to establish how they experience culture personally. We focused on their definition of the concept of culture, as well as on the broader perception of phenomena, activities, and other aspects they believe culture consists of. A few different concepts relating to the concept of culture should be singled out. Some participants perceived culture as a group of different norms relating to rules of behaviour in society, as well as to behavioural patterns acquired during one's upbringing. Other participants equated culture to art, also thus referring to tradition and the sum total of inherited cultural “artifacts”. The final distinction noted in the personal experience of culture amongst our participants related to their perception of different levels of culture, ranging from regional cultural specificities to national culture, and even to accentuating the importance of a holistic perception of culture through the lens of human civilisation. It is important to note that almost nobody mentioned ethnicity or religion when we asked about first ideas regarding the notion of culture. So, Damjan simply defined it: ‘Culture is what we humans have created separate from our nature’. (Damjan, male, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia). Apart from those statements linking culture with arts or even with ‘washing hands before eating’, Arsen is trying to make the picture more complete: ‘Culture. A combination of many things. History, homeland, folk dress earlier in history,



*language, dialects, stories, written works, food definitely, dance, and so on, something like that*. (Arsen, male, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia). One of the rare examples where the word ‘nation’ comes in is Jelica, who simply stated *‘Well... It’s something national, something every nation has’<sup>1</sup>*. (Jelica, female, pupil, rural school, Croatia)

When asked how they interpret the concept of cultural heritage, a large number of participants tied the term ‘heritage’ to their previously expressed opinions related to their personal experience of culture. In doing so, they show a high degree of identification with local cultural specificities and accentuate heritage typical of the region they live in. When analysing the relationship between heritage and regional belonging, it is important to emphasise that this approach to heritage was often accentuated by students from smaller towns, while students from big city referred more often to the totality of heritage in Croatia.

*Cultural heritage, it reminds me of some general group of works of art, traditions... Not content, traditions, art, generally anything specific to a particular area... Yeah, an area, territory, state, or any kind of region... It all somehow makes up people’s lives, it’s very specific to a particular group.* (Romana, female, pupil, urban school, Croatia)  
*In this region, traditional meals are important that are eaten for Easter, Christmas, birthdays.* (Matija, male, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)

### **5.2.2 Culture in school and in the family**

We spoke with participants about school as a place where they learn about culture, and we also asked them in what way culture is present within their families. Regarding culture in school, a large number of participants believe topics related to culture and heritage are lacking in school programmes, with the exception of a few subjects where they appear on the margins of the curriculum. However, they do state that some cultural activities take place at school; they often do not analyse this content thoroughly, instead “factually” listing what they see as cultural events held on school grounds. When asked to say something about culture in their own families, the majority mentioned specific traditions they practice with their families, most often referring to the celebration of traditional holidays such as Christmas and Easter. Some participants claim that they spend time together during the holidays, even despite the fact that their families are neither overly traditional nor religiously oriented. Another important aspect within the block of questions related to culture and family are cultural activities within the family itself. Students’ answers to this question display a wide range of content, from family trips to traditional cultural events (especially in the two small towns) and trips to the theatre, museums, and classical concerts. Asked about learning on culture and cultural heritage in school, Igor responded: *‘Not really, I mean, we learn history as part of our schooling, outside of that maybe in civics, but in other subjects definitely not.’* (Igor, male, pupil, urban school, Croatia). Ida would like to see a separate school subject on this issues: *‘It would be great if it were a bit broader, if it was an entire subject even, then we’d learn a little about everything.’* (Ida, female, pupil, rural school, Croatia). Dalibor (like many others) was focused on regional gastronomic festivals. It is important to note that sometimes the school is organising visits to such events and sometimes pupils are going there with their parents.

*Picokijada [a traditional event in the town of Đurđevac] for example, some seasonal things, Bučijada [a traditional, presentation of the use of pumpkins] or something like that. Then there’s a fairly strong feeling of civility amongst everyone, everyone wants to bring the best they’ve raised, pumpkins for example, and to excel in that. I think*

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<sup>1</sup> In Croatian language the notion of national in fact means ethnic

*that's where you feel culture and tradition the most.* (Dalibor, male, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)

For Matija, family is the central point in learning about culture and heritage: *'Family, because they made us read a lot, I used to get some books and I read them when I was a kid... We travel quite a lot.'* (Matija, male, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)

All teachers interviewed, regardless of the subject they teach, agreed that cultural education in school is exceptionally important, and that it is never too early to introduce this type of content

*"Personally, as a foreign language teacher, culture and civilisation are what I most enjoy working on with students...and I actually want to open the kids' eyes to see what the similarities are, and what the differences are, and first and foremost to learn to accept differences."* (Senka, female, teacher, urban school, Croatia)

### **5.2.3 Croatia, the Balkans, Europe**

When discussing European culture, our participants offered various replies, including the experience of European culture as a universal determinant for a cultural sphere on the level of the continent that divides Europe from other parts of the world, the perception of European culture as interwoven from various national cultures, and the inability to estimate what the fund of European culture and heritage might be.

*To be honest, I haven't heard the term 'European culture', but I can assume it's a culture specific to Europe, or rather to countries in the European Union. So it doesn't include some eastern cultures, but rather what those countries in Europe share.* (Tea, female, pupil, urban school, Croatia)

Participants often perceived this question as unintelligible, as a large number of them had never thought of Europe as a place with a shared culture, even though they did begin to speak of the existence of some aspects shared by the majority of people who live in Europe, while distancing themselves from the holistic perception and refraining from erasing borders between national culture and European culture. It is important to note that some participants experience Europe and European culture not as cultural production, heritage, tradition, or anything similar which they relate to national culture, but as a system of norms and behaviour and a particular value framework. In addition to national and European identity and culture, it was noted that some young people also mention the Balkan identity and Balkan culture as an important determinant and place of comparison between different identities and aspects of culture.

Initially, we only mentioned the term 'Balkan culture', which some participants portrayed as being opposed to the concept of 'European culture'; however, some individuals perceive the Balkans as a cultural sphere they belong to. Participants from the big city were the only ones mentioning Balkan culture, trying to emphasise the differences, like Igor *'Balkan culture is a bit different from European culture, they're a little different, they're not so stuck up, I don't know...'* (Igor, male, pupil, urban school, Croatia). Sonja thinks Balkan is not regulated and civilised like the West:

*I mean, that's the question, but I don't know, I think we want to present ourselves as being more a part of European culture than Balkan culture, but when we look at things like how people treat each other, for example, it's totally normal here for kids*

*under 16 to get destroyed by alcohol, but somewhere else in Europe that's not really considered normal.* (Sonja, female, pupil, urban school, Croatia)

### **5.3. Cultural identity of youth**

#### **5.3.1 One's own culture**

Participants frequently approached the concept of their own culture in different ways, i.e. they perceive it differently. Students from schools in rural area or small town are somewhat more inclined to view their own culture as a part of a broader regional culture they share with the community in which they live. They discuss the traditions and heritage of their region in this light, including the characteristics of the people, cultural events, the various activities of cultural and arts organisations, the clothes worn in villages, and the food typical of the culture of their region. As is the case with students in big city, pupils from rural and semi-urban schools very rarely mentioned aspects of national culture they identify with when speaking of their own culture without being prompted; except for a few cases, they did not mention their religious affiliation without being prompted either. Sometimes pupils embraced stereotypes regarding the region they belong: *'My culture, well, I look at myself and people from [this region] like other people describe us, mostly hard-working, we don't complain much, mostly you work, work, work.'* (Trn, male, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia.) Ida and Slađana representing wide spread understanding of culture and heritage as regional based: *'Potatoes from this region [laughter], cabbage, baked potatoes, traditional folklore.'* (Ida, female, pupil, rural school, Croatia).

*Now that autumn is coming, we have the plum harvest, we make brandy, jam, and so on. Maybe that's quite different from other countries. I don't know, the pig slaughter and so on.* (Slađana, female, pupil, rural school, Croatia)

On the other hand, participants from the gymnasium in the big city somewhat more frequently perceived their own culture as a culture of everyday life, which includes personal daily rituals and habits, free time activities, and preferences for cultural content and activities. They discuss their love of drinking coffee, whether they first shower or brush their teeth when waking up in the morning, or whether they prefer the theatre or the cinema. Particular students, even when they mention the concept of 'Croatian culture', mention it to emphasise their anti-nationalist orientation and to accentuate the importance of their own individual choices as opposed to collective cultural norms. Many who spoke about 'Croatian culture' also consider it important to say that the culture is not 'pure', but rather contains numerous elements of other cultures in some of its aspects, and they have a positive relationship towards this fact.

#### **5.3.2 The European identity**

When asked if they feel like Europeans, nearly all participants answered affirmatively, although they often base their identification with Europeanism exclusively on the fact they were born on the European continent, or that Croatia has acceded to the European Union<sup>2</sup>. Some participants recognise particular advantages of EU membership, and are thus informed about the usefulness of EU funds, however they believe that Croatia's belonging to the European Union has no effect on their lives whatsoever. On the other hand, some see in EU membership the possibility of a better education, networking, and the chance for a better life,

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<sup>2</sup> Many pupils equalize the term Europe with EU

and it is in this openness and the possibility of taking advantage of it that they see their European identity. In discussing Europeanism, a few students emphasised the superiority of old, powerful European nations such as Germany, Great Britain, and France, suggesting that the European identity is something that belongs to them, and not the Croats, whose influence and culture is minor in relation to those countries. Particular participants explained their Europeanism through shared cultural values, i.e. Christianity as the basis of European culture, while one participant noted that the fact he is not Christian does not make him any less European. One student from rural area sees the shared European identity as a kind of pledge for a better future, in which cooperation and community shift the power of ethnic identity into the background.

*Yes, I definitely consider myself European. All of my family, my grandmother, grandfather, they're all from Croatia, it's not like anyone came from Kazakhstan. I mentioned that Christianity is something that connects all of Europe. I'm not Christian, for example, but that definitely shouldn't matter to whether or not you consider yourself European. (Arsen, male, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)*

The only example of celebrating supra-national identity because of the destructive and dividing forces of ethnic identity is expressed by Miško:

*I: But do you think that potential European identity or the further networking of Europe can influence national identity in some way?*

*R: It might be able to, but only if we forget about the 'I'm a Croat, I'm a Serb, I'm this or that' as soon as possible. It would be easier to move forward.*

*I: Do you see that as something positive?*

*R: Yes, it will be easier to make progress if you say yes, we're all Europeans, let's cooperate and progress together, instead of I'm this, I'm that, I'll work for myself, you work for yourself. (Miško, male, pupil, rural school, Croatia)*

### **5.3.3 Diversity within years and among peers**

As regards participants' perceptions of differences between their classmates and peers, the data shows that there are particular differences in perception, especially considering where particular participants come from – these perceptions focus on different distinguishing criteria according to the different socio-spatial contexts within which the research was carried out. Members of the Roma national minority live in the county, where selected town is located, and so students from this area often mentioned Roma students when asked about differences among students in their year. However, regardless of their being perceived as different, nearly all participants who mentioned this expressed mostly positive or neutral opinions, and did not show any signs of intolerance. The same relationship was expressed towards religious and other ethnic minorities, indicating harmonious relationships regardless of differences.

*I think it's a good thing that we have students from the Roma minority. I know them and some of them went to school with me, they're really great and it's great that they're here and that they're welcome. I'm from a village with a fairly large Roma settlement I've been there many times, it isn't easy for them coming from that ghetto, they live their own way of life and no one knows what it's like, but it's hard to come from that way of life into ours. There's a lot of resistance from their parents, brothers, sisters, friends. There's a few of them, around 10, but I'm glad they're there. (Vladimir, male, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)*

The town where the rural school is located and the surrounding area is also characterised by a heterogeneous populace including various religious and national minorities, however the majority of participants described an exceptionally high degree of community among students and peers. They claimed that particular provocations based on ethnicity do occasionally occur between Serbs and Croats, however such incidents were described as rare and the majority condemned them.

*For example, I know there have been a few situations here at school, for example they claim some kids are Serbs, they don't want to hang out with them because they're Croats. But fine, OK. There have been a few who act like big Croat patriots, use fascist slogans, and so on. They got on our nerves so we calmed them down in the end. (Miško, male, pupil, rural school, Croatia)*

*My best friend is Orthodox, but it was never important, I don't look at her like that nor does she at me, nor has she ever provoked me, nor did I provoke her, I mean, I don't see the point of that. (Sanela, female, pupil, rural school, Croatia)*

Aside from the aforementioned perceptions of differences, students from both small towns also mention differences in style, musical taste, behaviour, etc., however significantly less than do their peers from big city. Students from the city discussed this type of stratification in their year – related to interests, lifestyle, music, choice of cultural content, and world view – far more often; these differentiations have far greater weight to them, although these are far from subcultural divisions in the “classical” sense.

*There are students from more liberal surroundings and students who are a bit more conservative, and then that argument happened fairly often. For example, topics like abortion or homosexuals, and then people have really strong opinions, even if they don't know exactly what they're talking about, but they got some kind of opinion from their culture that isn't their own true opinion, but it emerged from their (parent) culture. (Sonja, female, pupil, urban school, Croatia)*

Considering that the classes in the big city gymnasium are mainly ethnically homogeneous, what teachers note there is also the creation of a particular distance regarding world view issues.

*“They believe that, if they hold to some kind of cultural origin, that means they are this way or that way, so if they do this then they consider themselves, or others consider them die-hard traditionalists, or if they don't then they're open-minded, liberal, hyper-liberal, and so on. But I can feel a problem in ethics classes<sup>3</sup>, where kids who enroll in ethics in Year I are viewed by those who don't enroll in ethics as some kind of turbo left-wingers, Marxists, and so on, while those who take ethics view those who take religious studies as hard-core traditionalists who spend all day in church, praying the rosary, and so on.” (Teuta, female, teacher, urban school, Croatia).*

#### **5.4. Youth participation in culture**

Our participants spend their free time doing various activities, such as going out with friends, listening to music, watching films and series, reading, playing video games, taking part in sporting activities, etc. Nearly all participants claimed to partake in some kind of music

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<sup>3</sup> In Croatian secondary schools pupils should choose between two subjects; either ethics or religious education.

listening, whether in clubs, at concerts, or at home. They listen to various musical genres including rock, metal, electronic music, rap, hip hop, pop, and jazz, depending on their tastes. However, the majority of participants, regardless of location, claimed that the most popular musical genre among youth is currently *cajke* – modern folk music. Some spoke of *cajke* in a negative context as music they would never listen to, however the majority of students go to clubs where this kind of music is played at least occasionally. Even those who claim not to like *cajke* music and say they would never listen to it at home visit such places with their friends in order to fit in to society at large. The data generally suggest that the majority of participants have a very flexible, fluid musical taste, and the first thing they say when asked what they listen to is that they can mostly listen to anything. A negligible number showed an attachment to exclusively one musical genre or describes music in the context of a strong determinant in their identity. When describing their musical tastes, a few pupils from the big city used the term ‘alternative music’, which is intended to include genres such as jazz, blues, alternative rock, experimental, hip hop, trap, and indie music; the students from rural area did not mention any of these musical genres a single time.

*Techno, electronic music, that's what we like to listen to. Fine, we can listen to cajke, we don't have anything against that, but most of the time we listen to electronic music.*  
(Ranka, female, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)

*We're all very different, there are those who listen to folk and some who listen to metal, to Croatian pop and to mix of everything. It's not like people hang out more with people who listen to the same music.* (Vinka, female, pupil, urban school, Croatia)

It is interesting that one teacher in rural school perceived *cajke* as an integrative factor among pupils.

*“What brings them all together is cajke. You can feel that it brings them together in a way. What might draw them apart, I would say, is more the political situation in Croatia, the division into left and right, more than whether you're a Croat or a Serb.”*  
(Pavao, male, teacher, rural school, Croatia)

The majority of participants watch films occasionally, mostly thrillers and science fiction. Pupils from big city go to the cinema somewhat more often, as the selection of films screened in semi-urban and rural area is considerably poorer, and there are no modern cinemas there. Television is not especially prevalent as a free time activity; students watch films on the internet and Netflix. The majority of participants use the internet as their main source of information. Regardless of location, nearly all participants use some kind of social network such as Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, Snapchat, etc. A few students read books in their free time; there are somewhat more of these among students from big city. Volunteering is not a particularly popular free time activity; a few students from semi-urban and urban schools had some experience volunteering, while one participant from rural school expressed the desire to, although she knew of no such possibilities in her town. The selection of sporting activities in here is also limited. Male participants most often play football and basketball, while girls rarely take part in sport, for which they mostly blame a lack of conditions. Male and female pupils from big city take part in sports in equal measure; as the selection is significantly larger, they mention sports such as tennis, judo, horseback riding, boxing, cycling, volleyball, etc. Football is less popular than in the other two locations.

*Very few of my peers watch television, they don't read newspapers or news portals. Just the other day, our English teacher asked us if we read those portals, and they said 'only if something pops up', like some kind of striking news story, otherwise they*

*spend their free time on their phones, on Instagram, Facebook. (Irena, female, pupil, rural school, Croatia)*

*As far as sports activities goes, there's none of that, mostly football, and even that depends. They mostly have sessions for boys and they unlock the hall for them, there aren't any other activities. I mean, some of us would train if they opened something here, a gym or just a hall that would be open to everyone, but within the school, it's not really accessible when the school isn't open. (Sanela, female, pupil, rural school, Croatia)*

Few participants take part in cultural activities such as going to the theatre, classical concerts, museums, or exhibitions outside of their school obligations, although some – most often gymnasium students from Zagreb – go to galleries or the theatre, sometimes on their own initiative and sometimes with their parents or friends. The students from small towns visit cultural events promoting the traditional, local culture of their region a few times a year.

*Wild Garlic Day, that's in May. A few culture and arts associations come as well, they play something, then they make meals with wild garlic, it's some kind of party (Ojdana, female, pupil, rural school, Croatia)*

*We have to go to a few concerts a semester for music class, and we went, it was great, we went to a Christmas concert, and we go to exhibitions for fine arts. There are interesting things and we learn a lot about culture in art and music classes, in those cultural subjects. (Damjan, male, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)*

## **5.5. History**

### **5.5.1 History teaching**

Participants find history classes interesting to a greater or lesser degree depending on their personal affinities towards this type of content or towards the period they are learning about, as well as depending on whether or not they like the teacher and the way the subject is being taught. Of those who expressed an opinion as to what they find most interesting in the history curriculum, the majority prefer learning about World War II. When students have complaints about history classes, the majority are related to the excessive amount of information they perceive as useless and easy to forget, such as bare facts or the years in which particular historical events took place. Complaints also relate to a weak focus on the cause-and-effect interpretation of events, which participants state is necessary to an understanding of some content; some participants also emphasise bias, or the one-sidedness of particular content that lacks another perspective. Students who praise their teachers generally emphasise interactiveness in teaching and dynamic lecturing as what keeps them interested; they also advocate more learning through direct experience, e.g. field trips.

*Maybe they should give us other sources. As they say, "the winners write the history books." They should include texts from the winners' side and the losers' side into the textbook, so we can compare. (Dalibor, male, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)*

### **5.5.2 Historical figures**

Only a few students discussed figures who had any special meaning to them or their family, or towards whom they had any deep emotional relationship. The majority of participants list historical figures they have learned about in school and who are important to their national or local culture in some way, including Ljudevit Gaj, Fran Krsto Frankopan, Petar Zrinski, Matija Gubec, Josip Jelačić, etc. Only one participant described Dr. Franjo Tuđman, Croatia's

first president, as a person her family celebrates as a hero; the others who mentioned him mostly spoke of him in principle only, as an important figure in modern Croatian history. One student noted that, while Franjo Tuđman is exceptionally important to his father in a positive context, he has a different opinion. Ante Pavelić [head of the Independent State of Croatia, a Nazi puppet state] was mentioned once, in a negative context. Hitler was the most frequently mentioned figure in world history, and Mussolini and Stalin were also mentioned a few times; all three were mentioned in a negative context. A few gymnasium students from Zagreb mentioned figures important in the context of human rights, such as Abraham Lincoln or Rosa Parks. Generally, the analysis of statements points to a lack of strong emotions towards historical figures. Only one participant spoke with great enthusiasm about writer Oscar Wilde, whom she sees as an inspiration in her life. The most frequently mentioned figure was inventor Nikola Tesla.

*Adolf Hitler, Stalin, those are dictators who had a bad influence. More importance should be put on scientists and inventors. Because we only focus on negative things, we just skim over inventors, but I think that the invention of the airplane is very important for example. We should look at that. Nikola Tesla is important in Croatian history, maybe King Tomislav, Ivan Mažuranić.* (Valeri, female, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)

### 5.5.3 Historical events

Discussing historical events they consider important or about which they enjoy learning, participants frequently mentioned the Croatian War of Independence and the First and Second World War. Some participants noted that recent history (20th century) is of little interest to them, instead placing emphasis on concepts such as ancient times or the Middle Ages. One participant also answered that the French Revolution most greatly changed the course of history and human development, especially in the context of the cultural development of civilisation. It is important to note that some of these answers were conditioned by regional affiliation and the history of that particular region. However, the great majority mention the Croatian War of Independence, not only as an important historical event, but also tying it to a role in creating the reality in which they live. Responses involving the Croatian War of Independence often include the terms ‘Croatian independence’ or ‘collapse of Yugoslavia’. Some participants tie important historical events to the creation and collapse of the multi-ethnic communities Croatia has found itself throughout history (the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Kingdom of Yugoslavia, socialist Yugoslavia). It is impossible not to note that a large number of participants found this interview question “problematic”, as they could not decide on a specific historical event; some also tied this question to the question on the influence of history on everyday life and the context of life in modern Croatian society.

*Croatia’s independence was a very significant event in Croatian history, and while we were in a union with Hungary, that was an important period because Croatia developed a lot then.* (Suzi, female, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)

*The Croatian War of Independence certainly inspired and produced even more of that national identity, which is a large part of culture.* (Denis, male, pupil, urban school, Croatia)

*I think that World War I and II were important for every culture in general, including my own, simply because it’s generally known, and even though I haven’t learned about it yet and I don’t really know everything in detail but I think that’s really important, because after that the world changed, there was regime change in the*



*world, and that's the world in which I live today, so that's pretty important to my culture.* (Iskra, female, pupil, urban school, Croatia)

It is important to note that many participants couldn't answer simple questions about the World War II, some of them even couldn't differentiate between main sides in conflict.

#### **5.5.4 History from other sources**

When speaking with participants, it was important to establish which other sources they use to learn about history, and whether or not they use other sources of information or exclusively the "institutionalised" knowledge they receive through history class in their secondary school. There is a wide range of potential sources through which youth find information about various elements of history, including the media and films of various kinds (documentary and feature films). However, their families and their specific family history also play an equally important role in their perception of history. Some participants noted that they were not particularly interested in finding information on their own and researching history, while others mentioned the media as an important source of information, especially the internet, but also historical films and documentaries. However, we feel it is most important to note participants' exceptionally frequent reference to perceptions of history through conversation with their parents about various historical topics, or even through the direct experience of their parents. The peer group rarely presents a framework within which history and historical topics are discussed. A number of participants emphasised the discrepancy between history teaching in school and the information they get from other sources.

*Well... If something interests me, some part of history, I'll always google it to find out what I was interested in.* (Vuk, male, pupil, rural school, Croatia)

*This is OK, I mean, we have films we can watch, or for example, I asked my Dad what it was like during the War of Independence. He was a soldier then and he told me everything, I was really interested.* (Ranka, female, pupil, semi-urban school, Croatia)

*I think it's certainly a good source for people who are bored of listening to their history teacher in class, instead they can watch fun clips on YouTube, but I don't know, I always found it suspicious, for example, is it smart to follow stuff like that on the internet, like, for example, some media outlet or something reports on something because, for example, they can always be biased towards one side and they don't necessarily have to give an objective picture, so it was always easier for me to follow what's going on out of my textbook.* (Sonja, female, pupil, urban school, Croatia)

## **6. Discussion**

Considering the War of Independence as the moment in which the modern state of Croatia was created, the dominance of right-wing political options in Croatian society, the great significance of ethnic identity to youth (Baranović, 2002), and the discussion of social distance mentioned earlier in the text, we expected to find social distance and particular stereotypes and prejudices among youth. However, in all three settings, emphasis on the ethnic and religious dimension of identity and a strong social distance towards minority groups was, surprisingly, lacking. This finding in big city can be explained through a few elements, such as ethnic homogeneity and the fact that youth have no contact with 'others'. However, it is also important to note that the youth from these schools are usually children of university-educated parents, members of the middle class; it is also possible that teachers, who are not rigidly nationalist or xenophobic themselves, influenced the selection of participants. However, even if the findings from big city were to be expected, the findings from small towns, where significant ethnic minorities live, represent an even greater surprise. There are numerous discourses regarding the Roma minority in the semi-urban region, even

including demonstrations against the Roma by the local population. Our participants, when asked about that, frequently referred to the Roma as ethnically and culturally different, as they encountered them in elementary school. None of our participants was a member of the Roma minority, as Roma rarely attend gymnasium (this indicates their subordinated position in society). Some of the students mentioned their contact with members of the Roma minority, while the majority spoke of them as a closed community with which they have no contact. Only a small number of students expressed a negative opinion towards Roma, mentioning theft and violence. Contrary to that, another small number of participants from semi-urban school (including their teachers) expressed very positive, inclusive and emphatic view towards Roma minority. Moreover, they showed an awareness of a double-stigma against Roma who move from their community to a Croatian village, buy a house and live there, and will never be accepted on equal terms with their neighbours regardless of positive examples of integration, and who are also considered traitors by their own people for having left the community and living outside the Roma settlement.

In the rural region, which has a significant Serb minority, we didn't find any ethnic or religious component in concepts of culture or identity, nor did we find any significant social distance despite data from the literature claiming that youth in Croatia have a strong social distance towards Serbs. As opposed to some other places in Croatia, where the Serb minority has been ghettoised to a certain extent, we found no such examples among youth in this town. Some students referred to incidents they had heard about, while some pupils are aware that members of the Serb minority might feel uncomfortable during events that emphasise the Croatian national and religious identity (especially during celebrations marking events from the War of Independence). However, pupils' answers were dominated by a kind of generational school integration, without delineations or perceptions of cultural difference. Considering that the economic health of the region is founded on tourism, our impression is that the ability to make a living and work in contact with people from around the world has contributed to a reduction in social distance.

The final block of questions was intended to relate to specific phenomena defined by the research team in each country participating in the project. In the case of Croatia, history was chosen as the final interview topic. Conversation regarding history was founded on a few different aspects, from history teaching to individual student opinions of historical events and figures resulting from information from other sources. Croatian history is full of turbulent events and complex relationships with neighbouring states, and history as a subject is often present in the media space, turning it into a kind of everyday political topic through which various ideological standpoints related to current events are expressed. The results of research from 2013 showed very low interest in history among Croatian youth (Franc et al., 2013). Examining this information within the context of our participants, it becomes apparent that they display a great degree of disinterest in discussing history and historical topics. However, when asked to mention historical figures and events, the vast majority do provide an answer. It is interesting to note that the majority of youth mention historical figures that are universally accepted in public discourse (for example Nikola Tesla), while these same figures are often tied in various ways to the region in which the youth live, especially as regards the small towns. When discussing important events from Croatian history, a large number of participants mention the 1991 Croatian War of Independence, not referring to the broader context of these events but rather just to factual data or facts that sources of information note as exceptionally important to the modern Croatian context. Additionally, those few participants who did refer more broadly to events or historical figures often emphasised conversation with members of their family as their basic source of knowledge and opinions on history. Some previous research aids in interpreting this data: Mustapić (2015) notes that the lack of interest in history among youth is often tied with a very low level of knowledge of

history; while discussing the interactionist model of creating a personal past narrative, Vuković Juroš (2010) considers it important to note the presence of a pluralism of past narratives to which the individual is exposed, such as the family narrative, class narrative, or religious narrative. Within the context of the current research, it is apparent that participants who mentioned historical events or figures often display the narratives to which they have been exposed, especially family narratives and media narratives, as well as identity aspects with a focus on regional belonging expressed among students from small towns. World War II is still the subject of academic and media interpretation in Croatian society, with one side emphasising fascist concentration camps and mass murder and the other focusing on communist crimes and murder of civilians immediately after the war. For young secondary school students, with some exceptions, World War II represents a distant, very hazy past event; some students are unaware of even elementary facts about who fought whom.

As concerns the primacy of national and regional identity over some supranational identities, our findings correspond with those of other research. It is important to note that the concept of the Balkans was mentioned in neither of the small towns, but rather only in Zagreb. The Balkans has never been simply a geographical determinant in Croatia – this concept has manifold symbolic meaning. Some consider it to relate to the other, to Croatia's eastern neighbours, indicating something wild, uncivilised, and unacceptable. The Balkans are considered the opposite of civilised Europe, and Croats are divided on this subject; supporting the negative connotation of the term, one group wishes to see itself as completely different and separate from this concept, while the other group considers themselves at least partially steeped in Balkan culture.

Similarly, the findings of Ross, Puzić and Doolan (2017) suggest that the majority of young people identify primarily in terms of national and sub-national (regional, within Croatia) identities. They do not see themselves as full Europeans, but rather define their identity as 'almost European'. On the other hand, they consider themselves more inclined towards the 'Balkan' identity. Ross, Puzić & Doolan (2017) conclude that both the European and Balkan identities coexist, despite their mutual perceived opposition. Furthermore, as regards cultural literacy, it is particularly interesting to note that the participants in this research recognise Europe primarily as a political construct rather than a cultural one, unlike the Balkans, which seems to be more often understood in cultural terms.

In our research, participants also frequently tied the feeling of 'being European' with the political project of the Union rather than with culture. In this light, it is interesting to view data on which music youth most often listen to and the way they spend their free time – whether in urban, semi-urban, or rural surroundings, *cajke* music dominates, a style from Serbia that was once referred to as 'modern folk music', and which was referred to in the 1990s as 'turbo-folk' due to its heavy beats and the use of rhythm machines and synthesisers<sup>4</sup>. Discourse against this music has appeared multiple times since the 1990s in Croatia through the media and public forums, statements of associations, and other public actors; media expressions of this discourse often represent textbook examples of moral panic. The discourse against 'turbo-folk' can be divided into two dominant narratives. One is an urban, rock-oriented, elitist discourse that is disgusted by the music and lyrics, while the other is purely nationalistic and is based on the fact the music comes from Serbia. However, the moral panic that has appeared to a greater or lesser extent throughout the past two decades has not

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<sup>4</sup> Gotthardi-Pavlovsky (2014), in his ethnological approach to this phenomenon, showed how scientific research works against stereotypes and prejudice. Through the research, author changed some of his own prejudice towards the phenomenon of 'turbo-folk'.

succeeded in suppressing the great popularity of this music among youth in Croatia. For some of our participants, the strong presence of this music proves Croatia is part of the Balkans, not Central Europe.

## **8. Conclusion**

Having analysed the empirical material collected through interviews with secondary school students and their teachers, we shall offer a few conclusions related to the research questions. Upon studying the school experience of Croatian secondary school students, we have concluded that the individual level of school experience is frequently subject to the participant's own personal interpretation; it is impossible to exclude self-reflective references to the life experience individual receive in their formative years, which certainly include secondary school. However – especially in the Croatian context – it is important to note that the majority of participants are dissatisfied with the current education system; the most frequent criticism is directed at the excessive theoretical nature of teaching and the resulting lack of practical aspects in teaching content. The teachers we spoke to also noted the excessive focus of the curriculum on mere facts, and each attempts to make their lectures more interesting in their own way. More importantly, due to the use of the mandated textbooks, teachers also occasionally attempt to make their classes more socially current. As mentioned in the introduction, curricular reform is a burning issue in Croatia, and the data provided by these interviews prove that those most greatly affected by this reform – students – are highly sceptical towards what the future holds for the education system. Students are mostly prone to the opinion that the future will not bring any significant changes, although a minority sees the digitisation of the education process as a potentially positive, feasible change.

As far as the personal experience of culture and cultural heritage is concerned, participants mostly tied culture to behavioural norms and norms imprinted through upbringing, while a minority tied it to concepts such as the national or supra-national (European culture). An analysis of the empirical data affirmed the existence of the concept of Balkan culture in student narratives, which is interesting because it shows an exceptionally strong connection of culture with norms and values, as the majority of pupils see Balkan culture as something negative, but inseparable from Croatia. It is important to note that the majority of participants from small towns tied culture to the region they live in, speaking of the local culture which has dominant significance to them in the cultural, artistic, and traditional sense.

When answering questions about identity and the identity aspects of their lives, a large number of participants referred to regional belonging, especially those from small towns, while national identity remained secondary. A small number of participants noted the importance of identifying as a member of a particular ethnic or religious group, which is surprising considering the social climate and some past research on this topic. Our discussion has offered some possible interpretation of this phenomenon; the conclusion will reiterate some of the most important ones. By distancing themselves from the importance of these identity determinants, participants oppose the referent framework of their parents, not in the sense of youthful rebellion but in the context of a different view of the modern social context and a different order within the value framework in which they live. It is important to note that this conclusion cannot and must not be taken as a generalisation of all youth in Croatia, however it does stand in the context of our research in the selected locations. Differences among peers was experienced differently depending on the size of the town the school is located in; Zagreb thus represents a place of exceptional ethnic and confessional homogeneity, where the majority of participants do not even perceive differences. In the rural school, which has significant Serb national minority, differences between students is

perceived as secondary; the majority emphasised the economic aspects of life as primary aspects that transcend ethnic divisions.

As concerns the cultural participation of youth, it can be concluded that the participants are exceptionally inert in their consumption of cultural and artistic content, which they define as 'high culture' (theatre, museums, classical concerts, etc). On the other hand, when asked about cultural activities in the context of free time and various things they do outside of school, the majority emphasised a lack of focus on a particular genre of music or film; numerous participants noted socialising involving folk music ('*cajke*'), frequently justifying this as not their choice, but rather that of their friends. The majority of participants expressed dissatisfaction with the mandatory school reading materials, emphasising a desire to read books they choose themselves; we then concluded that the great majority of participants actually do not read on their own initiative in their free time. Other media content mentioned included social networks; only a small number of participants stated that they read internet portals as a source of information.

The topic selected as a specific feature of the Croatian part of the research was related to history. As stated in the discussion, we can conclude that the majority of participants are not overly interested in history, and that in addition to their lack of interest, they also display an exceptional lack of knowledge on history and historical topics. The majority of participants noted the excessive insistence on bare facts without context as a failure in history teaching. Discussion with teachers affirmed our thesis on the lack of interest in history, as well as that on the poor teaching concept and the implementation of this part of the curriculum. As history in Croatia is often discussed in daily politics and numerous historical topics are portrayed as ideologically coloured positions, it is no wonder that the majority of participants emphasise that they learn more about history from other sources than from history class. They identify their parents and grandparents as their primary sources of historical information, thus allowing us to conclude that, in addition to a lack of knowledge of history and a lack of youth interest in it, there is also a strong tendency in Croatia to interpret history on the basis of specific family histories; this leads to the further ideologisation and political reinterpretation of the past, which undoubtedly influences the present.

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