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WP2: Interpreting the past (The construction and transmission of historical memory)
Deliverable 2.2: Transnational analysis of historical discourse production and young people’s socialisation into memories of the ‘difficult past’ across Europe

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1. Introduction

The report provides transnational comparison of the production and transmission of social memories about problematic periods in national history among young people across Europe. The focus of this report is on the selective and intersubjective processes that shape how young people become socialised in mnemonic communities. Arguably, youth’s internalisation of political values and ideas is historically and culturally conditioned and is a result of their (dis-) engagement with the ‘difficult’ pasts of their countries. Our analysis of regional case studies examines what impact the ways how the ‘totalitarian’ national pasts are remembered in societies has on spread of radical political ideas among young people there. It also maps common and different features in the transmission of political heritage across European regions that share ‘traumatic’ or ‘problematic’ historical periods and evaluates various mediums of mnemonic socialization (e.g. museums, archives, family memorial practices, school curriculums, etc.). The report is based on the analysis of the research findings produced in the course of the first phase of MYPLACE WP 2 ‘Interpreting the past’, which were published as national reports on historical discourse production as manifested in sites of memory in MYPLACE Deliverable 2.1 (January 2013).1

1 Deliverable 2.1 country based reports had been produced by each regional partner of the MYPLACE consortium from the UK (University of Warwick), Denmark (University of Southern Denmark), Finland (University of Eastern Finland), Germany (two reports from the Western (University of Bremen) and Eastern (Friedrich Schiller Universität Jena) parts of the country), Russia (Scientific Research Centre ‘Region’, Ul’ianovsk State University), Estonia (Tallinn University), Latvia (Daugavpils University), Slovakia (University of SS Cyril and Methodius), Hungary (Debrecen University), Georgia (Caucasus Research Resource Centre), Croatia (Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences), Greece (Panteion University of Athens), Spain (Pompeu Fabra University), and Portugal (Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology, ISCTE, Lisbon University Institute). In Deliverable 2.2 we refer to these national reports citing the names of the report editors and the year of publication.
1.1. Methodology and theoretical frameworks

Several key concepts underpin the common theoretical framework for investigating the production and transmission of historical discourses and their reception by young people employed in the national case-studies on which our transnational analysis is based. Some of these concepts are discussed here in relation to the methodology of our transnational analysis.

Drawing on Halbwachs’ (1992) conception of ‘collective memory’, Boyarin argues that ‘identity and memory are virtually the same’ (Boyarin 1994: 23) since both are the product and manifestation of power relations at work within society. Thus, memories are intersubjective and symbolic since they are selected in order to constitute group membership and individual identity and are constantly reshaped, reinvented and reinforced as ‘members contest and create the boundaries and links among themselves’ (ibid: 26). Anthropological studies of memory often emphasise the closeness of this link between identity and memory and pay significant attention to conflicting memories as sites of the politics of identity (Pine et al 2004: 4). According to Klien this linkage between memory and identity is not accidental; he sees ‘identity’ as part of the ‘memory discourse’. Klien insists that the link between these two concepts has to be examined in relation to the perceived conflict between memory and history. He cites Maier’s argument that memory is appealing because of its articulation of ethnoracial nationalism that directs away from the cosmopolitan discourses of history (Klien 2000: 143). Thus the use of memory as a ‘replacement of history’ often is a result and indication of the historiographic crisis which social sciences and humanities are currently experiencing (ibid: 145). This strong statement is echoed by Assmann and Shortt in their analysis of the significance of memory for societies going through the process of transition (2012: 4). Memory often comes to the fore in societies living through transition as an important resource employed to question the authority of established
historiography, to revisit a nation’s political heritage, and to renegotiate meanings of national identity.

What members of a particular society remember is not a purely individual or psychological phenomenon but the product of the relationship between politics, as a realm of power, and the social construction of meanings of the past; a process encapsulated in Boyarin’s (1994) notion of the ‘politics of memory’. If a ‘collective memory’ of the nation is institutionalised as official historiography, imposing a particular ‘superorganic’ vision of a people’s past (Boyarin 1994), rememberings of marginal and subordinated groups often challenge these dominant discourses. For Pine et al (2004: 4) memories of marginal groups ‘always represent at least a potential source of power and tool of opposition’. Sturkin (1997) also recognises the potential of ‘cultural memory’ – memories outside formal historical discourse yet rooted in cultural products and imbued with meaning - to generate alternative visions of the past (cf. Olick and Robbins 1998: 111).

In this report we examine historical discourses by looking into the processes where the dynamics of the interactions between history (in its institutionalised forms) and social remembering/oblivion are articulated and crystallised. Importantly history and memory are not monoliths; sometimes the boundary between these two aspects of historical discourse is difficult to determine. Moreover, the dynamics of interactions between history and memory are not unidirectional. Thus, we are looking here at the dynamics between how the memory is interpreted and used in the works of historians and how history, in turn reproduces itself, or informs memory (or at least wider contexts in which it is always set). For Klien (2000) memory
is not only socially constructed it is also a historically contingent mode of engagement with the past. Therefore despite what is often perceived as the opposition of social memory to historiography, memory is a part of contemporary historical discourse. Furthermore, Kevin Birth (2006) maintains that the social memory and construction of identities is not dissociated from writing history, since every historian is to a great extent part of the mnemonic community, or in Bourdieu’s terms, has his/her own habitus.

During the first phase of the MYPLACE ‘Interpreting the past’ work package (WP2) we investigated how historical discourses are manifested and transmitted across generations in such ‘sites of memory’ as museums, archives, memorial sites, commemorative organisations, etc. within our national case-studies. Our understanding of ‘sites of memory’ as a concept has been developed from Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* which problematizes the relationships between memory and history. Nora (1989) opposes *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory in which memory is embodied as lived experience, to *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory where memory is crystallised to such an extent that it disappears. As Scott maintains memory has become fixed in records, monuments and artefacts; it has, in other words, become History (2002: 226). Observers stress the importance of the sites of memory for production and transmission of historical discourses within society. For instance Radley argues that monuments and museum collections invite and provoke people to elaborate meanings of the past. By talking about artefacts and arguing about competing interpretations of the past emplaced in commemorative sites people construct and transmit historical memory making it a ‘collective affair’ (Radley 1990: 57).

The regional partners in MYPLACE have developed partnership relationships with public non-academic (or semi-academic) institutions which have been identified as important ‘sites of
memory’ for WP2 research activities in order to access and examine different sites of historical discourse production. Among these sites of memory there are 13 museums, 2 1 archive, 3 1 public-law institution, 4 2 NGOs, 5 and in the case of the Georgia the research has involved visits to a number memorial sites in the locality. Insights into construction and representation of historical narratives in the sites of memory have been received in the course of participant observation in the public institution settings and expert interviews with the institutions’ staff members. In some cases (e.g. Georgia, Russia) expert interviews have included high school teachers. 6

At the same time, we would like to emphasise that the country-based reports on the production of historical discourses have never been envisages a representative of national historical discourses; they were designed, rather, as case-studies which aim to provide insights in production and transmission of historical discourses in the particular regional context and as manifested within particular ‘sites of memory’. Therefore, the regional findings which have been used for transnational analysis are not based on a nationally representative sample but in many instances are heavily shaped by regional political and socio-economic conditions, as well as the particular choice of site. Thus, for example, although in the report we refer to British or Spanish case-studies, in fact they account for West Midlands (or Coventry, more specifically) and Catalonia

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2 The museum partners are the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum (Coventry) in the UK; the House of Terror Museum and Holocaust Memorial Centre (Budapest) in Hungary; Bunker Valentin (Bremen) and the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany; The North Karelian Provincial Museum (Joensuu) in Finland; the Memorial Museum at the Memorial Site (Jasenovac) and the Croatian History Museum (Zagreb) in Croatia; the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (Riga) in Latvia; the Exile Museum (MUME) (La Jonquera) in Spain; The Dybbøl Battlefield Centre in Denmark; the State Museum of Political History of Russia (St. Petersburg) in Russia; and Art Museum of Estonia, Kumu (Tallinn) in Estonia.

3 In Greece the research has been carried out in the Contemporary Social History Archives (ASKI).

4 In Slovakia the research was conducted in partnership with The Nation’s Memory Institute.

5 Two sites of memory have been represented by nongovernmental organisations, such as Memorial Democràtic (Barcelona) in Spain; and the Associação 25 de Abril (Lisbon) in Portugal.

6 Altogether 73 expert interviews have been conducted in partners’ institutions. Within each regional case-study 3 to 5 experts have been interviewed.
respectively. Moreover, the country-based reports highlight the significance of the particular institutional context of our ‘sites of memory’, which sometimes have very strong political identities and affiliations, in the portrayal and interpretation of historical events and/or periods. However, through reflection on such limitations of our regional findings it is possible to reach some generalisations about historical discourse production and their reception by young people beyond the regional and site-centred context. Often regional (and/or alternative) discourses or politically driven institutional representations of the past have been developed as part of national historical discourses to which they conform, with which they negotiate, or which they oppose. The choice of the particular cases arises from the notion of the dynamics in the production and re-enactment of historical discourse. This implies an inductive rather than theory driven approach since we have been investigating how the sites of memory participate in and create historical narratives at the same time as they are themselves a product of historical discourse.

Commemorative sites thus occupy an important place in the MYPLACE approach to understanding the transmission of historical memories across generations. At the same time, we do not see young people as passive recipients of historical narratives but rather as active participants in diverse mnemonic communities. For example, official visions of history presented at commemorative sites are often challenged and interrogated by, what Snider calls, ‘mass personal memory’ that is ‘personal recollections held by enough individuals to have national significance’ (cf. Ochman 2009: 419). This process of making sense of the present conditions through active engagement with the past can be defined as a ‘memory-work’ (Hamilakis and Labanyi 2008: 12) since, as many of our case studies show, the meanings of the present day national/local identities are produced through conscious and embodied engagement with the past
in the course of which (family) memories are mobilised, official and/or mainstream historiography is challenged or confirmed and alternative history and ‘traditions’ are imagined. In our research we access young people’s experiences of the historical discourses and their memory-work through conducting a number of focus group with young people who have visited the ‘sites of memory’. In each regional case-study between 3 and 5 focus group discussion were carried out with young people aged between 16 and 25. Moreover, since we are interested in the experiences of historical discourses and the role which mnemonic socialisation plays in political and civic activism of young people across Europe, we targeted for interview both young people who visited the museums as part of their school/college curriculum and those who can be described as activists because of their active engagement with particular social and political issues.

1.2. Structure and organisation of research findings

The key results of our transnational analysis are presented below in two sections. The first section discusses the production and transmission of national/regional historical discourses. The commonalities in differences in national historical discourses have been analysed in clusters (see the discussion of clustering strategy below). The young people’s experiences of historical discourses, their reception, rejection, internalisation and interpretations are presented in the second section. Here the main forms of young people’s engagement with historical discourses and collective memory are discussed across regional case-studies with direct reference to the thematic clusters outlined in the preceding section.

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7 Altogether 54 focus group discussions have been conducted across the MYPLACE regions. In some cases (East Germany, Finland), however, the focus group interviews are limited to one.

8 Although our objective was to have at least one activist focus group in each regional case-study this was not achieved everywhere (e.g. Germany, Latvia, Estonia, Croatia, Slovakia, Denmark, and Finland).
2. Transnational analysis of historical discourse production and young people’s socialisation into memories of the ‘difficult past’: Research findings

2.1. Clustering national historical discourses

In order to compare regional case-studies and reach some generalisations about commonalities and differences in production and transmission of historical discourses about the ‘difficult past’ we applied a cluster approach in our analysis. The regional case-studies presented in country based reports (Deliverable 2.1) were thus clustered thematically. In our analysis common themes were identified along the following principle: i) historical events or periods which dominate the current political and historical discourse and often have a trans-regional character (e.g. WWII, experience of state socialism, history of the domestic nationalist or fascist regimes, etc.), ii) common characteristics of the present socio-economic and political conditions which impact on how the ‘problematic past’ is remembered or/and employed as a resource for articulation the contemporary political concerns in society (e.g. economic crisis, policy of austerity, rising protest movements), and iii) the role which different agencies and structures play in the production of historical discourses in representations of the ‘difficult past’ (e.g. the representation of historical events either from the state perspective or, alternatively, employing a social history approach that emphasises the ‘everyday’ and ‘ordinary’ perspective).

This analytic strategy has strengths and limitations. On the one hand, the themes have been developed from the careful reading of country-based reports and, therefore, are to a degree a result of an inductive approach to the data (which, however, is a secondary source since it is based on research findings produced in the course of regional case-studies; this itself imposes a
substantial limitation on our analysis as explained above). In some cases this clustering strategy leads to the emergence of rather predictable geographical clusters (e.g. the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Germany, Scandinavian case-studies). On the other hand, the principles for identifying themes for comparison have been developed from above specifically for the purposes of transnational (trans-regional) analysis which would allow bringing together several rather different and unique regional case-studies in their historical content and cultural context. Thus, it allowed the comparison of geographically distant regions such as South European countries and the UK. However, one might argue that had we chosen different principles for thematic comparison we would have generated different clusters and perhaps arrived at different conclusions regarding the processes of production and transmission of historical discourses. For example, had we prioritised the national narratives of civil war and ethnic conflicts as living memory/oblivion we might have discerned a cluster consisting of case studies from Georgia, Croatia, and perhaps Greece and Spain. Had we focused on regionally/ethnically divided mnemonic communities as a comparative theme then the clustering of Germany, Latvia and Estonia together would have been plausible. Nevertheless, our choice of principle for thematic comparison is consistent with the project’s focus on current political processes as factors shaping how individuals and society remember and engage with the past. Thus, in our analysis we identified the following three themes: experiences of post-socialist transformations, living through austerity and economic crisis, renegotiating meanings of national identity. These themes provide the focus on the most important factors in formation of historical discourses at the national level, at the same time, giving enough scope for transnational comparison across regional case studies.
Cluster 1: Central and Eastern European cases of historical revisionism and battles over the issue of national identity and memory

This cluster covers case-studies from former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (except East Germany) such as Slovakia (see Deak 2013), Hungary (see Sik 2013), Croatia (see Perasovic and Vojak 2013), Latvia (see Saleniece et al 2013), Estonia (see Nugin et al 2013), Georgia (see Zurabishvili and Khoshtaria 2013) and Russia (see Safonova et al 2013).

The majority of the public institutions where the research was carried out have emerged, or changed their profile, in the course of the political transformations following the collapse of state-socialism. As ‘sites of memory’ these institutions have clear political agendas in relation to historical periods and events that are defined as the ‘difficult’ past and how they are represented.

Thus in Slovakia, the Nation’s Memory Institute (Ústav pamäti národa; NMI) is a semi-academic public-law institution founded by the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. The NMI was created in 2002 mainly in order to provide an institutional base for objective interpretations of the so-called ‘unfree’ periods of Slovak past (obdobia neslobody), between 1939 and 1989, to provide a data bank that might be used for the prosecution of perpetrators of crimes during this period (Deak 2013: 3). The period in question covers that of the pro-Nazi Slovak Republic under the Tiso regime followed by the establishment of the Czechoslovak (Socialist) Republic ruled by the Communist Party.

In Hungary, the research was carried out in two museums representing rather different interpretations of the ‘problematic’ periods in national history. After the transition in 1989, an
exceptional need for memory work was evident since neither the Horthy era (1920-44), nor the Holocaust (1941-45), nor the decades of state socialism (1945-89) had been discussed properly before. More than ten years after the transition, this vacuum was intended to be filled by the opening of the House of Terror and the Holocaust Memorial Center. The House of Terror Museum was opened in 2002. The Museum is situated in the building which served as the headquarters of both the fascist (Szálasi’s regime, 1944-45) and communist dictatorships; it functions as a memorial center for the victims of both terrors and as a research centre for both historical periods. The other partner institution, the Holocaust Memorial Center, was opened in 2004. It is situated in a former synagogue, which during the Holocaust served as a collecting camp for deportations. Similarly to memorial centers in other countries, it functions as a complex memorial site, museum, educational and research centre, focusing on the events of the Hungarian Holocaust (Sik 2013: 4-7).

Similarly to the Hungarian case-study, in Croatia the research has been conducted in two public institutions - The Memorial Museum at the Memorial Site, Jasenovac and the Croatian History Museum - which represent the two traumatic periods in the national history WWII (1941-45) and the Homeland War of 1991-95 respectively. The Memorial Site, Jasenovac is located near Jasenovac, a place that was a concentration camp during WWII and is located about a hundred kilometres from the capital of Croatia, Zagreb. The Croatian History Museum is located in Zagreb. Jasenovac and the Croatian History Museum are amongst the most important museums and sites of remembrance in Croatia funded by the local and state authorities with a primary goal of preservation and presentation of certain historical memories (Perasovic and Vojak: 23). The

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9 The Croatian History Museum hosted an exhibition about the Homeland War at the time of the research.
traumatic events of WWII and the Homeland War are both separated and linked by half a century of Croatia’s existence as part of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia which is seen by some nationalist politicians as being a Serb-dominated and oppressive Communist state that denied Croats their national state. Thus historical discourses about certain ‘sensitive’ or controversial issues from WWII and the period immediately following it have partially imprinted themselves onto the historical discourse related to the Croatian War of Independence (ibid: 21).

In the MYPLACE project, the Latvian case-study has been completed in cooperation with the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia that deals with the recent history of Latvia (1940-1991). The museum was founded as a private museum in 1993. This suggests the institution’s financial and, presumably, political independence. The Museum’s mission has the following objectives: i) to identify, research, elucidate and commemorate the crimes against the state and the people of Latvia from 1940 to 1991 that were committed by foreign occupation powers of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany; ii) to preserve the historical memory of the Latvian people about the ‘occupation period’; iii) to inform and educate the people of Latvia and other nations about the history and consequences of the occupation period in order to strengthen the Latvian state and its place amongst the free and democratic nations of the world (Saleniece et al 2013: 5).

In Estonia, the research has been based in the Kumu contemporary art branch of the Art Museum of Estonia. Kumu is the first national museum that has been erected during the period of regained independence in 1991. The focus of the case-study has been two exhibitions organised by Kumu a) ‘Let’s Talk About Nationalism. Between Ideology and Identity’, and b) ‘Fashion and the Cold War’. Both exhibitions dealt with problematic topics that have their roots
in the past and representations of the past. The first exhibition actively questioned and criticized the taken-for-granted notions that nationalism has taken root through ideology in people’s everyday lives. The exhibition tried to analyse critically the sources of ideological nationalism and identity – topics that are particularly important in the country with a significant Russian-speaking population. The second exhibition, however, openly dealt with history-related topics, yet seemingly leaving contemporary politics aside. The exhibition, nevertheless, offered an interpretation of the cultural processes in the decades following World War II and actively engaged in the debate about the memories of Estonia’s Soviet past. Thus the museum positions itself as an active meaning creator for interpretation processes and not just a mere presenter of historical artefacts (Nugin et al 2013: 4-6).

A case study of the Russian team was conducted in the State Museum of Political History of Russia in St Petersburg, formerly constituted as the ‘State Museum of the Russian Revolution’ (founded in 1920). During the Soviet period the museum served to preserve the memory of the October Revolution (1917) as a key event in the formation of the Soviet state. In the museum there is an archive, which contains materials that are used as resources for historical works. Over the course of its existence the museum has changed its name, management and ideology of its expositions. It was a repository for documents as well as was losing them during the ‘political purge’ of 1929-1953; and has found new sources and types of exhibits (for example, materials from the pre-and post-election protests of autumn 2011 - spring 2012). In August 1991 the museum was renamed (and converted to) the Museum of Political History of Russia. The museum has the most constant and largest exhibition in St Petersburg of different aspects and periods of Russian history of the twentieth century with a particular focus on the early Bolshevik
regime, the Stalin era (including WWII) and the late Soviet period. Despite having ‘political history’ in its name, nowadays the museum exhibits objects of daily use, reflecting the idea that political history is created through the relationship between political leaders and the everyday practices of ordinary people (Safonova et al 2013: 3-4).

Finally, in Georgia the WP2 case-study is based in Telavi (a small town that is a district centre in the Kakheti region of eastern Georgia) where the research is carried out in collaboration with the Telavi Historical Museum. However, the museum has been closed for major reconstruction work from April 2012. This reconstruction is part of a big regional project ‘The rehabilitation of Kakheti’ (Zurabishvili and Khoshtaria 2013: 7). The project was initiated by the national government under the President Saakashvili’s administration and financed from international sources. Although officially having as its objective to improve living conditions of the local population and make the town more attractive for tourists by recognising its historical heritage, the ‘medico-political’ connotations in the project’s title implies also a particular vision of the past, present and future of Georgia as a post-Soviet nation. Arguably, this vision is characterised by re-vision of history that involves re-evaluation of the Soviet political and cultural heritage.

The research design was adjusted to the changing circumstances. Thus, rather than focusing on the museum as a main site of memory in the course of the ethnographic fieldwork a number of sites (monuments, churches, cemeteries, buildings and other important landmarks in the town) were identified. These sites demonstrate shifts in commemorative practices and historical memory since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The proliferation of a nationalist vision of the Georgian past with strong anti-Soviet (and by extension anti-Russian) ‘occupation’ narrative in representation of the 20th century history is manifested by the neglected state of old Soviet
monuments in Telavi and emergence new commemorative sites to remember the events of Georgian resistance to the Soviet rule. At the same time, social, economic, political and cultural transformations which characterised the 1990s became emplaced in the decay of the town’s infrastructure and dare state of some its historical buildings. The 1990s – the years which followed the collapse of the USSR – is a period of Georgia’s history in which territorial losses occurred in the course of the violent Abkhazian (1992-93) and South Ossetian (1991-92, 2008) conflicts – the events which have been identified as problematic/difficult events in the national history.

Despite such different regional and institutional contexts within which historical discourses are produced, there are two striking commonalities across all national cases in Cluster 1.

First, the state appears to be a key agent in the historical process and producer of historical narratives. This may be a direct legacy of the approaches to history adopted during the socialist period as well as its (still) dominant role in the production of educational materials, television programmes, determination of national holidays etc. via which young people are introduced to understandings of the past. One consequence of this is that the past is often represented from above by focusing on the history of groups and individuals in power, high culture and state ideology. It follows that in this representation of the past, the diversity of local, community, individual experiences of history are overlooked, ignored or played down (see below). Although different interpretations of the past can be discerned, they fall within the same paradigm in which the historical process is seen through the history of the state, its institutions, powerful groups and individuals, etc.
Secondly, national historical discourses are produced in conditions of ‘historiographical crises’ (Klien 2000) as a result of political changes during post-socialist ‘transition’. Thus, post-socialist politics of memory is characterised by different and often opposing each other interpretations of the past within institutionalised historical discourses. Often none of these discourses can be defined ‘mainstream’ or ‘dominant’ unambiguously. This situation might be experienced by social actors as a perceived absence of the consensus on the national historical narratives. This implies that citizens (including young people) are invited to take sides in the discursive struggle over the interpretation of the past. In many cases different historical interpretations have strong associations with particular, and often opposed, political ideologies. This creates space for the development of radicalised and politically extreme interpretations of the past (Sik 2013: 113).

Across all national cases there are several common themes within which the past is revisited:

The first is that historical discourses are universally negative towards the socialist/communist past. The main criticisms of this past are: the lack of individual and political freedom; repressions; and enforced political indoctrination.

At the same time historical discourses often fail to criticise the domestic 'fascist' (the Tiso regime in Slovakia, 1939-45; the Ustashe in Croatia, 1941-45; the Horthy government’s complicity in the Holocaust and Szálasi’s fascist dictatorship in Hungary, 1944-45; collaborationism during the Nazi occupation in Latvia and Estonia, 1941-45) and/or Stalinist regimes (particularly in Russia and Georgia) in the past. This can result in the partial rehabilitation of such regimes and tolerance towards far right political groups, such as Hungarian Guards (Sik 2013: 23) and HČSP.
– the Croatian Pure Party of Rights (Perasovic and Vojak 2013: 53-55). Other consequences of such politics of memory might be the uncritical embracing of xenophobic attitudes towards the Roma minority in Slovakia (Deak 2013: 47), or continued disunity and conflicts along ethno-national lines in Latvia and Estonia between ‘titular nationalities’ and Russian-speaking minorities living there (Saleniece et al 2013:36; Nugin et al 2013: 26-28). In some history textbooks and public discourses in Russia, for instance, totalitarian policies during the Stalinist period may be justified as necessary for the successful modernization of society during the socialist period (Safonova et al 2013: 18-22).

A third common theme is that of elements of nostalgia for the socialist/communist past appearing in both public and private domains of social memory. Such nostalgic narratives can be interpreted as reflections on the economic uncertainty of today, the shrinking of the social welfare provision of the state and the growth of social insecurity. The post-socialist period is often perceived as ‘disordered’ in comparison with the ‘order’ imposed under state socialism. The socio-economic inequalities of contemporary society provide the grounds for idealisation and misremembering (and/or selective remembering) of the socialist past.

Finally, historical discourses are characterised by the prevalence of ‘historical nihilism’ among the general public based on the lack of trust in any institutionalized representations of the national past partly due to the over-politicization of historical discourses emerging after the collapse of state-socialism. This may at least partially explain young people’s disinterest and/or
disorientation in interpretations of the past (see discussion of young people’s experiences below).  

Cluster 2: South European and British cases of re-assessment of the 'difficult past' from the perspective of the current economic crisis and 'austerity politics'

This cluster includes regional case-studies from Spain (see Ferrer-Fons et al 2013), Portugal (see Cairns et al 2013), Greece (see Koronaiou et al 2013) and the UK (see Popov 2013).

All public institutions which have been accessed as ‘sites of memory’ within this cluster’s case-studies have clearly left-wing political identities (often being associated with the progressive policies of current or previous national governments). Their political values and responses to government policies as well as to the current conditions of economic crisis (including cuts in public funding that have directly affected such institutions) are reflected in our partners’ approaches to the periods of national history that have been identified as problematic.

In Spain the research was carried out in collaboration with two public institutions working with traumatic memories of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and the Franco dictatorship (1936-75). Memorial Democràtic de Catalunya was established in 2007 as a direct result of a tripartite left-wing government’s (PSC, ERC and IU-EUiA) memory policies in Catalonia. This organisation sees its mission as turning historical memory into ‘a permanent symbol of tolerance, of the

10 Other possible reasons for lack of trust and/or disinterest in history might be the decline in standards of education in post-socialist countries, and current global challenges (with the advance of digital and internet technologies and relative increase in geographic mobility the mnemonic imagination stretches beyond the national past). The growth of historical nihilism might also be connected with new cyber-modernity that challenges state institutions’ authority and control over the representation of the past (examples of this include Wikipedia and the Anonymous movement).
dignity of democratic values, of the rejection of totalitarianism and of recognition for all the people who suffered persecution due to their personal or ideological beliefs or their conscience’.

Furthermore, this institution has developed a policy of regional diversification in collaboration with other small memory institutions in different locations in Catalonia, the most important of which is the Exile Museum (MUME) in La Jonquera. This museum has become a second research site for the Spanish case study. The Exile Museum (MUME) was established by the town of La Jonquera (near the border with France) with the support of the University of Girona. Open since 2007, this museum dedicates its space to remembering the exile caused by the Civil War, explaining its history and encouraging critical reflection from its visitors. The fact that both institutions are very recent initiatives indicates the dynamics of memory policy development under Spanish democracy (Ferrer-Fons et al 2013: 4-5).

The research which underpins the Portuguese case-study was conducted in conjunction with the Associação 25 de Abril. The Associação itself is a private non-profit organisation, established by military officers who organised and carried out the military coup that overturned the 48 year long Portuguese dictatorship of Salazar in the 25 de Abril 1974 revolution. The original members of the Associação had also all participated in the Colonial Wars which took place in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau between 1961 and 1974. Consequently, they all have direct experience, and memories, of this period; some members also participated in the conspiracy that led to 1974 revolution and the ensuing period of political change (Cairns et al 2013: 3).

In Greece, the Contemporary Social History Archives (ASKI) has become a partner institution and a main site for the study of the historical discourses within which the difficult periods of the
country’s history are remembered. The ASKI is a non-profit organization that has been historically linked with Greek left-wing parties from 1940 to 1974.\textsuperscript{11} The archive’s collections and library covers the main traumatic periods in Greece’s recent history: the occupation and resistance during WWII, the Civil War (1946-1949), the imprisonment and exile in 1936-1974, military dictatorship and struggle against it (1967-1974). ASKI maintains an academic profile whilst also attempting to articulate a different discourse on the past from dominant narratives. Committed to making public historical documents and promoting historical knowledge, ASKI believes that ‘democratised history’ may have many alternative narratives which represent a ‘history from below’. ASKI takes an active part in public dialogue on the historical narratives hosting regular seminars and other events. The archive’s staff collaborate with universities participating in conferences, workshops and exhibitions (Koronaio et al 2013: 3-4).

In the UK, WP 2 research activities have been carried out mainly in Coventry (although some fieldwork was conducted also in Nuneaton) in collaboration with the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum (hereafter, the Herbert). Both Coventry and Nuneaton underwent substantial economic and socio-demographic changes as a result of de-industrialisation and re-structuring of local economies during the 1970s-80s. This period, with its legacy of de-industrialisation, economic recession and socio-economic polices associated with Margaret Thatcher (Conservative Prime Minister 1979-90), has often been seen as a ‘difficult’ and divisive time in recent British history. The Herbert museum was founded as a ‘museum of the people of Coventry’ with a mission to serve the city’s population. There are three main themes through which the history of Coventry

\textsuperscript{11} Of particular interest is the archive of the Communist Party (1940-1974), because this was an archive that for many years was not open to the researchers and because the Communist party was illegal until 1974 (Koronaio et al 2013: 3).
in the late 20th century is represented in the Herbert: multiculturalism and diversity (a big display representing different migrant communities living in the city but mostly focused on South Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities); protest movements of the 1970s-80s (miners’ strike, anti-racist movement, etc.); and changes in women’s lives (represented through the experiences of women from different ethnic communities). Public institutions such as museums and libraries had been seen by the previous New Labour government as key actors in their policies of social cohesion that were intended to be implemented through engagement with deprived and marginalised groups and communities as well as through the celebration of cultural diversity and the promotion of social integration. Therefore, by situating the local community(s) in the centre of the historical narrative the museum makes them a useful tool in promoting the principles of social inclusion and cultural diversity. At the same time, social history as a way of engaging with community is an expression of a particular political position (namely, left of centre, and pro-Labour, if not socialist) of the Herbert as a public institution. Moreover, its approach to history through a focus on communities and the lives of ‘ordinary people’ is rooted in left-wing opposition to Thatcherism’s assault on ‘society’ in the 1980s (Popov 2013: 20-24).

The above case-studies have the following common features in production and transmission of historical discourses in their respective regions.

The past is seen through the prism of the current economic crisis that leads to a range of responses including: left-right radicalisation of protest movements which draw on interpretations of the past (Greece, Spain, and Portugal); separatism (Catalan/ Spanish case but also this might be extended to the Scottish independence movement although it is not within the
focus of MYPLACE research); the construction of a ‘depressing vision’ of the present
with strong nostalgia towards the past (the UK, partly Portugal and Spain) which have parallels
with the post-socialist nostalgia discussed in Cluster 1.

Secondly, the cluster is characterised by the relative insignificance of 'national/ethnic narrative'
in debates on the 'difficult past' despite the fact that xenophobic, racist and nationalist tensions
are growing in society. The points of division and conflict in these countries are political
divisions/conflicts in the past and socio-economic divides in the present.

The public institutions in this cluster approach the past predominantly through social history
focusing on particular communities and individuals rather than state-history (as in Cluster 1).
This produces a less unified, or fragmented, representation of the past.

The themes which cut across most of the case-studies in this cluster are as follows:
Traumatic memories of civil wars and military coups in Greece, Spain, and Portugal occupy a
central place in historical debates and politics of memory. This, however, differs from the post-
socialist cases of Croatia and Georgia where conflicts are presented as inter-ethnic violence
resulting from the break-up of federal states and/or foreign invasions (Perasovic and Vojak 2013;
Zurabishvili and Khoshtaria 2013).
Secondly, the ‘problematic’ or ‘difficult past’ is associated with military-style authoritative leadership (‘colonels’ in Greece, Franco in Spain, and Salazar in Portugal) and/or strong political figures (e.g. Thatcher in Britain).  

In all case-studies there is continuity in transmission of divisive political heritage in society despite changes of political regimes or ruling parties in government. Thus Francoism continues to be a divisive issue in Spanish political discourses (Ferrer-Fons et al 2013: 9), similarly to the Estado Nova discourse in Portugal (Cairns et al 2013: 20). In Greece, a left-right political division, with occasional violent outburst, has strong associations in society with opposing camps during the Civil War (1946-49) and with opposition to the Colonels’ regime (1967-74) (Koronaiou et al 2013: 13). In the UK, the evaluations of Thatcherism and Margaret Thatcher’s role in British politics and history are often conflicting if not irreconcilable (Popov 2013: 39-40).

A fourth theme is social oblivion, which often features as a way of dealing with collective trauma associated with the ‘difficult past’ within the context of consolidation of democracy. Thus until recently public debates on the Civil War were absent, perceived as politically incorrect, or prohibited in Greece and Spain (see, for example, Koronaiou et al 2013: 13 and Ferrer-Fons et al 2013: 11). The socio-economic legacy of the Thatcher reforms has not been revisited and their negative impact on working-class communities often misremembered in the UK (Popov 2013). The exception in this cluster is Portugal where the April Revolution is the most celebrated event in the country’s history and marks the end of oppressive and shameful

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12 Emphasising such ‘personification’ of problematic periods of history within Cluster 2, we, however, recognise the fundamental difference between Thatcher’s government, which came to power as a result of democratic elections, and the military dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Greece which committed brutal repressions against their political opponents.
periods of history associated with the Salazar dictatorship and Colonial Wars (Cairns et al 2013: 34).

**Cluster 3: Germany as a case of moralist historical narrative of the ‘difficult past’**

The cluster combines the analysis of historical discourses from both Western and Eastern parts of Germany (see Hashem-Wangler et al 2013 and Bescherer et al 2013). Both German case-studies were conducted in collaboration with the public institutions which represent the memorial sites commemorating the victims of Nazi concentration and forced labour camps. Both sites have strong deductive and educational programmes targeting school students. Thus these sites of memory directly address the National-Socialist past as the most problematic period in German’s history.

The memorial site Bunker Valentin, Bremen (the West German case-study), was known as the Valentin submarine bunker, a protective shelter built to construct German war-submarines during World War II at Rekum, a small port on the Weser River in Bremen. From 1943 to March 1945 forced labourers were used to construct the pens, which, however, were damaged by air-raids and remained unfinished by the end of the war. The Valentin U-boat bunker was the largest fortified bunker not only in Germany but in Europe. After the war the German army used this unfinished building as storage. Military use finally came to an end on 31 December 2010. In May 2011 the bunker was opened as a memorial site and a museum (Hashem-Wangler et al 2013: 3).
The focal point of the East German research has been the site of the former concentration camp Buchenwald, near the Thuringian city of Weimar. The concentration camp Buchenwald was one of the biggest on German territory. Its main function was the mass imprisonment and annihilation of political enemies and persecuted groups including Jews, Sinti and Roma, and homosexuals, who were held in horrendous conditions in the camp. Additionally, in Buchenwald, and even more in the sub camp Mittelbau-Dora, the systematic use of forced labour in military and other sectors of industry was widespread. After the liberation of Buchenwald and its associated camps the camps were not destroyed but used for different purposes. Buchenwald played an important role until 1950 as Soviet special camp 2 and used by the Red Army to imprison Nazis, collaborators and people suspected of supporting the National-Socialist regime. These camps were characterized by high levels of security and very poor conditions. Nowadays, there are four permanent exhibitions of which the biggest focuses on the ‘life’ of the inmates in the concentration camp and the internal camp structures. The other exhibitions are: art made by inmates of the concentration camp; Soviet special camp 2 (this memorial is spatially separated from the first); and the history of the memorial work in Buchenwald from 1945-89 (Bescherer et al 2013: 3-8).

The characteristic features in approach to the difficult past in Germany are as follows

There is a shift in the representation of the historical process from a deductive approach whereby the past is narrated ‘from above’ (the state-sponsored politically correct ‘moralistic’ interpretations of the National Socialist past) to a more ‘explorative’ approach which interprets the past events from the position of ‘ordinary people’ (Bescherer et al 2013). Bringing into focus
the everyday life of ordinary Germans during the National Socialist period raises questions about conformity to the murderous regime if not responsibility of ordinary people as ‘willing perpetrators’ (Hashem-Wangler et al 2013). This approach is partly an attempt to respond to growing neo-Nazi and xenophobic attitudes.

The question of contemporary German national identity is a central component of the historical narrative about the National Socialist past. The expression of German national identity has been problematic because of the strong association of the country with the ‘Nazi past’ even several generations after the war (Hashem-Wangler et al 2013: 17). This also highlights the significance of WWII memories for the formation of national identities across Europe that was registered in the majority of WP2 case-studies across all clusters.

A third characteristic of national historical discourse is the marginal place assigned to the socialist past following the unification of Germany. The Western perspective in interpretations of the GDR past is prevalent in public historical discourses; this consists of a negative evaluation of state-socialism similar to most of the case studies in Cluster 1 (see above). In public discourse the discussions of the two ‘difficult pasts’ (National Socialism and GDR experiences of state-socialism) are kept separate as any comparison of these periods proves to be problematic as in the case of the Buchenwald concentrations camp and Soviet Special camp 2. The initial attempts after the unification of Germany to simply counterbalanced the history of Nazi concentration camp with the narrative of the inhumane conditions in its the Soviet counterpart (which was established in the site of the Buchenwald after its liberation) were rejected by historians since the scale of Nazi atrocities committed in Buchenwald and its clear racist nature are incomparable
with the relatively small number of prisoners (who, however, had a rather high mortality) the Special camp 2. Moreover, the majority prisoners of Soviet Special camp 2 were themselves active members of National-Socialist party and Nazi-collaborators some of whom were perhaps involved in the crimes committed against Buchenwald inmates during WWII (Bescherer et al 2013: 24). To some extent the comparison this is a common of the Nazi and Soviet past (formulated in terms of ‘occupations’, ‘crimes’, ‘terror’, etc.) prove to be controversial for most of the cases in Cluster 1 (see in particular case-studies from Hungary and Latvia above).

There are five main themes in the representation of the ‘difficult past’.

The Nazi past is distanced through identification with victims of the concentration camps (forced labourers, Jews, anti-fascist resistance).

A dissatisfaction with the discursive construction of ‘collective guilt’ for the Nazi crimes becomes a characteristic feature of contemporary German identity.

‘Civic/personal courage’ is used as a means of bringing insight into the everyday experiences of ordinary Germans during the National Socialist period which also makes these experiences relevant to the present (explorative approach to history).

There is a strong legacy of ‘mandatory antifascism’ in Eastern Germany. This sometimes becomes a resource for opposing growing xenophobia and neo-Nazi attitudes among youth there. Nostalgic attitudes towards the GDR past in the East can be discerned, reflecting the socio-economic inequalities between Eastern and Western parts of Germany.
Cluster 4: Narratives of nations at war in Denmark and Finland

This cluster is characterized by the presence of war-narratives that contribute to the maintenance of modern national identity of Finns (see Puuronen 2013) and Danes (see Yndigegn and Adriansen 2013), as well as by a prevalent interpretative approach, which presents these narratives as the final solution to the past events. In both Finland and Denmark there appears to be more consensus around the interpretation of the 'difficult past' than in Eastern Europe and less preoccupation with the 'depressing present' when compared with the cases in Cluster 2.

War, either in the form of a decisive battle or continuous conflict, is central to historical discourse in these two countries as well as to the historical memory of the people that draw their identity from such discourse(s). However, apart from the promulgation of the national narrative and unification against the common enemy, which is in both cases the greater political and military power that Danes and Finns have confronted for centuries, there is also significant difference in the concrete circumstances of war. The unification moment for the Danes is the lost battle (the Dybbøl battle was a decisive moment of the Second Schleswig War in 1864 when Denmark lost its southern territories to Germany) (Yndigegn and Adriansen 2013) whereas for Finns the war proved their ability to defend and protect the national territory (as a result of the Winter war against the Soviet Union in 1939-40, Finland lost part of its territory but defended its independence against superior military force).

In the southern region of Denmark, there are currently two main sites exhibiting the historical episode of the Second Schleswig War. These are located at the museum housed in the Sønderborg Castle and at the Battlefield Centre on the top of The Dybbøl Hills, at the very place
where the famous battle took place on the 18th of April ‘1864’. The Battlefield Centre focuses solely on the Battle of Dybbøl, whilst the museum at Sønderborg Castle houses the biggest and most thorough exhibitions in Denmark on both the Schleswig wars. The Dybbøl Hills is a central historical site in Denmark and the war of 1864 is part of the national historical canon, and as such forms part of the curriculum in history in the Danish school system (Yndigegn and Adriansen 2013: 3).

The Finnish case study was carried out in the local Museum in the province of Northern Karelia. The Museum was founded by the city of Joensuu in 1917. The main aim of the museum is to collect, document, preserve and present the cultural history of Northern Karelia, to arrange exhibitions and study the collections, to document the cultural and built environment and to help smaller local museums in the area. This museum has also a specific role as it is entitled to preserve and exhibit the history of some of those areas which were occupied by the Soviet Union in the summer of 1944 (after Finland’s defeat in WWII) and which now belong to the Russian Federation (Puuronen 2013: 3-6). The museum expositions cover two ‘turning points’ in Finnish national narrative: the Civil War of 1918; and Second World War. The former is the main focus of the museum’s expositions since Joensuu was an important air base and infantry training centre during the war (ibid: 15-16).

The significant themes that illustrate the given cluster are as follows.

First, the promulgation of national identity based on the national narrative appears to be accompanied by a strategy of silencing alternative narratives.
This silencing strategy, to a considerable extent, creates a space for presentism, i.e. disinterest of young people in the particularities of the national struggle and orientation towards their present and future problems.

Finally, in both cases the wider contexts of WWII (e.g. collaboration with Nazis, resistance movement, etc.) seem to be played down as controversial and potentially divisive for national identity.

2.2. Young people’s experiences of historical discourses and socialisation into mnemonic communities

The second part of the report focuses on young people’s reception of historical narratives about the difficult past.

Our research demonstrates that historical discourses provide young people with the means to negotiate and interpret contemporary politics and society. Historical discourses – within which the difficult past is conceptualized - make an impact on the production of social memories and transmission of political heritage across generations. Thus young people engage with the difficult past in the following ways:

- passivity, indifference and disinterest in the past (or its official representation);
- active engagement with the past as a strategy and resource for articulation/enactment of political views;
- direct references to institutionalized historical narratives;
- lack of trust in the official and institutionalised representation of the national past;
- embracing, and/or distancing from, family memories of the past as opposed to more institutionalised/official historical discourses;
- intergenerational transmission of political heritage;
- transmission of social memory (socialization in mnemonic communities) through family, educational system, and places of memory;
- living memory/oblivion of the ‘difficult past’ as a reference point for the ‘depressing present’;
- nostalgic memories of the ‘difficult past’ as a reflection on the current socio-economic conditions;
- reference to the past as an expression of nationalist and xenophobic attitudes.

Using young people’s narratives produced in the course of the focus group interviews conducted by partners, in this section we demonstrate how youth across Europe is consciously engaged (or disengaged) with national/regional historical discourses. This memory-work demonstrates that youth’s interpretations of the ‘difficult past’ result from their socialisation in diverse mnemonic communities, which are themselves products of politics of memory in their respective societies (Cappelletto 2003).

**Passivity, indifference and disinterest in the past (or its official representation) have been encountered often among young people in the course of our research in all regional case-studies. However, these attitudes have been most vividly expressed by the participants in the non-activist focus groups in Denmark, Slovakia, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Georgia.**
Such disinterest in the past can be illustrated by the following quotes from respondents’ focus group interviews in different regions across Europe:

Denmark: ‘The past is the past, let’s look to the future…’ [DKFG3R3] (Yndigegn and Adriansen 2013: 35).

Slovakia: ‘Why should I go there [museum]? It happened, just leave it’ [SKFG2R1] (Deak 2013: 50).

‘We live without caring much about what once was’ [SKFG3R1] (ibid: 42).

Latvia: ‘In principle, from what our parents tell us we can imagine the situation they were in, from their stories, from feelings; but all the same, we will never be able to feel it completely, because we already live now: in a different time, in a different world, where there is no such aggression around us as there was in the past’ [LTFG5R22] (Saleniece et al 2013: 28).

These attitudes suggest that since past cannot be changed, it should be left alone. At the same time, they might be interpreted as a strategic avoidance of difficult and potentially divisive themes from the national/regional history (it is notable here that such attitudes are particularly prevalent in Cluster 4 case-studies). Hence, ‘aggression’ is mentioned by one of the Latvian respondents to refer to the complex situation with the interpretation of the Latvia’s history which
is politically charged and divided along ethno-national lines between Latvian and Russian segments of the country’s population.

In contrast active engagement with the past as a strategy and resource for articulation/enactment of political views is particularly common for participants mainly from the ‘activists’ focus groups in such countries as Greece, Hungary, UK, West Germany, Russia, Latvia and Croatia.

In the West Germany case one respondent made direct reference to the significance of historical knowledge while commenting on the contemporary protest movements and parties: ‘For me the Pirates Party is interesting. Somehow, they show social change, well, just how the politicians and the politically active people are influenced by history, where they recognize “in former times it was like this, and now we have to change it”’ [WGFG2R1] (Hashem-Wangler et al 2013: 37).

Similarly one of Hungarian respondents from the ‘radical’ focus group highlighted the close association of history and contemporary political activism: ‘My friends, who are involved in political life and who are trying to establish a local platform, we usually have 2-3 hour long political conversations and we usually end up in historical questions’ [HVB 18] (Sik 2013: 103).

However the Georgian respondents from an ‘activist group’ although claiming that they were interested in history and cared about the past, did not see any strong relationship between this interest and civic engagement: ‘One may be very actively involved in social life, but, at the same time, not be interested in history at all’ [GEOFG1] (Zurabishvili and Khoshtaria 2013: 29).
In Croatia, in response to the frequently repeated question about the connection between the relationship towards the past and being a part of an extremist group, participants tended to note the connections, but their direct knowledge of such people constantly led them to other reasons for joining extremist groups than one’s relationship with the past: “I believe there is a connection, I mean, that’s certainly the case with some, while it is not with others, and then there are some who have a mixture [of reasons for joining], I don’t know how to say it, they become a part of a group without knowing anything, and only when they become part of such a group, when they get a group identity from it, and feel like they found themselves, then they start paying attention to some things, and always look at them in accordance with the opinion of their group. At least a part of them acts that way, I think” [CRFG4]. Except for one testimony reflecting the possibility of understanding extremism within historical context (‘I don’t think we should be apologetic, but maybe such extremist movements can be better understood if we look at them from the perspective of Croatia’s past’ [CRFG2]) all other participants clearly stated that no form of extremism can be justified (Perasovic and Vojak 2013: 54-55).

Direct references to institutionalized historical narratives were heard often in responses of focus group participants from Latvia, Georgia, Estonia, Denmark, Greece, Russia, Slovakia, Spain and Hungary. In these direct references institutionalized historical narratives (e.g. school text books, museum exhibitions, academic publications etc.) were either accepted or critically evaluated. However, uncritical attitudes were mostly expressed by non-activist participants. The following quote from the Georgian focus group, for example, demonstrates their acceptance of the officially authorized interpretation of history: ‘Official [history] is history that should be known to everyone, and unofficial [history] is history that is closed [in the archives], and very few
people know about it’ [GEOFG3] (Zurabishvili and Khoshtaria 2013: 31). In the same vein the historical narratives about the Stalinist period from textbooks were reproduced by the Russian non-activist participants (Safonova et al 2013: 43-45).

The other respondents – especially those who could be defined as activists - seem to engage with the historical narrative in a much more critical manner. The following quotes from interviews illustrate this:

Hungary: ‘The winner’s and the loser’s side. They will tell the story in a completely different way’ [HVG 18]. ‘The same history can be taught many ways, while being more or less faithful to the fact’ [HHB 18] (Sik 2013: 106).

Spain: ‘You know what happened in the Civil War; they explained it to you in class. But when you stand there at the exhibition\textsuperscript{13} and see the images, the videos... you really realise that... that they’re doing that and have no reason to do it except for fear’ [SPFG1] (Ferrer-Fons et al 2013: 51).

Estonia: ‘I think that in connection with the Soviet period... Estonians have a feeling that there is a quite unified interpretation that they have to follow or obey … well, it (Soviet period) has to be presented as bad as possible…’ [ESTFG4R6] (Nugin et al 2013: 44).

\textsuperscript{13} This respondent is referring to her visit to the exhibit “Catalonia bombarded”, produced by Memorial Democràtic. As Ferrer-Fons et al note 'The exhibition provided information on bombardments during the Civil War of which the young people were unaware and which were not provided by the school or their families' (2013: 50).
The lack of trust in the official and institutionalised representation of the national past is another common feature that reflects ‘historical nihilism’ prevalent mostly in the post-socialist context but also in South European countries experiencing economic recession.

Activists from the Russian nationalists’ focus group expressed their lack of trust in the official sources of information about both the country’s past and its manipulation by those in power, by reference to the economic history of imperial Russia: ‘Economics research … that is very hard…because you cannot find much in documents and a lot of things are added there … to get the real numbers of rural economy is almost impossible… the same as if you want to study Ancient Egypt. Probably you can find more written information on Ancient Egypt’ [RUSFG5] (Safonova et al 2013: 54).

In Hungary respondents demonstrated in their interviews also a strong sense of distrust in official historiography as illustrated by the following quotes: ‘No one will know for sure, what happened! (...) It’s not at all sure if it was as we know it. The point is that it’s completely contingent, how the things happened’ (HHB 18). ‘First comes the ideology, history is matched to it’ [HHG 18] (Sik 2013: 106)

The following examples of focus group quotes from Cluster 1 and 2 case-studies convey a similar lack of trust in the institutionalised historical discourses as products of contemporary political conjuncture.
Slovakia: ‘…majority of them (teachers) support Communism….one can see that he [the teacher] does not like it (as it is) and that he would like socialism back. So he politely passes his opinions onto us’ [SKFG1R4] (Deak 2013: 41). ‘History is 100% manipulated’ [SKFG2R8] (ibid).

Greece: ‘[...] and all these narrations and the things that they teach us now, may not be true, at least some of them. Or maybe most of what we hear’ [GRFG4R5] (Koronaiou et al 2013: 35).

Spain: ‘I believe it’s whoever has the power, and right now that’s the media. They sell us a story and we’re so... I’m not saying everyone, but we’re morons in the proper sense of the word, and we believe it all...’ [SPFG3R1] (Ferrer-Fons et al 2013: 70)

In the case of the Estonian focus group with Russian-speaking youth, respondents’ opinion about the over-politicised nature of official historiography led them to the conclusion that the only trustworthy source of information about the ‘difficult past’ might be family memories (a point which is further elaborated in the next sub-section of the report):

Interviewer: So you prefer to believe what is told at home?

ESTFG2R4 (Dimitri): Yes, rather than the written version

ESTFG2R2 (Marina): Because the one who wrote in the text book is a stranger...
ESTFG2R1 (Andrey): *This is written by someone else…*

ESTFG2R2 (Marina): … *this is politics, and politics is not always the truth, let’s put it this way.* (Nugin et al 2013: 43).

Family memories of the past are opposed to more institutionalised/official historical discourses by many respondents across national case studies, but particularly in Estonia, Spain, Croatia, East Germany, UK and Hungary. Young people both embrace family memories and distance themselves from how the past is remembered in their families. Respondents often refer to their family histories to support their disagreement with the interpretations of the past prevalent in public discourses influenced by institutionalized historical narratives.

_Greece:_ ‘At school we discussed some things […] in the previous semester I wrote an essay about oral history, about that period (he refers to the Polytechnic uprising[^14]), [...] I think that the fact that my father had told me all about it […] it prompted me being one of those that supported the whole venture, as opposed to the others who were saying that nobody had been killed etc. Eventually, I could say that it helped me create an identity more ‘revolutionary’ in quotation marks, so to speak’ [GRFG1R3] (Koronaiou et al 2013: 35-36).

_Spain:_ ‘I think it’s good that they explain it, as they confront problems that way… Besides, it is information and cannot be lost. It’s direct information that we have,’

[^14]: The uprising of the Polytechnic School of Athens against the Colonels’ Junta was in November 1973. However, the event in collective memory is associated with the fall of the military dictatorship in July 1974 (Koronaiou et al 2013: 32).
otherwise it will be lost... And it’s better to listen to them than to search on the Internet, because maybe that isn’t true... Your grandparents’ experience is better’ [SPFG1R3] (Ferrer-Fons et al 2013: 66).

In Croatia, although many respondents emphasized the importance of family and older generation (parents) as a source of knowledge about the past, they also talked about the importance of distancing themselves from their parents memories which are charged with nationalist feelings: ‘Because of my opinions about the relations between Croats and Serbs I ended up in a conflict with my parents. Every time the topic is brought up, which is unfortunately very often at home, they always have the same argument – you weren’t alive then and you have no idea what they did to us, you don’t know that they butchered, exiled, and then I say, OK Mum, but that does not mean that some Serbian would do that to me now, I have Serbian friends, that does not mean they would do that to me... I feel pressure from the older generation, as if they are angry because we want to go forward, because, even though the younger generation has respect for our homeland, and I can say for myself that I am a patriot, that does not mean that I want to stay inside that same old frame of mind’ [CRFG2] (Perasovic and Vojak 2013: 39).

**Intergenerational transmission of political heritage**

Whether the family memory is opposed or embraced the intergenerational transmission of historical memory operates in a much wider discursive field that crosses the family boundary. Here it is rather the political interpretation of the past that is either shared across generations or, on the contrary, the younger people present their political beliefs as opposed to the political legacy of the older generation.
In many instances young people declare that their political values and belief are shaped by their parents’ influence on them. Often such explicit statements were made in relation to the socially acceptable political heritage – views which are widespread in society. For instance, in the case of one British activist, the origin of her left-wing anti-Thatcherism was attributed to her parents: ‘I always find my memory, like, if I were to think about the eighties and stuff, I just think “oh it must have been horrible then,” because my mum’s like a massive socialist and she’s always like “oh, that bloody Thatcher” and things like that. So, and my dad’s pretty much the same, and they both, it’s not a particularly happy view of the time. Like they just seem to think that everything was a bit crap for everyone’ [UKFG2R10] (Popov 2013: 41). Similarly a left-wing activist from East Germany talks about being socialized into her values by her parents who were opposed to the totalitarian regime of the GDR: ‘It was clearly influenced by my parents. I always remember them as rebellious. In particular, when they talk about the GDR. They were people who took to the street against injustice. And therefore, naturally, we became self confident and rebellious too’ [EGR1] (Bescherer et al 2013: 28). Ethnic tolerance and open-mindedness are seen by a Croatian respondent cited in the following quote as being inherited from her parents: ‘I don’t believe that the differences are too great. My parents aren’t that much older than me, and they are, especially my mother, very open and have been taught since they were little that it doesn’t matter who is what, but rather what kind of person someone is. No matter if they are Croatian, Serbian or whatever, so I actually believe that I got that inquisitive attitude from them, especially my mother’ [CRFG2] (Perasovic and Vojak 2013: 42).
At the same time, as the following examples from West Germany and Croatia demonstrate, young people distance themselves from and condemn nationalism and xenophobia of the older generation.

West Germany: ‘Well, when they just said that not everything was bad in those times, then it often is the case that people were taught that Jews are bad people and that fascism is a good thing and that you have to be Aryan and so on. And they were not converted to other perceptions afterwards and also … those are also the people who molest foreigners or take part in demonstrations against foreigners. This is alarming to me …’ [WGFG2R2] (Hashem-Wangler et al 2013: 29).

Croatia: ‘My father was extremely active, a Member of Parliament in its first session, and he is active again. Do we talk? Christ, no, that's a disaster. Our discussions are about why I lean towards the left while he is more radical, I must say. I'm actually the only one in my family with a kind of a leftist view, left-centre if you like. And the others are more right wing, so whenever we have Sunday lunches together, it is like a battleground over political views. And it's still like that. Anyway, we don't talk about politics any more because it's just impossible. He calls me a Communist; I call him as right-wing extremist and so on. Just no, it's enough. Not anymore’ [CRFG1] (Perasovic and Vojak 2013: 52).

Importantly in both cases cited above young people openly oppose the political views which are considered to be ‘extreme’ and rather ‘marginal’ to the political mainstream.
The following quote from one of Greek focus groups provides an example how silencing of the ‘difficult past’ is transmitted across generations as a particular political position in agreement with the mainstream political discourses: ‘Because there may be family members that have been killed in that period, there may be disagreements [about the period] among members of the family, without anyone ever explaining why they disagree … some things are discussed and some are not, some things are mentioned and some are not’ [GRFG1R5] (Koronaio et al 2013: 39).

The opposite situation to the Greek one, when conflicting political heritage leads to confusion of the younger generation, is vividly demonstrated in the following quote from the Slovak focus group discussion: ‘In our family it was always said, from my father’s side, that everybody had a good life during the Communist regime. Conversely, from my mother’s side, there…my great grandfather was a landowner…they [the Communists] came to hang him only because he was rich…they sent him to the uranium mines, jailed him and left only a hut for the family…so what am I supposed to think about it?’ [SKFG2R3] (Deak 2013: 39).

The sites of transmission of social memory (socialization in mnemonic communities) are family; educational system (history lessons and text books, but see above), self-education, NGOs, and places of memory. We observe several different sites where young people experience socialization in mnemonic communities that have a strong emotional and sensorial impact on them. They put different weight on these experiences often opposing one medium of transmission to another (e.g. education is often opposed as a less effective medium of socialization to family, popular culture (i.e. films, plays, music, social media, etc.) and places of
memory. Examples of young people’s narratives are provided below in relation to particular sites of transmission.

a) Education system:

‘I trust my grandma and my dad and my friends more than I trust what has been written in textbooks. Because I know how they live today and how they used to live, they tell me about it themselves, I’m pretty sure they can assess what their lives used to be like and what they are like now in Croatia’ [Croatia: CRFG3] (Perasovic and Vojak 2013: 40).

‘There was this teacher who, for the first time, went a bit deeper into this issue and some of the kids’ parents came and demanded that this issue was not dealt with’ [Greece: GRFG1R2] (Koronaiou et al 2013: 40).

b) Places of memory:

‘And you share these feelings with your classmates and you see that history should not be learned from a 300-page book, but should be learned in a more lively way, with museums, accounts from before on historical events that you can ask about. I believe this is the best way to learn about history’ [Spain SPFG3R2] (Ferrer-Fons et al 2013: 54).

‘… to make historical topics look cool and to bring them closer to young people, because Kumu is, after all, a modern museum, like… and young people are more
likely to come here than to, say, the history museum or... mmm... Estonian National Museum...' [Estonia: ESTFG5R2] (Nugin et al 2013: 33).

c) Popular culture:

'I know quite a lot of, like, Ska music and that, but I wouldn’t know that much about the actual, like, movement behind, I know it’s quite like, it was like a socialist kind of youth, trying to create another way, but I don’t know that much about the specific politics of it, no. Around that time it was like the rise of like the National Front really, wasn’t it. Which is, like, I guess, again in times of desperation, in times of recession I think people can grab out for anything to cling onto, as a reason or as a blame' [UK, UKFG2R9] (Popov 2013: 52).

'We don’t learn anything from school. My generation at least, because I graduated from school last year, don’t know a thing; honestly we haven’t even started to think of searching. I started searching about the Civil War after watching Deep Soul\textsuperscript{15}, as in school they don’t provide us with enough stimuli’ [Greece, GRFG3R1] (Koronaiou et al 2013: 35).

d) Family:

'In our school, in the 12th grade there is a huge presentation. Mine was about my grandmother, who was in Auschwitz. I made an interview with her, and we also had a lot of conversations. And I think I know quite a lot about this part. (...) The others

\textsuperscript{15} Deep Soul, or Soul Deep (Psyhi Vathia), is a Pontelis Voulgaris’ 2009 film (Greece, Cyprus) that tells the story of two brothers fighting in opposite camps in 1949 during the Greek Civil War (Koronaiou et al 2013: 15).
already know that this has really shaken me… what my grandma and my family had to go through. …. Sometimes I quarrel with Dad, which easily ends up in great disputes. In fact we usually talk about Hitler, who I don’t find a positive figure, unlike Dad. (…) My grandma lived through the World War II, and she usually stands up and leaves the room, and we are just left there …’ [Hungary, HHG 18] (Sik 2013: 83).

‘My biological grandfather was in the Ultramar16 I didn’t know him so I can’t really speak from personal experience, but it was a negative experience for my family because my grandmother was left with two young daughters, two and four years old. My mother had four or five years after my biological grandfather passed away due to complications from the war, health complications that were compounded by a lack of assistance’ [Portugal, Inês] (Cairns et al 2013: 31).

‘My grandfather lived quite near to the border. They were also forced to leave their farm and to come here. But it has been a hard experience, because they had to leave places of domicile and their homes and everything’ [Finland: FGFI] (Puuronen 2013: 27).

Living memory/oblivion of the ‘difficult past’ has sometimes surfaced in young people’s narratives as a reference point for the ‘depressing present’. The present is perceived in

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16 Guerra do Ultramar, or the Overseas War is a term used in Portugal for Colonial Wars between 1961 and 1974.
continuity with the difficult past (living memory) and interpreted as depressing and frustrating by several respondents from post-socialist case studies and countries experiencing economic crisis.

In Georgia respondents emphasize the importance of their living memories of the events in interpreting the difficult past: ‘The earlier wars [in the early 1990s] happened when we were not born yet, while at the time when this one [2008] happened, we were here, following the events. <…> This made this war the most difficult for us, <…> and the most difficult event in the recent history of Georgia’ [GEOFG1] (Zurabishvili and Khoshtaria 2013: 39).

In Croatia only one respondent mentioned the current economic crises as a ‘difficult period’ in her life: ‘For me the hardest period is this year, there is a crisis, I'm looking for a job, you can't see a way out of this situation, I’ve been sending job applications everywhere – this is the most difficult period in my life’ [CRFG1] (Perasovic and Vojak 2013: 38). In the same focus groups the current conditions were linked with the economic transformations which occurred after the collapse of the state socialism: ‘I wouldn't single out any concrete event, rather the whole process of privatization and transition. That is the thing that definitely has marked us for the next, I don't know, 500 years I guess, until some new communism and nationalisation comes around and everything starts again. This, of course does not have to happen. But our society really has been incredibly impoverished. Not only by privatization in the 90s, but also in the last few years with all these robberies which resulted in the trials of that former political leadership. That is the thing that definitely has an influence on our life today’ [CRFG1] (ibid: 48).
On the other hand the depressive present is created as if through oblivion of origin of the experienced current conditions. Thus in the Greek case the current political situation in the country is evaluated as a permanent state of the country: ‘As an eighteen year old girl I vote reactionary, because I see that there is no bipartisanship anymore, [it] has become one of, even if there are names like left and right, but there are just names, in effect it is exactly the same, exactly the same’ [GRFG3R4] (Koronaïou et al 2013: 44).

The UK case study also provides an example of living memories of urban decay which are embodied in the working-class social centre being vandalized by local youth for whom decline of the working class communities is the only reality they know about. The UK participants also talk about Coventry as a depressing place:

UKFG1R1: ‘Today Coventry is very drab and very grey to me. It’s a shame really.’

UKFG1R2: ‘Coventry to me is a halfway point at the moment.’

UKFG1R4: ‘Yes. I don’t think anyone in Coventry wants to stay here for the rest of their lives… I don’t know, it’s just somewhere that you’d be glad to get away from later on in life’ [UKFG1] (Popov 2013: 62-63).

Nostalgic memories of the ‘difficult past’ are featured in respondents’ answers as reflections on the current socio-economic conditions. Young people mostly in the post-socialist countries and regions discussed in Cluster 2 sometimes express nostalgic attitudes towards the past which is often seen there as ‘difficult’ or problematic. Significantly no such narratives have been recorded in countries from Cluster 4 whereas in the German case the ‘Ostalgia’ is similar to the nostalgic
memories of socialism in other Central and East European countries but the older generation’s nostalgic recollections of the National-Socialist past are criticized and opposed by young people (see above). Thus nostalgia needs to be interpreted in relation to the living memories of the ‘difficult past’ (discussed in the previous sub-section) and as an example of how the past is misremembered in order to convey dissatisfaction with the current conditions. Therefore rather than being an accurate recollection of the past nostalgic narratives represent concerns with the problematic present which are often seen in terms of ‘broken’ or fragmented communities, declining living standards and social security, economic recession, collective underachievement as a nation, etc. The following quotes from focus group discussions carried out in different regions provide examples of youth nostalgia for the past:

Latvia: ‘She [narrator’s grandmother] still remembers the arrival of the Red Army [1944], but, you see, positively, people were glad about it. She was too small to remember the events of 1940, she remembers mainly that people danced, sang and had fun’ [LTFG1R1] (Saleniece et al 2013: 25).

Hungary: ‘There were more chances to go on holiday (...) it was better to be young at that time. Then, the youth could go to good camps, for example at lake Balaton, now they have nowhere to go’ [HVG 18] (Sik 2013: 93).

‘...At least there were clear rules: 8 hours of work, 8 hours of rest, everything was settled. Now everyone has to do overtime jobs’ [HVB 18] (ibid).
Slovakia: *When we look at that, perhaps during socialism there wasn’t freedom of speech, but we had jobs and everything around that. Now, we have freedom of speech and the majority of us are unemployed.* [SKFG1R1] (Deak 2013: 40)

Britain: ‘*In the seventies and eighties I feel it was a lot more acceptable, because such a large, I don’t know what percentage it was, but such a large amount of the population did live in council provided housing, and it wasn’t seen as a bad thing, I think. But also the sense of community was a lot greater, which meant, sort of more, even if there was negative connotations from other classes or other cultures towards a certain community, it would be more a feeling of “oh, we’re all in this, like, together,” all kind of, a lot more communal spirit, which I think's really important’* [UKFG2R9] (Popov 2013: 76).

Russia: *[It] started with education, everybody should get [at least] eight years of study... No promotion of smoking and alcohol as you get now, you turn on the TV after 10 pm there are only tobacco products and alcohol advertising, but then they produced others, ... you have to be into sports, especially in wartime, because these sports skills, they can be useful in a war. Anyway, for the people there was something positive’* [RUSFG1] (Safonova et al 2013: 45).

Reference to the past as an expression of nationalist and xenophobic attitudes

In focus groups history and the past were often linked to the notion of nation and ethnic/cultural ties. The difficult past was also sometimes discussed as ‘shameful’. In several regions, however,
young people refused to talk about past in terms of ‘shame’ implying that they do not accept collective responsibility for events in history (in Germany and Russia in particular). More generally young people’s responses indicate tension around issues of national [collective] identity, ‘tradition’ and role of the ethnic/racial Others in their country’s past.

West German participants instead of talking about the ‘duty to remember’ [Holocaust], put emphasis on ‘this must not happen again’. Thus, their accentuation is on the future instead of the past. In other words, rejecting the discourse about collective guilt also means that young people do not call it shameful anymore (Hashem-Wangler et al 2013: 30). This was further reflected in young people narratives about German national identity being affected by memories of the National Socialism and WWII: ‘Yes, above all, Germany is labelled that way. When you go abroad as a German and you meet some people there and talk to them and you tell them that you come from Germany, then very often you get confronted with remarks on Hitler or something like that. Or someone says “oh, I’m a Jew, I have to be careful now” … that happened several times to me (others expressing approval). My sister once was in Denmark and there they played a game called “Who am I?”, where you get a note on your forehead. And she immediately knew who she was … (oh, that’s mean … Adolf Hitler), yes. Such things happen all the time, Germany is always connected with this’ [WGFG1R1] (ibid: 33).

The German approach to the ‘difficult past’ is referred to in focus group discussion with the Russian National Democrats who also refuse to take collective responsibilities for the crimes of Stalinism which is seen as a regime alien to Russians as a nation: ‘Germans … always trying to achieve the ideal, cathartic in their repentance (…) However, we are also trying to transfer it
into our reality... like let's ask forgiveness for Stalin and so on. It is not quite clear... for what and from whom we should ask forgiveness... except the Communist Party, it has something to ask forgiveness for, and perhaps the country's leaders too. But society itself has nothing to ask forgiveness for, because we had the opposite situation. Because, we did not choose that regime. There was no choice. Germans at least voted for Hitler in his time. And we had an armed takeover of power. The resistance to the regime was not only in the 60s, not only dissidents... It was before that, throughout the whole Soviet time.’ [RUSFG5] (Safonova et al 2013: 55). At the same time the activists from the ‘Searching group’ in the Russian case study, who are ideologically within the pro-Communist patriotic political spectrum, link anti-Stalinist discourse with pro-Western rhetoric and, therefore, non-patriotic or anti-Russian. They evaluated the position of the museum guide as follows: ‘Khrushchev’s’ characterized with ‘an intelligentsia complex about the eternal guilt of the country. But only own guilt. Abroad everything is always good and perfect’ [RUSFG4] (ibid: 49).

Young people from focus groups in Latvia consider collaboration with the Nazis in the Holocaust as the shameful past. However, in some narratives similarly to the Russian participants cited above they blame for this seemingly isolated events and foreign powers; this also suggests that collaborationism was not something which has to be associated only with Latvians: ‘Actually, we have always tried to achieve something good in Latvia, but as we have always been under somebody else’s rule, I don’t think there was something shameful. All that idea about independence lasted for many years, so we regained that independence, in whatever way it might have been done’ [LTFG2R2] (Saleniece et al 2013: 36). ‘I consider that “shameful” is a bit strong for Latvia, perhaps, there are events about which it would be “inconvenient” to
speak. If you take that collaborationism, we are not the only ones in this respect, in other countries there might be much more to speak about' [LTFG1R1] (ibid). The term ‘shameful’ is used, nevertheless, in relation to the Russian speaking population’s claims to the status of the Russian language in Latvia, suggesting strong support for nationalist attitudes closely linked with the denial of any legitimacy to the Soviet (and by extension Russian) political and cultural legacy in the country: ‘Perhaps, what is [shameful] is that in our own country we couldn’t use the Latvian language’ [LTFG4R13] (ibid).

The Slovak participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the policies towards ethnic minorities (Hungarians and Roma) which are associated with the pro-European position of the government who by supporting minorities betrays the national interests of the Slovak majority. Here xenophobic (if not racist) sentiments are sometimes framed in the nostalgic references to the Communist past: ‘In those times (Communism), whites were united, and when they walked the streets, the Roma were scared. Now, it is the opposite. When a white man walks the street, he is afraid a Roma might beat him’ [SKFG1R1] (Deak 2013: 48)

In the narrative of the young people from the UK case study xenophobia and nationalism have been also tied to the past but in a rather different way. Young people associated such attitudes with the older generation who were socialized into a much more homogeneous society. Significantly, though, younger people oppose such views, being much more comfortable with the contemporary multicultural Britain. Some young participants comment that the popularity of far-right organizations (e.g. BNP and EDL) is on the rise in the country but mostly among people of the older generation ‘who actually remember the time when British traditions were there’ (Popov
2013: 58). Thus a young Labour activist expressed her concern about the alleged popularity of the BNP among older generation residents of a rather deprived areas of town explaining the electoral switch of life-long Labour supporters to the far-right party by working-class people’s frustration in the current situation of economic crisis but also linked it with the noticeable ‘influx’ of new migrants from Eastern Europe: ‘We did have a BNP candidate who didn’t do that badly, like to be honest he got a lot of support. I know a lot of Polish people have been immigrating in recent years over to Nuneaton… They are starting to have – I feel like I’m sounding racist, but there’s now sort of like an area of Nuneaton that’s got a large influx of Polish people with a lot of Polish shops and a lot of cake shops and Polish supermarkets that weren’t there five years ago. So that would be I’d say the level and influence of the Polish community in Nuneaton, which would be quite a significant change within the last few years really since they joined the EU. It’s been a massive change in Nuneaton, the Polish community has’ [UKR9] (ibid: 59). Some young people might even like the BNP’s idea to preserve ‘the British traditions’ but, nevertheless, abhorred all anti-migrant rhetoric from the far-right (ibid: 58-59).

In the Greek case study the theme of immigration has also emerged in the course of focus group discussions in relation to the growing popularity of the far-right Golden Dawn party as a reaction to the economic crisis and because the Golden Dawn used an accessible political discourse: “They said what Greek people wanted to hear at that time, to the voters who voted they said the keyword “immigrants” since they are too many and most are illegal” [GRFG3R3] (Koronaïou et al 2013: 45). The notion of the good old days when immigrants were not around en masse and references to the Greek traditional values are strongly evident in Golden Dawn’s discourse.
3. Conclusions

Our transnational analysis highlights several commonalities in production, transmission and content of historical narratives in the regions across Europe in which MYPLACE research has been conducted. These are summarized below.

First, historical discourses at the institutional level are quite politicised. Thus all public institutions which are also ‘sites of memory’ have a clear political agenda in the representation of the particular ‘problematic’ periods and/or events of national history.

Secondly, memories of WWII play a significant role as a formative historical narrative for national and local identities. This is evident even in case studies where WWII was not the ‘difficult past’ in question (UK and Denmark) or/and countries which were not directly involved in the war (Spain and Portugal).

In majority of case-studies the traumatic periods/events are in the living memory of the parents’ generation (e.g. establishment and collapse of state-socialism in Central and Eastern Europe, civil wars and revolutions in Greece, Croatia, Portugal and Georgia, dramatic political and economic transformations in the UK, and post-socialist states).

A strong presence of social memory was registered in all cases. This social memory exists in interaction with official and/or institutionalised historical discourses, and is, to a certain extent, shaped by them but also used as a source for alternative historical interpretations.
The past often features in young people’s narratives as a reference point for justifying or rejecting growing xenophobia and nationalistic attitudes in society.

From our analysis of the national reports we can conclude that young people are sensitive to over politicisation of historical discourses where the representation of the difficult past is manipulated in the interest of current political agenda. In response to this young people develop different strategies in interpreting the past events as important for their present. These strategies range from their complete disinterest in the past resulting in ‘presentism’ to active engagement with the past as a resource for their political stance. Another aspect of young people’s critical attitudes towards institutionalized historical discourses is that they rely on family memories and interpretations of the past, sometimes critically evaluating them or fully embracing them as a more comprehensible and trustworthy source of knowledge about the past. The political heritage of the past they acquire through interactions with the older generations. At the same time political values and attitudes of their parents’ and grandparents’ generation might be challenged or dismissed as inappropriate to their present day conditions. This conclusion correlates with the observation that family constitutes an important site for the mnemonic socialisation (Pine et al 2004; Hirsch 1999). The role of family in intergenerational transmission of political heritage and the impact of family memories on young people’s political and civic activism will be explored during the second (intergenerational) phase of WP2 research activities.\[17\]

\[17\] The research findings resulting from intergenerational interviews within family settings will constitute the main content of Deliverable 2.3 country based reports that are due in May 2014.
4. References


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