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"I just hope the whole thing won't collapse":
"understanding" and "overcoming" the EU financial crisis
from the citizens' perspective

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TranState Working Papers

"I JUST HOPE THE WHOLE THING
WON'T COLLAPSE":
"UNDERSTANDING" AND "OVERCOMING"
THE EU FINANCIAL CRISIS FROM THE
CITIZENS' PERSPECTIVE

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Staatlichkeit im Wandel • Transformations of the State
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ABSTRACT

Based on qualitative research conducted in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Poland, and the United Kingdom, the article analyses the ‘citizens’ perspective’ on the ‘EU financial crisis’ as it is communicated in the European public sphere. With reference to this aim, we argue in the following steps: After a general introduction into the research field we describe our overall theoretical approach on the citizens’ role in the process of a communicative construction of the European public sphere. The following section introduces the methodological approach, triangulating qualitative interviews, a half-standardised questionnaire, qualitative network maps and media diaries. We go on to present our research results on the citizens’ constructions of the ‘EU financial crisis’. On the one hand, they are struggling to ‘understand’ the crisis, a process that is marked by perplexity, anxiety, and speculations. On the other hand, the citizens develop their own view on how to ‘overcome’ the crisis, either in a national way, a European way, or by re-negotiating European cooperation. Based on such an analysis we conclude by a general reflection whether the crisis is a problem for the EU and its public sphere.

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**“I just hope the whole thing won’t collapse”¹:
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citizens’ perspective**

1 INTRODUCTION

What is mainly called the ‘EU financial crisis’ has not only been an important focus of media coverage in Europe and beyond. In addition, it became the subject of intellectual debate. For example, Anthony Giddens (2012) argued in the *Guardian* that “stabilising the euro should be a bridge to longer-term change and a stimulus to the imagination”. As a reaction to the crisis and the related politics of the German government, Ulrich Beck (2012) published the book “The German Europe”, in which he criticises the increasingly dominant position of Germany in the EU and the related “national view” on Europe – also within other countries – a view that weakens the originally transnational and partly cosmopolitan orientation of the European project. Spurred on by his conviction, Beck became politically active in building up an initiative for a “bottom-up Europe” – together with other politicians and intellectuals like, for example, Zygmunt Bauman, Jacques Delors or Richard Sennett (cf. Delors et al. 2012). Jürgen Habermas published various interviews and articles about the present situation of the EU, which were translated into English and as a consequence became part of the European debate as such (cf. Habermas et al. 2012). Together with two other academic essays, some of these newspaper articles were published in his book “On the European constitution” (Habermas 2011), in which he outlines the possibility of a post- or supranational Europe as part of a world society. Beside their request for deeper European integration, these intellectual statements have in common the recommendation that EU politics should focus more on the people living in Europe: their view of the fact that for the first time the breakdown of *global* capitalism can only be avoided by *national* tax payments (Habermas 2011: 117); their clear desire for a “bottom-up Europe”, in which the citizens’ “uncertainty, anxiety and indignation” (Beck 2012: 14) should become a core reference point for politics; or their criticism of a “lack both of dynamic leadership and of democratic legitimacy” (Giddens 2012: 3) in relation to the citizens. In sum, it is a ‘*citizens’ perspective*’ the various intellectuals are asking for.

It is this ‘citizens’ perspective’ we want to reconstruct in this article. As scholars of media and communication studies we are interested in how far such a ‘citizens’ perspec-

¹ Quote from an interview with Hilde Haltenberger, a 56-year-old retired Austrian foreign language assistant living in a small village in the North of Austria. See the appendix for sociodemographic information on the interviewees cited in this article.

tive’ on the so-called ‘EU financial crisis’ is related to their “public connection” (Couldry et al. 2007: 8) to what we call the “European public sphere”. As outlined by us elsewhere (Hepp et al. 2012a: 26), this European public sphere cannot be understood merely as an extended national public sphere (Gripsrud 2007: 483-485). The European public sphere is a more complex phenomenon that can be described alongside a shared pan-European transnationalisation of historically mainly national political public spheres.

Within media and communication studies, it is usual for research on Europe to distinguish between a “horizontal” and a “vertical” dimension of Europeanization (Koopmans/Erbe 2004; Wessler et al. 2008: 10, 56; Koopmans/Statham 2010b: 41). Vertical Europeanization means an increasing ‘monitoring’ of Europe and the EU in the public sphere of each country. Horizontal Europeanization means an increasing ‘monitoring of’ and ‘discussing with’ other European countries. For both aspects of Europeanization, we can identify two further moments which offer us four distinct criteria for the Europeanization of national public spheres on the level of media coverage (Peters 2008: 200): First, the vertical dimension of monitoring EU governance; second, the vertical dimension of a collective identification with Europe; third, the horizontal dimension of discursive exchange, meaning a shared pan-European discourse between the national public spheres; and fourth, a European discursive convergence in the national public spheres. We can link these four criteria quite easily with the example of the aforementioned intellectual discourse on the European crisis: Across the European countries, they monitor EU governance of the crisis. Within the group of the elite speakers quoted above, we can perceive identifications with Europe. Additionally, there is a discursive exchange, including the examples of publishing the same articles in different languages. And finally, we are confronted with a certain convergence of arguments, especially in relation to the ‘citizens’ perspective’.

However, while considerations like these were also the starting point of our own research, a lot of detailed research has been carried out on the production of the perceived European public sphere in journalistic practice as well as the articulation of this public sphere in media coverage since then (cf. recently Koopmans/Statham 2010a; Hepp et al. 2012a), significantly less research has been undertaken on the citizens’ perspective (Dahlgren 2006). Here we find – beside very general data as, for example, the Eurobarometer (2012) and generalising interpretations of such data (Risse 2010) – almost a complete absence of research on the audiences of this European public sphere, viz, on the people, in this case not seen as national consumers but as European citizens (García Canclini 2001).

Focusing on the financial crisis, this article tries to fill at least some gaps in this research deficit. Based on qualitative research conducted in Austria, Denmark, France,

Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom, our overall aim is to reflect the ‘citizens’ perspective’ on the ‘EU financial crisis’ as it is communicated in the European public sphere. With reference to this aim the article comprises five sections. After this introduction we describe our overall theoretical approach on the citizens’ role in the process of a communicative construction of the European public sphere. The following section introduces the methodological approach. We go on to present our research results on the citizens’ constructions of the ‘EU financial crisis’. And finally, we conclude by discussing how to evaluate these results.

All the research presented in this article is based on a collaborative investigation carried out within the project “The Transnationalisation of Public Spheres in Europe: Citizens’ (re)actions”, which is part of the Collaborative Research Center 597 “Transformations of the State” at the University of Bremen and funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). Since 2003 we have been researching the possible articulation of a European public sphere on the levels of media content, media production, and now media appropriation.²

2 CITIZENS’ (RE)ACTIONS: MEDIA APPROPRIATION AND THE COMMUNICATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF A EUROPEAN FINANCIAL CRISES

Introducing our overall approach, it is helpful to refer to a more general sociological rapprochement to the European society. If we follow here the arguments outlined by Georg Vobruba, we should not resort to a pre-definition of what the European society might be as a starting point for research. Rather, we should analyse the *social construction* of what is called European integration and in so doing as academic observers attempt to grasp *how actors in their everyday practice construct* this European society and, hence, an understanding of society itself. In this “perspective of second-order observations, the heuristic term ‘society’ is used in order to grasp phenomena which might in practice be observed and interpreted *as society*” (Vobruba 2012: 269). The astonishing consequence of such an approach is not only that something like a ‘European society’ becomes reconstructed in the actors’ perspective: additionally, this approach makes it possible to formulate detailed propositions of the specificity of “‘society’ within European integration” (Vobruba 2012: 274). In an exemplary way, Vobruba analyses three kinds of actors’ views on European integration: the “professionalised European integration elite” view, the “national political elites” view and the “citizens’” view. Each of these three constructions is related to a certain understanding of the ‘European society’:

² For more information on the Collaborative Research Centre “Transformations of the State” see <http://www.sfb597.uni-bremen.de>, for more information on our subproject see <http://www.zemki.uni-bremen.de/en/research/third-party-funds/dfg-project-public-spheres-in-europe.html>.

For the “professionalised European integration elite” – a group, to whom we can also count academics like Beck or Habermas as involved intellectuals – the ‘European society’ is what *inevitably* has to be built to secure freedom and welfare in Europe. Having their national competencies, responsibilities, and elections in mind, the “national political elites” construct the European society on the one hand as something in which they are involved, but on the other hand as an intervention into national politics. It is this construction that is criticised by the intellectuals of a “professionalised European integration elite”, as pointed out above. In contrast to this, the citizens have a “utilitarian attitude toward the European society” and “construct society according to their own economic interests” (Vobruba 2012: 274). It would be this triple social construction process in which we should locate the current “Euro crisis [that] set off a new dynamic of people’s action and institution building” (Vobruba 2012: 276). Therefore, we are confronted with complex processes of struggle and conflict that are not contrary to a step-by-step constitution of a European society but part of it. Here, Vobruba reminds us of classical sociological analysis that demonstrated how far the national society was also constructed by conflict (Simmel 1992: 284).

As scholars of media and communication studies, we do not investigate the overall social construction of the European society – rather, we are interested in processes of the mediatised “communicative construction” (Hepp 2012; Knoblauch 2013) of Europe. This said, we can learn a lot from the ideas discussed so far: investigating the communicative construction of a certain phenomenon means to focus on these processes as such, including their different actors and their articulations, which are not only marked by complexity but very often also by conflict. In relation to the European public sphere, this is the reason why it is not only necessary to research the journalists, the different political actors to whom they refer to and the ‘contents’ they produce; but also it is fundamentally necessary to turn towards the people and their constructions as citizens. Looking at the citizens in this way, they are not just the ‘audience’ that ‘receives’ media ‘contents’. Going far beyond this, they take part in the involved processes of communicative construction: They appropriate the media coverage as they locate and make sense of it in their everyday practices. And they articulate their own positions, usually in everyday interchange but possibly also ‘in the media’ when they write blogs, submit online comments or twitter, for example. In short: The citizens *act* and *react*. In so doing they become part of the communicative construction of Europe and its public sphere.

Helpful in describing a fundamental level of these citizens’ (re)actions is the aforementioned concept of “public connection” (Couldry et al. 2007: 5). Nick Couldry, Sonia Livingstone and Tim Markham developed this as a heuristic term to isolate a complex component of a working democracy, namely that people must build-up a certain connection to the public as a precondition of democratic engagement. This can happen

through media use – but not by that alone. For example, we can build-up a public connection in an indirect way via communication with ‘informed’ people – a communication that links ourselves with public issues. Relating the idea of public connection to questions discussed here, we can argue that a precondition for a ‘democratically working’ European public sphere is an involvement of the people via a certain public connection. In other words, a first level of citizens’ (re)action is to build up a European public connection. In so doing they communicatively construct themselves as what we might call European citizens. Based on this fundamental level, more specific forms of (re)actions unfold in the way they articulate their own position either as media participants themselves (for example, when they write blog entries, tweets or letters to the editors) or as participants in their everyday discourse (when they talk with others about European politics, for example). If we want to arrive at an appropriate understanding of what we call European public sphere, it is essential to include these moments into our analysis.

This is also the case when it comes to the so-called ‘financial crisis’ as it is discussed in the European public sphere. At the moment we find a lot of academic contributions on how the crisis should be defined. If we only refer to the scholars quoted so far, we find statements like “the crisis of the European Union is no debt-crisis” but a struggle for solidarity (Beck 2012: 23f.) Similarly, it is conceived as the “product of ad hoc crisis management strategies” rather than the “transfer of sovereignty” (Habermas et al. 2012: 1) or as the result of the missing pan-European state reforms when the euro was introduced (Giddens 2012: 1-2). It might be the case that each of these statements is right. However, if we are interested in the processes of the communicative construction of the crisis, we inevitably also have to analyse the citizens’ constructions of this crisis as part of its communicative construction. This means, first, to get an insight into their public connection in relation to this crisis and then, second, to get an understanding of their related (re)actions. Only in so doing can we arrive at an overall understanding of how this ‘crisis’ becomes concrete.

This is the reason why in our case we do not want to start our analysis by defining in advance what the core character of the ‘EU financial crisis’ is. Having the very general statement by Antonio Gramsci (1971: 178) in mind, i.e. a crisis is a process of struggle – also including its definition, we want to focus in detail on the people’s communicative constructions of the crisis in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom. As a result, our research question reads: How do the people as European citizens construct the EU financial crisis?

3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: DESCRIBING THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC CONNECTION

An explorative research design is indispensable for addressing our research question: For the purpose of an initial survey we had to define the possible various ‘crisis definitions’ in advance in order then to ask whether or not the perceptions of the people would correspond with these predefinitions. Avoiding such a hypothesis-testing approach, we investigated in a much more open manner the public connection of the people in Europe, that is how far they have access to a European public (in the above outlined sense of the word), how they appropriate the discourses of this public and, based on this, how they (re)act in their everyday life.

With such an overall approach, we investigated six different EU countries: Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom. These six countries were chosen in order to compare our research results with the previously conducted content analysis and newsroom research. Originally, the argument was to select two of the core funding members of the European Union (France, Germany), two rather smaller countries (Austria, Denmark) and with Great Britain a country dominated by rather critical orientation to the European Union. This sample was later extended with Poland to have one important new Eastern-European member state in the sample.³

While one might criticise this sampling for omitting a southern European state or ‘crisis countries’, such as Greece, Spain and, more recently, Italy, this design corresponds with the framework of our long-term and large-scale study on the European public sphere, including a long-term content analysis as well as an investigation of journalistic discourse cultures (Wessler et al. 2008; Hepp et al. 2012a). The obvious advantage of such an extensive research design is the extent to which we can compare various data sources in order to gain multi-dimensional insights into the phenomenon, which is the main aim of our overall research.

However, we have to bear the obvious limitations in mind: Our results cannot be transferred to the aforementioned ‘crisis countries’ one-to-one. The reason is that their ‘crises’ are not just an ‘EU’ or ‘Euro crisis’, but, in addition, also crises of the national political systems and their legitimacy (especially in Greece and Italy). Therefore, we are confronted with an additional level of complexity which we do not face when researching Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Poland, and the United Kingdom – countries whose national political systems exhibit a high level of stability (cf. Tsuneyoshi et al. 2012). As a consequence, our research has to be read in relation to other research that focuses more closely on these ‘crisis countries’ (cf. for example Vobruba 2013; Fotopoulos 2010). Notwithstanding, the relevance of our research derives from the fact

³ For more details of our previous empirical design see Hepp et al. 2012a: 49-62.

that the countries in our sample include the main states that have to support a possible ‘crisis solution’ – also financially: Any ‘solution’ of the ‘crisis’ needs to be legitimated within these countries, amongst others. It is under these premises that we research the pre-condition of ‘finding a way out of the crisis’.

In detail, our research in these six countries is based on an appropriation study using qualitative interviews with 30 citizens per country including a half-standardised section on socio-demographic background (which was additionally documented by post-interview protocols and case profiles), qualitative network maps (interviewee’s drawings of their communicative networks) and media diaries (interviewee’s documentations of their media use over a period of one week). This fieldwork was conducted from September to December 2011, a period when discourses surrounding the ‘EU financial crisis’ had a first peak, reflecting a possible withdrawal of Greece from the euro zone – something that did not happen until now.

Having questions of public connection, media appropriation, and public engagement in mind, we asked our interviewees about their personal life and biography, their media use and communicative networking, their possible access to the national and (mainly by that) European public sphere, their participation in the European public sphere, as well as their political identifications and understandings of political legitimisation. Our idea is that research on citizens’ media appropriation allows for a concluding, qualitatively differentiated evaluation of the transnationalisation of public spheres in Europe and related processes of European identity and citizenship building.

The selection of our interview partners was oriented towards the model of “theoretical sampling” as developed by the Grounded Theory methodology (Glaser/Strauss 1999: 45-77): In essence, in each of the researched countries we were looking for cases of persons with a high difference in their age, life background, media use and political orientation towards the nation-state and Europe.⁴ The fieldwork was undertaken in two phases of six weeks, each of them investigating three countries at the same time and accompanied by a shared interpretative discourse among the research team. This made it possible to sample in relation to our broadening and deepening theoretical understanding. However – and at this point we had to break with the fundamental approach by Glaser and Strauss –, comparing six countries, it was impossible to realise jointly *all* the collecting, coding and analysing of the data. For practical reasons we had to limit our fieldwork to the duration of three months in total – and we are still in the process of analysing these highly complex data. This is the reason why we understand our ap-

⁴ See a detailed overview including the whole sample and sociodemographic information on every interview partner in the final section of this paper.

proach only as oriented by the strategy of “theoretical sampling” and not as a one-to-one realisation.

The interviews were transcribed and – together with the other data (media diaries, network maps) – analysed following coding procedures suggested by Grounded Theory (Glaser/Strauss 1999; Strauss/Corbin 1998). This means a multi-step process: first an “open coding” of the data, then an “axial coding” that searches for the interrelation of the analytical categories, and finally a “selective coding” that rounds off the theory. While this process of data analysis has not yet been completed for the project’s overall research questions,⁵ we will present here a preliminary case study on the citizens’ construction of the ‘EU financial crisis’ as it was communicated to us in the interviews. This analysis draws especially on our post-interview protocols and case profiles.

We performed this analysis in a transcultural perspective (Hepp 2012: 140f.). Without the data first being aggregated on a national-territorial basis, our cases of interview partners are compared with one another. In this way we can obtain a system of categories that describes not simply national differences, but more general common factors and differences in cultural patterns. This approach makes a greater complexity of analysis possible, and paves the way for the identification of cultural thickenings that can assume very different forms – an approach that is necessary if we also want to analyse the possible forms of an emerging everyday European society.

4 THE EU ‘FINANCIAL CRISIS’ FROM A CITIZENS’ PERSPECTIVE

In respect of our research question – how do citizens construct the so-called ‘EU financial crisis’ – we have to distinguish between two kinds of patterns of construction: This is, first, how the people construct their ‘understanding’ of the crisis. At this point we are confronted with perplexity, anxiety, and speculation. Second, there are patterns that refer to ideas of how to ‘overcome’ the crisis. At this point, our interview partners discuss three possible ways: a national way, a European way, and something we might call a ‘new’ way, i.e. a re-negotiating European cooperation. In the following, we want to present these main patterns of constructing the ‘EU financial crisis’ – patterns that are the reference point for further reflections in the concluding section. With reference to our on-going analysis, a short comment on the terminology used. For practical reasons, in the following we will use the term ‘(EU financial) crisis’ without quotation marks. Nevertheless, it is important to have in mind that we are speaking about certain constructions of what is *called* ‘a crisis’ – not about a given definition.

⁵ The main focus of our research is to investigate the European public connection and legitimation in relation to different forms of media appropriation.

4.1 ‘Understanding’ the crisis: Perplexity, anxiety, and speculations

Across Europe, the citizens interviewed by us construct the financial crisis as a serious matter. When articulating their disorientation, the pattern of understanding characteristically widens: first of all, from *wondering* about how it all began and what is going on, second, leading to *worrying about effects* on both their personal lives and the future of Europe and, third, it includes *speculation* about the complex nature of the crisis. In this sense, a 50-year-old University project manager from London says: “It’s just way too complicated and unwieldy for most people to understand. You know, what you get off the news is, the more you know the less you understand.” (Jessica Price, 50, UK)⁶. Similarly, a young man from France articulates his anxiety about the consequences of the crisis by stating that “the big question is what happens if the crisis cannot be solved”, and he continues, “this unsettles me a lot, and therefore I try to follow the developments” (Roberto Zero, 25, F).

a Perplexity: Grasping the crisis

Above all, the interviewees are puzzled by the EU financial crisis. They construct it as complex in its economic and political nature and consider it difficult to understand in detail. In trying to comprehend the crisis and its impact, the interviewed citizens rely on the information they acquire via the media they use as well as their everyday interchange with friends and family. In this whole process of appropriation they relate this information back to their everyday lives as well as to what they perceive as a broader European context.

For example, Amina Zündler, an Austrian who works as a manager for cultural projects, perceives the Greek crisis as bewildering and states that she cannot understand: “How can a whole country fail?” (Amina Zündler, 28, AT). In her eyes, the economic aspects of the crisis are obscure and opaque, so that she feels completely mystified. Although she describes herself as “always on the internet, following the news all day long” via various channels, such as orf.at or Facebook, this does not sufficiently help her getting an overview of the crisis’ context. In this sense, also a woman from London states “that this whole sort of economic mechanism is just too complicated for anybody to understand now. [...] you know, the top economic brains in the world don’t know how to fix it. And [...] governments are just incapable of knowing what to do about it” (Jessica Price, 50, UK). Similarly, Dennis Cooper, a political science student from North London, states: “The European financial crisis, I’ve been following that quite a bit. I

⁶ We have changed all our interviewees’ names in order to respect their anonymity. Beyond that, the information in the brackets contain the interviewees’ age and their country of origin, which is AT-Austria, D-Germany, DK-Denmark, UK-England, PL-Poland).

think I don't know nothing about, I don't know anything about economics" (Dennis Cooper, 29, UK). To resolve this deficit, he follows media reporting on the financial crisis. He tries to find out more about the crisis, mostly online – via BBC news, twitter and blogs, among others the Blog of Chris Delow, an economist who is writing a lot about the financial crisis and the problems in Greece. Likewise, for Angelie Toulon, a student of agronomy, the crisis reveals both that the topic is very complicated and that she simply is not educated in economics. To compensate for this, she tries to understand what is going on and what the impact of the crisis might be by following the reporting of *Le Monde* – her favourite newspaper that she receives for free at her faculty department. However, she does not always succeed: "Sometimes I understand something and one second later I don't understand anything anymore" (Angelie Toulon, 21, F).

Another way of dealing with the uncertainty is to talk about the crisis within one's circle of friends and family. Here, we hear from the French retired pharmacist Karlotta Sapon that she is presently talking about it a lot with her husband, as the crisis is "the big, our big worry" (Karlotta Sapon, 65, F). For Stéphane Trufon, a psychologist living in Paris, it is his girlfriend who turns out to be his personal expert in this matter, as she studies International Relations.

To summarise, the interviewees share the experience that their common knowledge of economic topics proves insufficient when it comes to such a complex matter as the EU financial crisis. One approved but not always sufficient way to remedy this is to stick to media coverage; another one is to make use of their personal network and in this way to satisfy their need to talk about the crisis.

b Anxiety: Worrying about the future

The interviewees are highly concerned about the possible impacts of the crisis. On the one hand, their worries are on a personal level, insofar as they articulate anxiety about rising unemployment rates, the risk of inflation, and depreciation of their savings. On the other hand, in the interviewees' eyes the whole EU project is at stake: regarding the EU's *raison d'être* first and foremost as an instrument for creating and maintaining peace, an economically flagging EU might once more result in terror and war.

When it comes to the personal life of our interviewees, the crisis turns out to be an important topic of conversation in the family circle. For example, the formerly mentioned Jessica Price talks about how her family feels directly affected by the crisis: "[M]y daughter has just finished her undergraduate degree and then my auntie's son has as well, so we worried about finding jobs. [...] Ehm, you know, they're both looking for jobs and not finding it very easy not to pass on your mind at the moment" (Jessica Price, 50, UK). Similarly, the currently unemployed Steven Corner from Plymouth in Southern England states that the crisis "does impact my family [...] as my mother might lose

the house” (Steven Corner, 21, UK). However, worrying about the personal impacts of the crisis is not limited to job-related threats, but is also threatening in terms of money. For example, there is Herbert Sennenberger, a retired design draughtsman, who fears that the crisis might lead to inflation, something that he rather associates with his parent’s generation’s experiences: “Even if we returned to gold, then I’d give a gold dollar for a kilogram of bread, and the gold is all gone either way” (Herbert Sennenberger, 65, AT). Besides worries about every day basic needs such as food, there is also the concern about financial investments. Our French interviewee Karlotta Sapon, she was introduced earlier, and her husband, for example, fear that the money they have invested at the stock exchange might be endangered by the crisis, too.

Besides personal worries, the interviewees are also concerned about the future of the EU. Here, the spectrum of worries varies from unspecific concerns, as we can hear from Jacques Ardèche, a 64-year-old French manager, from the 21-year-old Angelie Toulon, who finds it hard to view the future of the EU optimistically, or from Stéphane Trufon (27, F) who, in the light of the crisis, does not expect the EU to get anywhere. These general doubts about the impacts of the crisis and the chances of overcoming it are reflected by perceiving the crisis as being characterised by the manifoldness of the EU’s many different cultures, as the Austrian student of agriculture and nutrition science Kilian Wedekind, aged 26, puts it.

However, our interviewees do not totally agree as to what extent the excitement about the EU crisis is in fact adequate: While some criticise that the crisis draws too much attention, others are troubled by the misgiving that the crisis might be even more serious than one can see at first sight. For example, Maria Rudler (23, AT), a student of political science, complains that due to the crisis various issues such as foreign affairs, environmental and cultural aspects are being eclipsed. Another interviewee, Simon Gärtner, a 37-year-old biologist who works as a gardener in the North German city of Bremen, rather suspects that politicians even stoke conflicts like xenophobia and risk of terror in order to distract from the actual dimensions of the financial crisis. For a third interviewee, Danish pensioner Bjørn Æby, a former blacksmith, the implications of the crisis are not at all clear yet. Despite the fact that he does not feel affected personally, as he considers himself economically secure, he perceives the crisis as “the worst thing he has experienced in Europe in his whole life” (Bjørn Æby, 64, DK). As far as he has noticed, some people in Denmark are already struck by the crisis and feel “uncomfortable” with that. His greatest fear is that some other EU member states from Eastern Europe might join Greece and Italy in their financial problems. Eventually, the separation of a few or more countries from the Eurozone would lead to chaos. It is this ultimate, almost apocalyptic scenario that plagues some of our interviewees. For example, agriculture engineer Roberto Zero from France wonders what would happen if no solution to the

crisis could be found: “Everything can collapse, dissolve, and this makes me very uneasy” (Roberto Zero, 25, F). Likewise, Hilde Haltenberger, a retired foreign language correspondent, hopes “that the whole thing will not collapse” (Hilde Haltenberger, 56, AT). Or, as another Austrian pensioner, the former nurse Friede Kerner, puts it: She is worried that “something even worse might break out, something like war” (Friede Kerner, 59, AT).

As we have seen, it is common for our interviewees to be worried about the EU’s financial crisis. Both the extent and the cause of their concern nevertheless vary: from the individual to the collective level, from a general feeling of discomfort to fundamental fear for Europe’s future.

c Speculations: How the crisis came about

Although the interviewees construct the crisis as difficult to understand, they are not shy of speculating about the reasons for it. The explanations they present are all permeated by the perspective that the economic problems have been predictable and, in parts, avoidable: Either the failure is located within national misgovernment, or within the EU’s system. In the interviewees’ eyes this seems not at all inconsistent with the impression that they are confused by the crisis, as we discussed it above. Both attitudes can coexist, inasmuch as our interviewees try to overcome their disorientation by constructing individual explanations. On the basis of this, we have identified three approaches to speculate about the crisis: with an economic perspective, a focus on national misgovernment, and an approach concentrating on the structure of the EU.

One way of reasoning about the financial crisis is to appraise it from an economic perspective. For example, jobless Lucas Almenos (58, F) from Marseille states that the problem is that the banks rather than the politicians govern the world. Noah Moulin, an IT-security engineer from Paris works in the financial industry himself. During his daily work, he “watch[es] the financial markets breaking down”. He “notice[s] many billions, billions and billions being transferred in order to help Greece, or to help Portugal” (Noah Moulin, 28, F). His opinion is that the Greeks, for instance, do in fact need help. The explanation he offers is that Greece should not have the euro – in his view, small countries such as Greece with a generally weak economy need financial flexibility. This, in his eyes, is not given in the case of Greece with the euro. Another interviewee, Kurt Binder (60, D), a wealthy pensioner, insists that the crisis is an economic crisis originating in the US. He regards the crisis to have no relation to the euro in particular or the EU in general. We find even less concrete guesswork in the case of the Danish street newspaper seller Anders Hansen, who suspects “someone” to hold the “cash box” and one needs to “make him give back the money not only to Greece, but to Europe as a whole” (Anders Hansen, 33, DK). Characteristic for this approach is to focus on eco-

conomic aspects only, allowing the complex issue of the EU financial crisis to be more easily understandable but at the same time reduced to a simplified level.

A second considerable explanatory approach refers to systemic aspects of the crisis on the level of national and historic background. Here we have, for example, Lone Søndergaard, 24-year-old Danish student of education, who states that the Greek financial crisis does not necessarily have anything to do with the EU; apart from that, Greece is situated in the middle of Europe – geographically. On the contrary, she regards the whole problem as being caused by misgovernment on the part of Greek politicians. Responsible for this misgovernment in her eyes are, in turn, the people of Greece. The very same argument can be heard from Max Rost, an electrician, who suspects the crisis to be caused by national political “disorder” (Max Rost, 33, AT). Another Danish interviewee, Mads Jespersen, an architect, admits that it is a problem if the Greeks are not willing to pay their taxes. Nevertheless, one has to ask why they refuse to do so. In his view, he continues, it is all based in mistrust of “the central power”, referring to Greece’s recent history which was overshadowed by military dictatorship. On the basis of this, Mads Jespersen, for example, considers the Greeks to have every reason to fear that their taxes would not inure to the benefit of the collective good. What is characteristic for this set of explanations is that they perceive the crisis as grounded in failures of national – Greek – politicians, all too long condoned by the people of Greece. Therefore, in this perspective responsibility if not delinquency lies within the national field of accountability.

A third prevalent explanatory approach emanates from the perception that it is the EU itself that either caused or at least proved not effective enough to prevent the implications of the crisis for its (weaker) member states. For example, Edgar Davis, a consultant, regards the euro as a disaster in any event. Consequently, he expects the EU to “go down the drain” (Edgar Davis, 71, UK) and reckons that the euro will be withdrawn. From another interviewee, Poul Omegn (44, DK), a sales promoter who is currently unemployed, we learn that the EU had recently grown too big too fast, with the EU enlargement regarding the Eastern European countries. Concerning the accession of Greece to the EU, Mads Jespersen, the earlier introduced Danish architect, tells a remarkable narrative: in his point of view, Greece was assisted by the EU in manipulating its facts and figures. The objective, he suspects, had been to support the young democracy, and he concludes that these superordinate political intentions were to “woo them into the warmth”. Clément Sapon, a retired executive (65, F), constitutes that the crisis would not have affected Greece and Portugal so much, “if there had been a European economic government providing harmonisation [...] – Taxes, expenditures, laws, and tolls need to be harmonised”. Fabrice Girard, another consultant, adds: “We don’t have a European defence policy, no European economic union, there’s no one who represents

us against the global lobby. Well, and now we face the disaster, as it is us who have to solve Greece's problems now. [...] We don't have a European government, and this is the catastrophe" (Fabrice Girard, 45, F). Here, we find hints on the interviewees' ideas about how the crisis might be overcome. Contrary to assigning blame to the national level, as presented above, it is characteristic for this approach to perceive the crisis as a consequence of systematic failure within the EU system. The statements, however, vary with regard to whether we should disestablish or intensify the structure of the EU, an issue we will focus on later.

We have shown a certain spectrum of speculations about the background of the crisis, ranging from a focus on economic aspects only, to a national-systemic or an EU-systemic perspective on the complex issue of the EU financial crisis. Within the presented reaction-pattern 'understanding the crisis', references of the interviewees' conception of how to overcome the crisis have already been hinted at. We will concentrate on this in the following.

4.2 'Overcoming' the crisis: Ambivalent ways out of the crisis

Inasmuch as the EU financial crisis as well as the economic problems in Greece leave our interviewees at a loss, worries them and lets them ponder over its interrelations, they do not confine themselves to trying to understand the crisis, but they also propose solutions which might lead Europe out of the crisis. Some of the interviewees depict *national solutions*, emphasising Greece's national responsibility to solve "their" problems on their own and rejecting the idea of helping them out financially. In this sense, Lone, the earlier mentioned student of education living in Copenhagen, emphasises that Greece has "made its bed, and now must lie on it" as "there is no money to be grabbed" from the other EU member states (Lone Søndergaard, 24, DK). Others depict *European solutions*. These European solutions either point to absolute solidarity with Greece as a member of the European community, because otherwise "there is no point in the EU at all" (Louis Barney, 21, UK); or they point to the necessity of fostering European integration in order to have better institutional instruments at hand to solve the financial crisis, so that "more EU and not less EU" (Mads Jespersen, 50, DK) should be the political answer to the crisis. In addition to the articulation of national and European ways out of the crisis, a third pattern that can be extracted from the interviewees' statements is the hint at *alternative ways out of the crisis*. These alternative ways are perceived by our interviewees in the necessity to re-negotiate European solidarity with Greece in the actual circumstances of the current crisis.

Yet, before presenting the three different ways out of the crisis articulated by our interviewees in detail, we want to shed some light on an aspect that is situated on a "meta level", as it concerns the perception of political actors in the crisis: Remarkably, our

interviewees predominantly do not perceive European, but national politicians as the principal actors in the crisis. It remains unclear whether the national actors' engagement for the future of the EU should be regarded as positive or negative: The problem seems to arise from the actual need for it, due to the fact that European politicians are dismissed as invisible, where national actors are welcome to fill this vacuum.

Fabrice Girard, for example, the consultant introduced earlier, lives in Paris but workwise commutes to London for one week per month, regrets that only two political actors can be seen in the crisis. These two political actors taking responsibility in the case of the current financial crisis and visibly fostering political solutions are Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, and Nicolas Sarkozy, the then French president: "It is a shame that they [Merkel and Sarkozy] are doing this job alone, that there are no other countries who feel responsible to act. The others, they just twiddle their thumbs and watch, they just watch" (Fabrice Girard, 45, F). Nevertheless, he admits, it "would be much more complicated to discuss all this with 15 or even 27 member states". In a similar vein, some Danish interviewees like Faris Hom, a young man with family roots in Somalia who is currently preparing to be a taxi driver, states "there are many countries [in the EU] that don't help. I think if everyone had helped like Angela Merkel does, then this problem here would have been solved a long time ago" (Faris Hom, 25, DK). Poul Omegn, again, misses "official EU politicians" acting as strong crisis managers: "Rompuuy [head of the European Council] does not act as a visionary, he doesn't do anything. There is always Angela Merkel, Berlusconi and Sarkozy" (Poul Omegn, 44, DK).

Beyond these perceptions and evaluations of national and European politicians acting or not acting in order to 'overcome' the actual EU financial crisis, the interviewed citizens' reactions to the crisis are analysed in the following with regard to possible ways out of the crisis; namely national, European and new ways.

a The national way: Solving a nation's problem

For our interviewees, following the reaction pattern of hinting at national solutions in order to overcome the EU financial crisis, it is above all maladministration flanked by corruption and unreasonableness that has played a major role in the case of the financial crisis in general and Greece's economic problems in particular. Consequently, these interviewees consider it a rational consequence to let every aggrieved party solve their problems on their own. For example, the earlier introduced Herbert Sennenberger refers to the term "dissoluteness" when emphasizing that Greece "crept into the EU by faking facts". He compares Greece, Germany, and Austria to neighbouring families, with two of them being hard workers and one of them being dissolute and having squandered all his money. Against this background he cannot approve supporting Greece; for him, it is

not only the fault of the Greek politicians and banks but it is also the upper class that “has cheated on the state” (Herbert Sennenberger, 65, A). Quite similarly, Ismael Brooker, a former engineer who migrated to the UK from Lebanon in the 1960s and now runs a coffee shop in Richmond near London, tends to see each EU member state responsible for its own economic problems, so that the EU should not help Greece as long as it continues to pursue wrong policies. He compares Greece to a child who always spends all his pocket money and should therefore not be given any more money:

“You know when you’re raising kids [...], you give them pocket money; you have five kids, and one guy saves, [...] but one guy is a big spender and when the big guy spends money, you say, ok have some more. So it’s not going to fix his problem, and the same with Greece, it’s not going to fix anything. They don’t care [...]. In my opinion this is what I think of the matter, why bring these countries, Lithuania, for example, all these countries, why bring them around?” (Ismael Brooker, 62, UK)

Going along with these assignments of national fault and responsibility, many of our interviewees say they are not willing to transfer “their” national taxes to Greece. For example, Kurt Binder, he was mentioned earlier, does not trust Greece to handle the European injections of cash responsibly. He fears that in consequence “the German taxpayers have paid for it, and will in the end be burned one way or another” (Kurt Binder, 60, D). In a similar vein, Ismael Brooker states “every single man is paying more taxes, because they [EU] didn’t let them [Greece] go” (Ismael Brooker, 62, UK).

From the interviewees’ statements it becomes obvious that excluding Greece as a member state of the Eurozone may be considered as a radical, but nevertheless a conceivable consequence and solution. Lisa O’Connor, working as an arts and music manager, articulates quite radically that one should “send them to hell, sorry, them down in Greece. Well, if they do not stick to the rules we have here in the EU, then it’s over, it simply is” (Lisa O’Connor, 62, DK). Similarly, the small village inhabitant Joachim Gerke is obviously niggled that “a whole country is flagging just because it is not able to, uhm, govern itself and to budget responsibly [...]. I cannot understand that there is still more and more money being invested into this country” (Joachim Gerke, 46, D). A somewhat double-edged attitude, whether the European community generally should interfere with national sovereignty or not, can be observed in the case of a cleaning lady, who on the one hand refuses the EU’s right to “dictate Danish interests”, but on the other hand expects Greece to let the EU overtake the crisis’ management, “because if they want something from us, then they also have to give something” (Lina Rendersen, 58, DK).

As the extracts from our interviews have shown, the national way as a solution to overcome the EU financial crisis is mostly being promoted as an assignment of national

responsibility to Greece. As a consequence, the Greek government is considered to have to solve the problems they have produced by national economic or political maladministration on their own. Against this background the interviewees articulate their reluctance to spend billions of euros to help Greece fix the problem. And even more so, they do not trust that Greece would handle financial support provided by the EU responsibly. Some of our interviewees even consider Greece's exclusion from the European Union as a conceivable alternative.

b The European way: Solidarity and intensified integration

Contrary to the suggested national solution, other interviewees clearly argue for a solution on a European level. The motivation in favour of this solution is underscored by two arguments: *absolute solidarity* owing to humanitarian considerations and the postulate of the European community on the one hand, and *intensified integration* on an institutional level on the other. In either of the argumentations, we can identify a strong commitment to the essential *raison d'être* of the EU, as taken for granted by these interviewees: “The Greek crisis can be seen as the European time of reckoning” (Mads Jespersen, 50, DK).

Regardless of the asserted guilt of Greece's national government, our interviewees consider it to be a human imperative or a natural consequence of Greece's EU membership to show *solidarity*. Speaking of the Greeks as the “bankrupt Greeks”, Fritz Kantler, who himself tries to eke out a living more or less unsuccessfully as a returned globetrotter with neither education nor employment, states is unfair, as he considers the Greek people to be “quite hard-pushed” (Fritz Kantler, 61, AT). In this sense, Louis Barney, living at his parent's house and studying history and political science at the University of Plymouth, states quite emotionally: “What's the point of being in [the EU] if you're not getting that [financial] protection. It's necessary to help each other out. It's important for them [the Greeks] to know you want them to be back” (Louis Barney, 21, UK). He continues, arguing that every EU member state “has to give something back at some point”, because the community makes it natural to help each other out and not to split up as soon as problems arise. As a consequence, “everyone has got to tighten their belts, and keep hoping. [...] The EU should be kept together [...] instead of splitting up and going back to say the Deutschmark or the Franc. [...] So just keep the economy strong and stick to it really”. Likewise, Barbara Szymańska, working as a cleaning lady in Warsaw, supports a common European effort to overcome the crisis – even though she states not to “know what will be later, how we will have to pay off, how our children will feel” (Barbara Szymańska, 52, PL). In a similar vein, earlier introduced biologist Simon Gärtner advocates that Greece should stay in the EU: “Europe as a whole deserves it to see this through” (Simon Gärtner, 37, D). With regard to Europe as a po-

litical community, Poul Omegn characterises the current financial crisis as a European “litmus test”. According to him, the question at stake is “whether the European team spirit actually works” (Poul Omegn, 44, DK). Consequently, he is in favour of absolutely sticking together in the EU – otherwise it would be like refusing help to a family member. It is this reciprocal help for which the EU stands. Nevertheless, financial help for Greece would in the end also be beneficial for the sponsoring body – as the example of the Marshall plan after World War II has shown, as Poul Omegn explains: “This steel company will in the end profit from the fact that Greece gets financial help – because they will buy its steel products”.

European solidarity without conditions in times of crisis is also what agricultural and nutritional student Kilian Wedekind advocates. He goes even further and accuses national politicians, who, in order to promote themselves in national elections, abuse the Greeks and their problems by saying “we pay, we pay, we pay [for them] and in the end we do not get anything back”. In principle, “countries who perform badly economically have to be supported” (Kilian Wedekind, 26, A). Similarly, earlier introduced university project manager Jessica Price argues that politicians should be careful not to stigmatise countries like Greece now: “I think we’ve got to be prepared not to stigmatise countries that are, have been performing badly economically. I think we’ve got to be careful that the stronger countries don’t bully the weaker countries. I think we’ve got to put everything in historical atrocities that have happened, ehm, in these countries.” She goes on to state that even though “there doesn’t seem to be any real leadership” (Jessica Price, 50, UK) in the crisis, it would be problematic to have one single country taking over this leadership:

“We don’t want to reach the point where one country has too much power in Europe. Because that’s always been dangerous in the past. Ehm, but I think we’ve got to [...] appreciate that despite being in the EU the constituent member countries are very different and very unique. And they’re not all going to fit this one-size fit sort of type concept. [...] You know, Germany and France have had strong, [...] I mean, Germany has got an amazingly strong economy, ehm, you know, most countries in the EU are never going to match Germany in its efficiencies and strong economy. It’s just never going to happen. [...] I think it’s a bit rich for countries in Europe telling, you know, telling Greece what to do at this time, because you know, Greece has never been a strong economy and there are others, other economies in Europe that are a bit dysfunctional as well. And, ehm, I just don’t think they should be punished in this way, I just think this whole thing is problematic. [...] Ehm, I feel really sorry for Greece.” (Jessica Price, 50, UK)

Similar to Jessica Price's expression of sympathy with Greece, other interviewees state their solicitousness as well. For example, Fritz Kantler, living in "precarious" circumstances and having been out of regular work for decades, expresses his "appreciation and sympathy for the people" in Greece. From his perspective, those people are "in big difficulties [...], because the economic system, ehm, thus just horrible on the human level". He associates his sympathy with the Greek people with his own stigmatization as a "longhair and, eh, eh anti-social" (Fritz Kantler, 61, A).

Additional to the feeling that showing solidarity is necessary to begin with, solving the crisis by following a European way is strongly bound to the call for an extension of European cooperation on institutional levels. In this sense, our interviewees opt for absolute solidarity, attributing it to the commitment to the European community or simply to humanitarian reasons and consequently suggesting a *deepening of European political integration* as well as an *improvement of European institutions*.

By seeing the EU financial crisis as a "crossroads" leading either to a "European federal state", a "separation" of the EU member states or remaining at the "status quo", political science student Manuel Vechter postulates his "ideal conception" leading to the "United states of Europe" (Manuel Vechter, 19, A). In a similar way, Roberto Zero hopes "that [...] the crisis allows Europe to foster integration even more" (Roberto Zero, 25, F).

Instead of promoting 'more' European integration, other interviewees state that the EU must be improved with regard to its institutional functioning. We can refer here to an already quoted statement by Fabrice Girard, the French business consultant. He regrets that there is currently "no European Economic Union [...]. There is no European government, and this is the catastrophe. Europe, the next Europe that we will construct, must above all be political, so that the national governments will dissolve" (Fabrice Girard, 45, F). Similarly, David Weaver, working as a freelance financial consultant and living just outside of London, argues that the EU needs central monetary control since "this whole thing [the EU] seems a bit ill-conceived": "If you've got countries like Greece and Germany, with Greece trying to run similar economic models and such, and you don't have central money control, then you're going to have problems" (Daniel Weaver, 49, UK).

As we have shown above, our interviewees promote national as well as European ways to overcome the EU financial crisis. However, there is a third reaction pattern that can be found in our interviewees' statements: the re-negotiation of European cooperation.

c New ways: Re-negotiating European cooperation

A third way that neither contradicts the national nor the European way of overcoming the crisis, but rather forms an integrative alternative to both solutions, is the call to re-negotiate the way the EU is handling the current crisis as well as the way European solidarity should be handled with regard to countries like Greece in the current EU financial crisis.

For example, Poul Omegn (44, DK), he was cited a number of times, states that European solidarity must have certain limits. The case of Greece will bring to light where these limits run, so that these will be discussed and re-negotiated again. Similarly, Cornelia Sucher states that European solidarity with countries like “Ireland, Greece [might] be an extra topic” (Cornelia Sucher, 56, A), because corruption, assumed as being part of everyday life in those countries, cannot be supported by the EU. Other interviewees also stress that those countries that want to receive financial support from the EU in times of crisis need to “do” something for this support. In this sense, the cleaning lady Lina Rendersen states that the Greek people as well as the Italian people need to work for the financial help they receive. And another interviewee from Austria – Hilde Haltenberger – hopes that the European community will not collapse in the course of the current financial crisis. However, she argues that the EU should have a say “when spending billions” (Hilde Haltenberger, 56, A) of euros to countries like Greece.

5 CONCLUSION: THE CRISIS AS A PROBLEM FOR THE EU AND ITS PUBLIC SPHERE?

Summing up our research presented here, we can confirm that there is – beside all national differences in the construction of what ‘the crisis’ might be – a European public connection: Rooted in their national political discourse cultures, almost all interviewees display a connection to the European public sphere, in the sense that the overall topics of Europe and the present (European part of the) crisis are noticed and/or discussed in their everyday life. This public connection is mainly constituted through regional and national media.⁷ Within the identity horizon of the interviewed persons, Europe does not necessarily occupy a central spot but does take a noteworthy place. And while many specific EU policies, decisions, and regulations are criticised, the idea of Europe has an astonishing presence. Therefore, our interviewees across all six countries construct their understanding of the EU financial crisis by actively following the media coverage and

⁷ A question we do not discuss further at this point is how specific patterns of public connection are related to more detailed media repertoires (forms of appropriating media in total). While we are presently looking into this, it would be beyond the frame of this article to discuss these relations in detail.

by talking to friends and families about possible consequences for their personal lives as well as for the European Union as a political community. They do not simply, from their citizens' point of view, perceive the crisis as being a complicated matter, but also discuss the positions of the economic experts and politicians who are meant to fix the problems.

Looking closely, the analysis of our interviews shows that the reaction pattern of overcoming the EU financial crisis can be differentiated by an emphasis on national, European or new ways of overcoming it. By promoting a national way, our interviewees mostly accentuate that countries like Greece who are facing severe financial difficulties should solve 'their' economic problems on their own, claiming that they have produced these difficulties themselves as a consequence of economic and political maladministration as well as corruption. In contrast, the interviewed persons promoting a European way out of the crisis either emphasise absolute solidarity with Greece because of the fact that Greece is after all part of the European community, and the community spirit ought to be to help each other especially in times of difficulties. Or they promote improvements on the European institutional level as well as a deepening of the European integration in order to have better EU political instruments at hand to manage and overcome the crisis. Eventually, alternative ways of overcoming the crisis are articulated by some interviewees who stress the necessity to re-negotiate European cooperation in the financial crisis. Interestingly, most of the interviewees promoting this third way do not question Greece's membership in the European monetary union. Nevertheless, they do not promote absolute solidarity with Greece regardless of the actual situation, nor do they support a deepening of European integration.

We can relate these results back to our reflections at the beginning of this article. Fundamentally, we see a quite pronounced European public connection in relation to the crisis. Additionally, our analysis demonstrates that reflection about how to overcome the crisis is not just an elite debate on the part of well-known intellectuals but also a prominent topic of people's everyday discourse. Analysing data like this is remarkably helpful because it also offers a chance to deconstruct particular criticisms that are often *assumed* as a citizens' perspective: It is *not* the case that a national point of view would be the only dominant position. We find more sophisticated positions and a lot of reflection about European solidarity and a shared interest. Referring to this, at least as a preliminary thesis, we might argue that the abovementioned four dimensions or Europeanization can also be linked to a citizens' perspective on the EU financial crisis: Across the European countries, they monitor the EU governance of the crisis (first dimension). With a varying degree we find a remarkable, fundamental identification with Europe – not necessarily as the EU, but more with the fundamental idea of Europe (second dimension). While only very world-oriented people trace media coverage from other

countries, there is at least an indirect discursive exchange that through national media also other European positions are perceived (third dimension). And finally, we are confronted with some convergence of arguments when it comes to the three different possible ways of overcoming the crisis (fourth dimension). This said, certainly we cannot argue generally for each individual that he or she defines him- or herself as being a ‘European’. Also we do not have historical interview data that makes it possible to develop a long-term view on the historical change of these dimensions. Nevertheless, we can postulate a fundamental ‘anchoring’ of a European orientation – also in times of crisis. This does not necessarily mean that there would not be any criticism of the EU and its crisis management. But a fundamental legitimation of the European idea seems to be evident in spite of the EU financial crisis (cf. Hepp et al. 2012b).

How do we evaluate research results like these? In our view, two points are striking. First, our analysis shows that the financial crisis in general and the serious economic problems in Greece – and in other European countries – in particular, highly concern the interviewees across Europe. The question whether the crisis is perceived as a threat to the EU and will possibly end in the cessation of the European Union remains open and is discussed ambivalently. However, the more striking point is that our interview partners not only have a European public connection, but additionally are mainly involved in a shared discourse on the crisis. Irrespective of their construction of how to overcome the crisis, this involvement can be understood as the core point: Referring back to pragmatic concepts of citizenship and public sphere (Dewey 1927; Lingenberg 2010: 49f.), we can argue that our interview partners position themselves *as European citizens* insofar as they construct the European financial crisis as a problem affecting their own lives. For some cases, this kind of citizenship might be highly situational and framed negatively. However, also if it is only a situational positioning in critique, it remains a moment-like positioning as a European citizen who is affected by the crisis and therefore has a certain ‘understanding’ of it and often also the wish to articulate ideas of how to ‘overcome’ the crisis.

Second, our transcultural analysis demonstrates the high complexity of crisis constructions. We cannot decipher solely national patterns of crisis constructions in the sense that, for example, interviewees from Germany or the United Kingdom articulate only the ‘national way’ as a way out of the crisis for Greece. Especially the patterns of constructing how to overcome the crisis occur across all the different countries investigated by us. At this point, an important future research question is how far these diverging constructions then might be related to other variables like, for example, differences in “media repertoires” (Hasebrink/Domeyer 2012) and communicative networking on the part of the interviewed persons. This said, once more it becomes obvious that Europe is not only segmented nationally but also that there are additional transnational

patterns of segmentation – and transnational patterns of a shared belonging and responsibility.

As we are still in the middle of the process that is called the ‘EU financial crisis’, any statement of the outcome of this crisis is purely speculative. However, if we reflect our analysis carefully, it suggests that this crisis might again result in a deepening of European integration also at the level of the citizens: They seem to share an understanding of the present crisis as a ‘common crisis’ in Europe. And in the event that a fundamental legitimation of the European idea will remain⁸ and there might be also a ‘common solution’ – either in the form of the ‘European way’ or another ‘new way’ of a re-negotiated European cooperation – the result might be a strengthening of this citizenship through the present crisis. But as said: It remains a matter of speculation whether this will actually be the case in future.

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⁸ For an analysis of how far this is the case at present cf. Hepp et al. 2012b.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Sample Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Poland, United Kingdom

Interviewee (pseudonym)	Age	Interviewee's context	Interview place
AUSTRIA			
Manuel Vechter	19	Student of political science, participates in Model United Nations, a simulation of the work of the UNO	Vienna
Maria Rudler	23	Student of political economics, lives with her boyfriend in an anonymous neighbourhood	Vienna
Cornelia Sucher	56	Learning counsellor, associated with the Waldorf community, interested in basic income grant as an alternative welfare system	Hietzing, suburb of Vienna
Kilian Wedekind	26	Student of agriculture and nutrition science, develops a system for self-sufficiency for a person who is worried about his personal belongings	Vienna
Melanie Hitzler	38	Business administrator, carrying trade, attached to her cats and animals in general, has a girlfriend from the North of Germany and therefore frequent holidays there	Leopoldsdorf, village nearby Vienna, in Lower Austria
Ilja Hecker	29	Freelance software engineer, highly interested and engaged in local alternative projects (social, economic, ...)	Vienna
Fritz Kantler	61	Returned globetrotter, unemployed, unskilled, who tries to support people with even fewer chances, volunteers in a free-store	Vienna
Peter Auermann	29	Business manager, renewable energies, holding a doctor's degree in economics/social sciences, returned to his local community to spend his life together with his family there	Settlement nearby Wels, Upper Austria
Max Rost	33	Electrician, highly active in training children in his local football club	Steinbach, village in Upper Austria
Friede Kerner	59	Retired nurse, has worked in Africa for some years, engages for peace and is against nuclear energy	Settlement nearby Wels, Upper Austria
Kristina Huber	24	Trainee in a steelworks, has recently been to Mexico for a study sojourn	Linz, Upper Austria
Felix Denkmeier	26	Locksmith and actor, agitates against "the media" and "the politicians", thinks a lot of local communities and relies especially on his friends	Pettenbach, village in Upper Austria

Interviewee (pseudonym)	Age	Interviewee's context	Interview place
Hilde Haltenberger	56	Early retired sales assistant, had been abroad as a young adult, always wanted to travel and live in other countries, but decided to stay in her home region and to comply with her desire by integrating it into her work, where she could make use of her foreign language skills	Settlement nearby Wels, Upper Austria
Edeltraut Riedel	52	Seamstress by trade, currently working as a kindergarten assistant after a long period of preoccupation as a housewife and mother	Settlement nearby Wels, Upper Austria
Amina Zündler	28	Manager for cultural projects, Carinthian Slovene, network of journalists, politicians and other related elites, had established language courses for asylum-seekers, an – initially – award-winning initiative that was later made impossible	Klagenfurt, Kärnten
Karl Autelberg	52	Writer, solitary, taken with Marxist ideas while dismissing their implementation through respective political parties, watches the people around him intensively but does not seek interaction with them	Klagenfurt, Kärnten
Herbert Sennenberger	65	Retired draughtsman, prefers harmony both on a personal level and on the level of society/politics	Walddorf, village on the periphery of Klagenfurt, Kärnten
Rüdiger Genzmer	51	Radiographer, interested in theatre	Klagenfurt, Kärnten
Samir Sirani	48	Heating engineer, immigrated from Iran (then Persia) as a young adult, lives with his family in a middle-class residential area	Klagenfurt, Kärnten
Tobias Odmayr	28	Unemployed, unskilled, college dropout who has returned to his home village, interested in the development of the gold price, occupies himself with computer role-playing, volunteer in the auxiliary fire brigade	Greifenburg, village nearby Spittal, Kärnten
Franz Wellinghaus	63	Retired elementary school teacher, competent with the computer, teaches – on an informal basis – other people to use it	Greifenburg, village nearby Spittal, Kärnten
Hubert Panzer	50	Secondary school teacher, likes to ride his motorcycle	Greifenburg, village nearby Spittal, Kärnten
Carola Dudersdorf	41	Pharmacist, currently mostly occupied with her young children, interested mainly in her domestic duties and local events	Settlement west of Innsbruck, Tyrol
Irene Hiebler	38	Social worker, currently on parental leave, family roots in Bosnia	Vienna
Agron Kirsonic	19	Jobs in a betting shop, dropped out from three apprenticeships, family roots in Bosnia	Vienna
Ute Neidler	22	Draughtsperson, concentrates on her local network with her family and her boyfriend, leaves the field of politics to her father and her boyfriend, assuming that she is not well-read about these issues	Traiskirchen, village south of Vienna, in Lower Austria

Interviewee (pseudonym)	Age	Interviewee's context	Interview place
Helmar Klinker	48	Trainer and moderator, contacts to politicians and journalists, perceives himself as part of the civil society, which for him is everyone who stands up for something	Graz, Styria
Michael Mahdbauer	35	Administrative officer, family roots in Germany, tries to get as many perspectives of media coverage via the use of a smartphone app which he uses to read articles from various countries, if only he is capable of the language	Village nearby Graz, Styria
Lena Müller	18	Pupil, lives in her mother's household, previously dedicated her time to anime/manga and, more recently, identifies more with online gaming	Suburbs of Vienna
Zahra Yezemin	20	Attending job-creating measures, Muslim, immigrated from Turkey as a child	Vienna
DENMARK			
Mette Kongekjær Engholm	24	Musician and teacher for music, highly appreciates security (personal and national), reluctant to advocate for something, as this might rebound on her negatively and put her career at risk	Ballerup, suburb of Copenhagen, Sealand
Anne Solveig Dybegaard	49	Church vocalist, quite withdrawn and contemplative	Copenhagen, Sealand
Bo Falck	29	Recently graduated student of politics, active in various informal projects in the fields of theatre, politics, music, film.	Copenhagen, Sealand
Lasse Drengbjerg	21	Student of economics at the CBS, jobs in a hippie-like soup bar	Copenhagen, Sealand
Poul Omegn	44	Sales promoter, currently unemployed, holds both liberal, conservative and even left wing positions	Brøndby, suburb of Copenhagen, Sealand
Jelena Frydshøj Helsbæk	67	Retired graphic designer, immigrated from former Czechoslovakia as a young adult, experienced Denmark as very open and liberal, in contrast to her country of origin	Brøndby, suburb of Copenhagen, Sealand
Bjarke Kristensen	49	Forestry worker and landowner, perceives all political aspects explicitly from the perspective of his profession	Gl. Stenderup, village in the south of Fyn
Astrid Hyllegaard	43	Teacher, different political orientation (very left wing) than her husband (more conservative), which frequently leads to intensive but productive discussions	Countryside in the middle of Fyn
Lisa O'Connor	62	Arts and music manager, not interested in chitchatting with her neighbours, focuses more on superordinate issues	Castle on the countryside in the middle of Fyn
Marja Kestrupsholm	70	Retired farmer, who does community service in an archive for local history and teaches computing for the elderly	Gl. Stenderup, village in the south of Fyn
Sigurd Birk Vandemose	65	Former blacksmith, night-watchman and church vocalist	Faaborg, small town in the south of Fyn

Interviewee (pseudonym)	Age	Interviewee's context	Interview place
Bjørn Æby	64	Early retired coppersmith, formerly highly active in training handball, in recent years turned to playing golf and maintains much of his network there	Munkebo, village in the north of Fyn
Signe Hæselbjerg	43	Business manager of a handicraft business, always busy, frequent business trips in Denmark but also abroad in Europe and in the Middle East	Håstrup, village nearby Faaborg, south of Fyn
Bente Kallesen	67	Retired nurse, still active doing community service with elderly people	Kerteminde, village in the north of Fyn
Karen Tøjdsholm	22	Trainee in a young fashion boutique, has gained a new perspective on her country/Europe during a round-the-world-trip, looks at politics from the fashion perspective	Odense, major city in the middle of Fyn
Lina Rendensen	58	Cleaning lady, unskilled, backs her family besides her challenging job	Rural settlement in the south of Fyn
Sanne Hellebæk	18	Stock keeper in a supermarket, unskilled, occupied with her daily struggles	Håstrup, village nearby Faaborg, south of Fyn
Lone Søndergaard	24	Student of education, adopted from Korea as a baby, volunteer in a street project	North of Copenhagen, Sealand
Mads Jespersen	51	Architect and hostel keeper, open/liberal, sets a high value on sustainability and environmental issues	Amager, Copenhagen, Sealand
Kjeld Hjemkjær	25	Homeless and unemployed/unskilled, occupied with his life, not interested in politics	Copenhagen, Sealand
Faris Hom	25	Preparing to be a taxi driver, immigrated from Somalia as a child, has moved around a lot in the past years in Europe, Asia/Middle East, Africa	Copenhagen, Sealand
Anders Hansen	33	Street newspaper seller, unskilled, homeless, focuses on the needs of people with difficult means	Copenhagen, Sealand
Jasper Kristensen	55	Allround handyman, autodidact, rejects EU/politicians in general, appreciates his local and informal network	Christiania, Copenhagen, Sealand
Tonja Hellesen	27	Care assistant, unskilled, focuses on her daily life, protests against close-down of a school in her rural area, commutes for shopping across the Danish-German border	Rinkenæs, village in the south of Jutland
Helge Svensen	40	Foreman in a locksmith's, many German colleagues, commutes for shopping across the Danish-German border	Ullerup, village in the south of Jutland
Lotte Lillebjerg	34	Storekeeper, trained farmer, currently on parental leave	Ullerup, village in the south of Jutland
Mikkel Poul Karstensen	32	Vocational counsellor and student of theology, strong Christian belief	Mørke, small village north of Aarhus, middle of Jutland
Linnea Sign Holmbjerg	27	Kindergarten worker, currently on maternity leave	Aarhus, middle of Jutland

Interviewee (pseudonym)	Age	Interviewee's context	Interview place
Zuzan Aril	19	Voluntary service in a congregation, Assyrian Christian, immigrated with her family as a child	Aarhus, middle of Jutland
Pelle Kristiansen	22	Social education worker in training	Aarhus, middle of Jutland
FRANCE			
Angelie Toulon	21	Student of agronomy, shares a flat with other students in Southern Paris, hails from Rouen in West France, plans an Erasmus year in Spain	Paris
Jaques Ardèche	64	Director of a small company in the field of pharmaceutical congresses, loves arts, museums and concerts, well situated family background	Paris
Roberto Zero	25	Agricultural engineer, lives in Mannheim (Germany) but regularly returns to Paris to see his girlfriend, Italian father, French mother	Paris
Stéphane Trufon	27	Psychologist, identifies strongly with Paris, hails from West France, did a lot of backpacking (Russia, Vietnam etc.)	Paris
Victor Mattelart	56	Director of a small company in the publishing sector, identifies strongly with Paris	Paris
Arielle Filou	32	Project manager, shares a flat with a friend, lived in Germany for three years, family roots in Germany	Paris
Karlotta Sapon	65	Retired pharmacist, moved from Paris to a small village with her husband, has three daughters, seven grandchildren	Abondant, small village in central France
Clément Sapon	65	Pensioner, moved from Paris to his place of birth with his wife Karlotta	Abondant, small village in central France
Inès Marquis	45	French teacher, lives in Marseille, speaks several languages, lived in Germany for two years, studied in Paris	Aix-en-Provence, South of France
Marielle Gispon	30	Physics teacher, lives with her husband and two-year old daughter in a small village, identifies strongly with South of France	Le Crès, small village east of Montpellier
Julien Hermès	61	Doctor in the local hospital, born in Dakar (Africa), migrated to France at the age of 18	Valence, South-Eastern France
Fabrice Girard	45	Freelance business consultant, lives and works one week per month in London, lived in Switzerland for a year	Paris
Emma Albert	35	Assistant in the purchasing department of a small fashion company, lives in a suburb in southern Paris	Paris
Florence Bompard	37	Housewife, mother of four children, used to work as a PR assistant, lived abroad for eight years (USA and Norway)	Nantes, Western France

Interviewee (pseudonym)	Age	Interviewee's context	Interview place
Paul Bompard	43	Controller at the French consulate general, worked and lived together with his wife Florence and his four children for eight years abroad (USA and Norway)	Nantes, Western France
Susan Filou	38	Housewife, mother of three children, holds a French and a German passport, trained confectioner	Nantes, Western France
Charlotte Maison	35	Biologist at a local meat factory, grew up near Paris, building a house for herself, her partner and their daughter	La Ménittré, small village in Western France
Fabrice Maison	35	Project manager for the city council, identifies strongly with the region, building a house for himself, his partner Charlotte and their daughter	La Ménittré, small village in Western France
Martin Fleur	63	Pensioner, continues working as a consultant for the company he was employed at, well-situated family background	Paris
Pierre Artis	56	Professor of pharmacy, lives in West France and commutes to Paris for work	Paris
Pauline Miró	42	Engineer, lives with her husband and their two children in a Parisian suburb, loves concerts and making music	Paris
Sylvie Corona	25	Jobless, recently graduated in history and political science, lives with her mother in a Parisian suburb	Paris
Théo Perrier	29	History teacher, lives together with his German girlfriend	Paris
Madaleine Crespel	50	Piano teacher, mother of two children, migrated from Ukraine to France twelve years ago, lives with her French husband in a Parisian suburb	La Frette-sur-Seine, small town in the north of Paris
Cécil Dubiel	39	Sales manager for a news agency, trained agricultural economist, graduated in Marketing, travelled the world for one year	Paris
Frédéric Baisnée	24	Accounting clerk at the French railway company, identifies strongly with his home town Paris	Paris
Amélie Lamarque	25	Doctoral student of history, shares a flat with another student	Antony, small town in the south of Paris
Yves Loire	30	Supply teacher of history, lives in his parents' house in Versailles	Versailles, small town in the west of Paris
Noah Moulin	28	Stock broker at a bank, born and raised in South of France, studied in the UK	Paris
Claudine Mattieu	32	Freelance legal adviser, regularly travels to Paris for work	Montpellier, South of France
Lucas Almenos	58	Jobless, born in Marseille, lived for several years in Algeria, moved to Paris with his wife and two sons a couple of years ago	Paris

Interviewee (pseudonym)	Age	Interviewee's context	Interview place
GERMANY			
Christine Hauschild	42	Foreign language secretary, employed in public service administration, constantly improves her language skills and travels regularly	Bremen, city in Northern Germany
Simon Gärtner	37	Environmental biologist, currently gardener in a public park, identifies strongly with the multicultural and low-to-middle-income district he lives in.	Bremen, city in Northern Germany
Dietmar Lange	60	Retired offset-printer, strong engagement in leftist and environmental activities within the 1968 leftist movement, experiments with engaging in local politics for the green party, trainer of a local soccer team	Bremen, city in Northern Germany
Gerhard Deichen	62	Retired chief executive of a public transport company, travels globally and engages in numerous NGOs despite a recent heart transplantation	Bremen, city in Northern Germany
Susanne Kramer	33	Early-retired and unemployed former cook, fears her approaching move to a larger city as well as too much information on actual politics, interested in cartoons and arts	Bremen, city in Northern Germany
Marianne Becker	40	Long-term unemployed, failed her final exam as a bakery salesperson, depends on social security benefits, dreams of possessing a car	Bremen, city in Northern Germany
Leonie Stiesing	26	Student of biology, well-situated family background, has studied abroad, lives in a shared flat with international students and expresses her support of Europe	Bremen, city in Northern Germany
Anja Gerber	31	Clerical employee about to apply for more fulfilling job, closely related to her family and their local surroundings in a small village nearby Bremen.	Bremen, city in Northern Germany
Karsten Hinze	31	Project manager in a company that coordinates concert ticket sales, writes for music magazines and blogs occasionally.	Bremen, city in Northern Germany
Anita Berger	44	Trained dietician, working as a cook after a long parental leave, strong ties to her family, the local Catholic church and the Münsterland region	Coesfeld, small town in Western Germany
Markus Kleimann	37	Employed in IT-management, trained forwarding agent, following his training in a large company he returned with his family, a Canadian wife and two children, to his home village	Klein-Gerau, village suburb of Frankfurt
Wilhelm Bergmann	66	Retired employee in public service, engages in various civil projects and activities – among others as a volunteer in a national census, as a member in a local running team and skat club	Taunusstein, a village near Wiesbaden, South-Western Germany

Interviewee (pseudonym)	Age	Interviewee's context	Interview place
Sabine Deterding	33	Nurse on parental leave, continues living in her home town, stems from a well-off family, now struggles with economic challenges	Obertshausen, middle-size Frankfurt suburb
Anna Merkel (with participation of her husband Juri)	64	Cleaning lady and her husband, a retired truck driver, both stem from an ethnic group of Germans in Siberia, came to Germany for a better life	Witten, a city in the Ruhrgebiet agglomeration, Western Germany
Heide Lehmann	50	Housewife with two late-teenage sons at home, middle-class family, former office and legal assistant	Witten, a city in the Ruhrgebiet agglomeration, Western Germany
Christoph Lehmann	20	(The former) Heide Lehmann's son, chemical laboratory assistant in training, continues living at home, shares a passion for old timers with his father and brother	Witten, a city in the Ruhrgebiet agglomeration, Western Germany
Corinna Imhof	47	Both on sick leave and jobless, former hairdresser, cosmetician and office clerk, is about to lose the house she grew up in and lives with her family due to financial problems	Witten, a city in the Ruhrgebiet agglomeration, Western Germany
Joachim Gerke	46	Clerk, working for a company that delivers goods to building centres, spends most of his working time in the car, spends any free minute with his little daughter	Linum, village in Brandenburg, Eastern Germany
Constantin Zielke	25	Trained in fishery, returned to living at home after working as a construction worker in Denmark, now employed in an integral nature reserve, head of the local youth fire brigade	Linum, village in Brandenburg, Eastern Germany
Lara Bamberger	31	Public servant, working for the Federal Ministry of Transport, in charge of supervising the implementation of EU development programs, currently on parental leave, cannot imagine living anywhere else than Berlin	Berlin
Yvonne Rauch	22	Works occasionally as a cleaning lady while also training as a social assistant, very modest financial resources, expecting her first baby	Berlin
André Kopp	25	Cleaning worker, specialised in hospital cleaning, and boyfriend of (the former) Yvonne Rauch, low income, gave up smoking hash for his girlfriend and future family	Berlin
Paul Unger	42	Lecturer, teaching German in Erasmus student classes, has working experience in Central Eastern European countries, travels a lot, engages in civic and cultural projects	Berlin
Bela Maschmann	32	Artist, lives under quite rough conditions in the storage room of his shared studio, reports to avoid social contacts	Berlin

Interviewee (pseudonym)	Age	Interviewee's context	Interview place
Kurt Binder	60	Retired manager of sewing company, trained tailors for the company's production in Southern Europe, financially independent, strongly engaged in a local shooting club, part-time hunter	Bielefeld, Western Germany
Dorothea Prenz	68	Originally trained as a laundry worker, has been a housewife for long years, now works as a cleaning lady to upgrade her poor retirement pension, engages in a local church choir	Bielefeld, Western Germany
Jana Kaminski	18	Pupil in 11th grade, lives at home in middle-class conditions, Polish family background, interested in the anarchist movement	Osterholz-Scharmbeck, small town in Northern Germany
Idris Hartmann	18	Stems from a Turkish-German family, currently jobless, finished secondary modern school, spends his time on Facebook, chilling and playing soccer	Berlin
Arnim Pollmann	69	Retired fireman, strong bonds to his local surrounding, travels regularly	Berlin
Christian Bauer	20	Agriculturalist in training, very low regular income, lives partly with his employer and his family	Koblenz, South-West Germany
POLAND			
Kamila Sasnal	21	Soldier from a family of soldiers and student of medicine, lives together with her little son, parents and grandparents, travels regularly to Germany and the USA	Otwock, village in the Warsaw suburb
Janusz Ruchniewicz	24	Student of history, interested in theatre and arts, lives with his grandmother due to limited financial means, travels to his family's residence near Cracow regularly	Warsaw
Marcin Cichocki	31	Monk and priest, living in a comparably large Dominican community, stems from a family of academics in Northern Poland, PhD in theology	Warsaw
Beata Szarek	58	Works in a cloakroom at the University of Warsaw, very limited financial means, takes care for her sick husband, always lived in Warsaw	Warsaw
Barbara Szymańska	52	Trained sales assistant, now working as a cleaning lady for upper-class families, lives with her husband and two teenage sons in a tiny apartment in the centre of Warsaw.	Warsaw
Marlena Gruzińska	29	Finished her German studies a couple of years ago, commutes for her job with a large German travel company from her family home to Warsaw.	Kobyłka, little town near Warsaw

Interviewee (pseudonym)	Age	Interviewee's context	Interview place
Karla Goszyk	68	Retired accountant, assists others in official affairs on an occasional basis in order to augment her income, shares her house with a large number of pets	Radom, town in the center of Poland
Ludwik Reiter	65	Professor of computer science, identifies strongly with traditional family background, was engaged as a local politician in the past	Radom, town in the center of Poland
Arkadiusz Hawajski	44	Sales manager, identifies strongly with the Catholic Church and the PiS party	Radom, town in the center of Poland
Gabriela Klich	32	Research assistant at the University of Gdańsk, holds a PhD in economics, mainly concentrates on her academic career and her two little daughters	Czaple, dormitory suburb of Gdańsk, Northern Poland
Magdalena Gwosdek	33	Young mother and teacher, specialised in assisting disabled children, organises youth camps in European countries	Gdańsk, city in Northern Poland
Dagmara Ptaszek	28	Assistant in the local heritage administration of historical monuments, cannot realise her travelling dreams due to her very low income, learns a number of languages to recompense	Częstochowa, town in Southern Poland
Grzegorz Samochowiec	54	Became comparably wealthy by running a micro business dealing with car tyres, strong bonds to his hometown Cracow	Cracow
Wojciech Budlewski	52	Has been working occasionally as a construction worker, due to a recent eye operation now at home, lives with his family in a one-room-apartment	Cracow
Agnieszka Alpińska	30	Works as an assistant to the executive board of a large German company after finishing her German studies, settling into her newly acquired apartment after her recent marriage.	Warsaw
Radek Kerski	30	Identifies strongly with Warsaw's former workers' district Praga, where he lives and successfully runs a car workshop, maintains some contacts to the local underworld	Warsaw
Marzena Pikarska	48	Jurist, now working as a self-employed law consultant to internet companies, recently bought a house of her own, values classic humanitarian education	Warsaw
Tadeusz Silnicki	24	Student of engineering and former Polish champion of weightlifting, focused on building a successful life, aiming at a well-paid job, an own apartment, a representative car and a family.	Warsaw
Mariola Nierubca	26	Trained librarian, currently jobless, confesses to be not really interested in working, rather aims at being a housewife, self-perception as a 'real' and original Warsawian	Warsaw

Interviewee (pseudonym)	Age	Interviewee's context	Interview place
Bogdan Barań	25	Skilled logistics worker, his dream of buying his own apartment will probably remain out of reach, his passion and hobby is cooking	Piaseczno, dormitory suburb of Warsaw
Paweł Pronobis	60	Commuter from his home village in the south-eastern Polish mountains to work as a lawyer in Warsaw during the week, well-educated, traumatised by his family's experiences in WWII	On the train, from Warsaw to Lublin, Eastern Poland
Horacy Ogrodnik	62	Garden engineer, runs successfully a farm that experiments with agricultural seeds within the network of an international company, travels globally, nevertheless strongly values his local surrounding	Nałęczów, health resort near Lublin, Eastern Poland
Monika Gajdowicz	62	Tailor, lives in very modest circumstances, is a strong believer and meanwhile heavily disappointed with the ambiguous attitudes of Polish Catholic priests, loves to follow soap operas	Palikije, settlement near Lublin, Eastern Poland
Marlena Szczapa	18	Pupil, preparing for her final school exams, bored by Grójec, spends her rare free time by biking or going on shopping trips to Warsaw	Grójec, small town near Warsaw
Greta Dzielska	18	Pupil, preparing for her final school exams, best friend of (the former) Marlena Szczapa with whom she spends most of her free time.	Grójec, small town near Warsaw
Bogdana Kruczaj	56	Works as a legal consultant and regularly engages in taking care of her grandchildren, strong faith, media repertoire mainly consists of religious media.	Cracow
Ryszard Golczyk	58	Early-retired shipyard worker, identifies strongly with the Kashubian region, breeds and keeps pigeons, engagement in the Polish pigeon society and exceptional interest in European soccer	Rumia, village near Gdynia, Northern Poland
Danuta Szerszyńska	38	Trained seamstress, now housewife and mother of two children, identifies strongly with the Kashubian region and the Catholic Church, her husband works abroad, so she gets to know 'the world' through his eyes	Kczewo, settlement in the Kashubian region, Northern Poland
Maciej Szerszyński	22	Nephew of (the former) Danuta Szerszyńska, lives in his parents farmhouse, used to commute to Sopot for a job in a car workshop, now works on an occasional basis	Kczewo, settlement in the Kashubian region, Northern Poland
Edyta Rolny	33	Took over a farm from her parents which she now runs with her husband, disappointed with the EU subsidies which did not improve her financial basis, but complicated daily business	Bartoszylas, village in Northern Poland

Interviewee (pseudonym)	Age	Interviewee's context	Interview place
Slawomir Kaszubski	65	Retired farmer from a family with a long tradition in farming, lives in a small house on his family's areal, takes over representative functions when it comes to public affairs in his village	Bartoszylas, village in Northern Poland
UNITED KINGDOM			
Trisha Mahin	24	Marketing assistant, moved to Bristol six months ago, shares a flat with three young women, travels to her family's house in Yorkshire regularly	Bristol, South England
John Campbell	58	Homeless, used to work as a cleaner, has no contact to his sister who lives in North London	London
Edgar Davies	71	Retired engineer, still assists his former company for which he worked longer periods in Saudi Arabia	London
Elizabeth Hamilton	53	Holds a BA in English Literature	Hampstead, small suburb in the north of London
Lisa Harvey	58	Trained teacher, works as a manager in a hairdresser's shop, hails from Ireland	Richmond, small town in the west of London
Oliver Cox	30	Waiter in a fish restaurant, working-class family background, lives together with his French girlfriend	Richmond, small town in the west of London
Eva Celik	42	Owner of a small clothes shop, hails from Turkey, strongly identifies with her Turkish neighbourhood community	London
Daniel Weaver	49	Freelance financial trader and statistics trainer, graduated in natural sciences	Wimbledon, suburb in the south of London
Louis Barney	21	Graduated in English Literature recently, currently jobless, shares a flat with his girlfriend and other students	London
Charlotte Miller	36	Nurse, politically active in local groups in the field of charity, spent a year working and travelling in New Zealand	London
Ismael Brooker	62	Owner of a small coffee shop, former engineer, hails from Lebanon, migrated to the UK in the 1960s, politically active against the Iraq war	Richmond, small town in the west of London
Heather Turner	28	Logistics manager at the British ministry of defence, shares a flat with three young women, family roots in Manchester	Bristol, West England
Amber Johnson	29	Architect, born in South Africa (South African mother), grew up in a small village in South East England, strong identification with the UK	Bristol, West England
Julia Riley	25	Project Manager, shares a flat with three young women, family roots in Somerset (South West England)	Bristol, West England
Alexander Spring	27	Biologist, owner of a small event agency, strong identification with his home town Bristol	Bristol, West England

Interviewee (pseudonym)	Age	Interviewee's context	Interview place
Dennis Cooper	29	Political scientist (BA), worked for a think tank, politically active in the Labour party, currently studying political science (MA)	London
Jessica Price	50	Project Manager at the University, family roots in India, politically active in the field of environmental protection	London
Sophie Clifton	36	Elementary school teacher, hails from Australia, lives in England for 12 years, shares her house with a friend	London
Tamara Tannhäuser	30	Marketing Assistant, born in England, grew up in Germany, where her parents and sister live. Studied in Holland, Belgium, Spain and Australia	London
Rebecca Brix	20	Student of social work, shares a flat with other students, family roots in London	Plymouth, South England
Steven Corner	20	Student of history and political science, lives together with his mother, strong identification with his home town Plymouth	Plymouth, South England
Charlie Willis	25	Works as an usher in a small theatre, lives together with his parents, family background characterised by narrow circumstances	London
Scarlett Coronis	54	Social worker at a college, lives separated from her husband in a small house with her 19-year-old daughter	Sowerby Bridge, small village in Yorkshire
Nicole Koronis	19	Insurance agent, lives together with her mother (the former) Scarlett	Sowerby Bridge, small village in Yorkshire
Jamie Plotter	24	Political scientist, voluntary worker in an Oxfam bookshop, earns his living by looking after a handicapped boy	Leeds, Midlands England
Luke Smith	59	Retired teacher, owner of a small coffee shop that he does not run for profit but for meeting young people and organizing concerts	Leeds, Midlands England
William Porter	63	Pensioner, works for 1-2 days per week in a second-hand bookshop, has been politically active in the city council	Leeds, Midlands England
Nancy Warner	53	Owner of a small bed and breakfast business, lives separated from her husband and her two sons, online games play a major role in her free time	York, East Midlands England
Jack Whistler	36	IT supporter for the local archaeological charity, identifies strongly with his hometown and region, has travelled only twice abroad	York, East Midlands England
Megan Fraser	27	Saleslady in a local bookshop, hails from Scotland, moved to York four years ago, identifies strongly with Scotland	York, East Midlands England

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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