

## Representation of Youth in the Public Debate in Greece, Italy, and Spain: Does the Political Leaning of Newspapers Have Any Effect?

Bosi, Lorenzo; Lavizzari, Anna; Voli, Stefania

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# **Representation of youth in the public debate in Greece, Italy and Spain:**

## **Does the political leaning of newspapers have any effect?**

**Lorenzo Bosi, Anna Lavizzari and Stefania Voli**

Recent scientific studies have reached the near-unanimous conclusion that the media produce a stereotypical representation of young people. However, research in this area has not often scrutinised whether there are any significant differences in the coverage of the subject matter. Notably, this article examines whether the political leaning of newspapers has any impact on the levels of plurality in the news coverage of youth. On the basis of political claim analyses of six newspapers from three countries (Greece, Italy and Spain), we find that the coverage of youth in the public debate is very similar if we compare centre-right to centre-left newspapers. This suggests that the social construction of the concept of youth dominates in the adult world, regardless of any political differences. Nonetheless, differences emerge when young people are given the opportunity to speak for themselves; centre-left newspapers are more likely to recognise the agency of, and give a voice to, young people.

**Keywords:** *Youth; Public Debate; Claim Analysis; Agency; Media System; Polarised Pluralist Media Model.*

### **Author Biographies**

**Lorenzo Bosi** is Assistant Professor in Political Sociology at the Scuola Normale Superiore and a research fellow at the Centre on Social Movement Studies (COSMOS). He is a political sociologist pursuing comparative analysis into the cross-disciplinary fields of social movements and political violence.

**Anna Lavizzari** is a post-doctoral fellow at the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the Scuola Normale Superiore and a research fellow at the Centre on Social Movement Studies (COSMOS). Her research interests includes youth political participation, gender, and social movement studies.

**Stefania Voli** is a post-doctoral fellow at the Department of Sociology and Social Research of the University of Milan-Bicocca. She has been post-doctoral fellow at the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the Scuola Normale Superiore and a reserch fellow at the Centre on Social Movement Studies (COSMOS). Her main research interest includes gender, youth and social movement studies.

## **Representation of youth in the public debate in Greece, Italy and Spain:**

### **Does the political leaning of newspapers have any effect?**

Traditionally, scholarly research has largely focused its attention on youth's use – both as consumer and producer – of media, mostly in relation to new media (Messenger-Davies, 2001; Fyfe & Wyn, 2007) and to the impact of media on young people—also in terms of civic and political participation (Cushion, 2009; Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007). Over the past years, youth studies have started to look at the ways in which media represent young people (Wayne *et al.*, 2008; Mazzarella, 2003, 2007; Wyn, 2005; Kitzinger, 2000; Cushion, 2007).<sup>1</sup> Generally, empirical research on media has brought to the surface a stereotypical representation of young people (considered in terms of an entire demographic category and social group), namely as lazy, troubled, disinterested, disengaged and dangerous (Mazzarella, 2003). This is also the perception of young people themselves, who feel that the media tend to portray their generation in a negative and unflattering light: as apathetic, bored and self-centred slackers (Pecora & Mazzarella, 1995). The news coverage of young people is similar to media coverage of those groups whose goals or actors differ from, and challenge, mainstream norms; for this reason, they are cast off as unimportant and delegitimised (Ashley & Olson, 1998). In both cases, delegitimation creates the impression that actors are incompetent, incapable, disorganised and unable to engage in any kind of battle, and that they are capable only of creating disorder (Such *et al.*, 2005, p. 316; Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012, p. 4).

Another similarity between the two cases is the persistent denial of any agency – namely, active subjectivity, intentional action, choices, decision-making and forms of self-expression young people use to react to society (White & Wyn, 1998; Coffey & Farrugia, 2014) – and voice (i.e. the way young people represent themselves, tell their actions, express their claims) in media (Hartley, 1998; Giroux, 1998, 2000; Grossberg, 1994).<sup>2</sup> Described almost exclusively by expert adults, such as politicians, psychologists, sociologists, doctors or teachers, young people remain “powerless over their own image presumed incapable of self-representation, not imagined to have a collective

interest which needs to be defended in the news” (Hartley, 1998, p. 52), in ways that are comparable to a colonised community. According to John Hartley, young people “are, in semiotic terms, a virtual but colonized ‘class,’ an ‘internal colony’ (...) apt to be characterized by ‘colonising’ discourses of control, which function to represent them as weak, prone to victimisation or unruliness, and incapable of self-government” (1998, p. 64). Young people are subject to the media’s attempts to categorise them and generalise single problematic episodes, presenting these as typical of an entire generation, thus ignoring internal axes of difference such as age, gender and economic status.

Building on such streams of research, this article examines a research question that to our knowledge has not yet received attention in scholarly literature: does a newspaper’s political leaning affect the way young people are reported in the public debate? The rationale behind our attempt to answer this research question is that we wish to empirically challenge the conclusion that there is only one way in which newspapers cover this subject matter. We will investigate this research question systematically, by analysing the public discourse on youth in three southern European countries (Greece, Italy and Spain), characterised by a similar Polarised Pluralist Media Model and recent socio-political context of crisis, through a political claim analysis of a random sample of 100 claims per newspaper.<sup>3</sup> We collected claims via a keyword search (based on the words ‘young’, ‘student’ or ‘teenage’) in the digital archives of two newspapers per country, one centre-right and one centre-left, covering the period between 2010 and 2016 (EURYKA WP2 2018).

The article begins with an analysis of the way the concept of youth has been constructed throughout history, followed by an in-depth review of existing research on media portrayals of young people in the public debate. In the following section we will offer a concise discussion of the selection process of the countries and journals under examination, and we will also present the data sources. Given the exploratory nature of the analysis, the remainder of the article is dedicated to the

analysis of the research question. In the concluding section we discuss the results and provide further avenues for research.

### **Young people in the media and in public debate**

The concept of youth is a constructed social category. Historically, it has been defined and redefined in opposition to the concept of adulthood. As Pierre Bourdieu has observed, “the relationship between social age and biological age is very complex [and] shows that age is a biological data that is socially manipulated and manipulable; and talking about youth as a social unit [...] is already an obvious manipulation” (2002, pp. 144-145). In the past, young people themselves have very rarely been active in the construction of their own identities, basically lacking any agency in such a process, being dependent on adults as well as subordinated to them.

In the patriarchal family, and particularly in rural society, (male) adults held a position of power over young people (and women at large), claiming a right/duty to protect, command or control (i.e. as fathers or employers). Young people, including women, were considered immature, unable to decide for themselves, and therefore dependent on male authority and on their categorisation as “the others”. Once the patriarchal family gradually started to enter a period of crisis, due to the advent of industrial society, which was based on the exploitation of female, youth and even child labour, the concept of youth started to change. Thanks also to the struggles of the labour movement and the development of the welfare state, access to adulthood progressively started to depend on legal, social and economic elements as well as civic ones. These included the progressive exclusion of young people from the workforce through changes in the industrial practice; the institutionalisation of public and compulsory education; and the right to vote, which implied civil and legal responsibility (Wartella & Mazzarella, 1990). These socio-political developments provoked an increasing rise of youth as a group deserving attention, protection laws and reforms (Wartella & Mazzarella, 1990). This new social group, defined now through social and generational parameters, began to be perceived as a subject of adult concerns and as an “object” of study and inquiry, but

also as “dangerous”—a potentially destabilising social group (Dogliani, 2003). As Mazzarella suggests, “several major studies and reports (see, for example, Hurt, 1924; Walter, 1927) were issued in the mid-twentieth century, documenting that youth were spending their newfound leisure time in questionable and ‘unworthy’ pursuits (i.e. hanging out with friends, movies, etc.). These reports called for the need to institutionalize leisure through such adult-sanctioned and supervised activities as scouting” (2007, p. 230).

Modern notions of youth undoubtedly emerged as a result of the innovations of the industrial revolution, among which we must not overlook the access to mass media. We could say that “the very existence of youth, at least in the twentieth century, is intimately tied to the media and vice versa” (Grossberg, 1994, p. 26). From the mid-twentieth century onwards, mass media culture started to be strongly linked to youth culture, and adults became concerned with the protection of their children from what they perceived to be the harmful influences of mass culture: movies in the 1920s, radio in the 1930s, rock’n’roll and television in the 1950s, counterculture in the 1960s, punk, rap music and drug addictions in the late 1970s and 1980s, Internet and videogame violence in the 1990s, and so on (Mazzarella, 2007).

More recent studies on the media coverage of youth have identified a polarisation between two opposed positions, where young people are represented both as offenders and as victims, namely of accidents, crime, violence, economic crisis or unemployment (Andersson & Lundström, 2007; Levinsen & Wien, 2011). As a result of this representation, or better, of this *misrepresentation* (Gaines, 1994), young people have become the “other”, “a group to be protected, saved and/or feared” (Mazzarella, 2003, p. 233) by adults. It is clear, using Mazzarella’s words,

that when adults construct youth they invest it with properties and characteristics that they (adults) need for whatever reason at that particular time – the need to sell products, the need to justify cutbacks in government funding for youth programs, the need to make excuses for the downward mobility of the middle class, the need to look for

simple solutions to complex problems, the need to feel good about themselves as they age. Whatever the reason, it is clear that the mainstream (...) construction of youth is done by adults, for adults. (Mazzarella, 2003, p. 244)

In this article such near-unanimous conclusion that the media produce a stereotypical representation of young people is questioned. We do this by examining whether the political leaning of newspapers has any impact on the levels of plurality in the news coverage of youth in three southern European countries (Greece, Italy and Spain).

### **Case selection and data**

Media systems are a set of interacting media practices and institutions, embedded in the broader social, economic, cultural and political context (Hallin, 2015). The extent to which a country's media institutions, practices and political structure are interrelated is a characteristic feature of different typologies of media systems, as the “[p]olitical structure thus comes to be embodied in certain ways of speaking about politics, conventions of communication that in their turn profoundly affect the possibilities for political discourse in the society” (Hallin, 1994, p. 25). In Dan Hallin and Paolo Mancini's (2004, p. 21) seminal historical-qualitative analysis, the authors compared different Western media systems, taking the distinction between commercial and political logics – that is, the degree of commercialisation versus politicisation – as their basic criteria for differentiation. They propose four major dimensions of comparison: 1) the development of media markets; 2) political parallelism, namely the degree to which media are linked to political parties and institutions, thus reflecting the major political cleavages in society; 3) journalistic professionalism; 4) the role of the State in the media. Successively, they identified and distinguished three fundamental and ideal models<sup>4</sup> characterised by common trends across the four dimensions. Firstly, the Mediterranean/Polarised Pluralist Media Model, which applies to countries



that have become democracies relatively late. This model is characterised by a strong government intervention in the economy and an elite-oriented press with a relatively limited circulation. In these cases, journalism is considered less professional, in the sense that public service companies follow national governments and their leadership's political orientation. Moreover, the links between political actors and journalists are strong. Examples of countries that fall under the Polarised Pluralist Media Model are France, Italy, Greece, Portugal and Spain. Secondly, the Northern European/Democratic Corporatist Media Model is characterised by consensus, and by a strong State with a well-grounded legal system. The publishing sector is an important part of the Democratic Corporatist Model. Other features include a non-commercial public service and a high degree of autonomy for broadcasters. Journalism is professional and self-regulating, with common ethical standards being adopted for radio, television and newspapers. Examples of countries that fall under this model are Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Austria and Germany. Thirdly, the North Atlantic/Liberal Media Model is, instead, characterised by strong and widespread press freedom, and by strong individualism. Newspaper circulation is relatively high, although lower than in the case of the Democratic Corporatist Model. Politically, most of the countries that adopt this model have a majority system. Generally, the media are not strongly linked to the government and to political parties, but are governed by commercial interests, and journalistic professionalism is relatively strong. Countries that fall under the Liberal Model are, for example, the United Kingdom, the USA, Canada and Ireland.

Given that our aim is to analyse whether the newspapers' political orientations have any impact on the way young people are reported in the public debate, we expect that – if we adopt Hallin and Mancini's (2004) distinction – any relevant difference can be traced in those countries characterised by a Polarised Pluralist Media Model.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, we aim to look at how mainstream newspapers participate in the construction of the category of youth and, particularly, what role they play in shaping the social reality that affects youth, as they intervene in the public debate. For this reason we have selected, among the nine countries examined in the EURYKA project (and for which the

data were available),<sup>6</sup> the following three: Greece, Italy and Spain.<sup>7</sup> We are confident that the fact that this selection allows us to compare newspapers of centre-right and centre-left political orientations, in three countries characterised by a Polarised Pluralist Media Model, makes the comparison particularly meaningful, while also challenging the one-directional representation of young people in public debate that emerges from scholarly literature. Indeed, public debate and news production in polarised countries is not neutral, but rather shaped by different political orientations, values and beliefs, and interests.

Taking a random sample of 200 claims per country, we searched for newspaper articles containing the keywords ‘young’, ‘student’ or ‘teenage’ in the digital archives of two newspapers per country, covering the period from 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2016 (see Table 1). We based our selection of newspapers on two main criteria: first, for comparative reasons we selected two leading, qualitative and mainstream newspapers for each country, one representative of the centre-left’s political views within the media system, and one of the centre-right’s views; second, we chose newspapers with a national coverage, in order to cover a larger portion of public opinion.<sup>8</sup>

<INSERT TABLE 1 HERE>

We studied the newspapers’ coverage of young people by including the major variables coded in the political claim analysis. In particular, we chose to focus on the following variables: the summary actor making the claims (eight categories of actors), the object affected by the claim (specific categories of summary actors including youth), the issues discussed in the claim, the forms through which claims were made in the public debate (verbal and non-verbal) and, most importantly, the positioning (positive, neutral, negative) of the actor towards the interests and rights of the object—this was particularly interesting when youth constituted the object of the claim. In addition, we created a new variable, one representing the political orientation of the newspapers included in our sample. We therefore aggregated the centre-left newspapers (= 0) and the centre-

right newspapers (= 1) of the three countries under examination in our political orientation variable (n = 600). Moreover, in order to control country selection, we also aggregated the three countries of the Pluralised Media Model in one variable. For the purpose of the analysis, we employed descriptive statistics showing cross tabulations of the distribution of claims across these variables and the newspapers' political leanings.

The main idea was thus to highlight potential differences between centre-right and centre-left newspapers' coverage of the actors intervening in the public debate, of the object of public discourse and of its evaluation, along with the coverage of the issues discussed and the forms of intervention in the public debate.

## **Findings**

We started by first investigating the following question: to what extent is the public discourse about young people differently articulated, in terms of the positioning towards the object affected by the claim (positive, neutral, negative), in newspapers characterised by different political leanings? Obviously we will not focus exclusively on the positioning of the object affected by the claim, we will also look at how forms of intervention in the public sphere and issues adopted by non-youth actors,<sup>9</sup> are given space in newspapers with different political leanings.

In our case youth is the most frequent object of claims (88.9 per cent), both in newspapers with a centre-right (93.6 per cent) and centre-left (84.1 per cent) political orientation. This result might not come as a surprise, given that we selected – following the project's youth-focused methodology – claims in which youth represented the object, except when claimants were young people themselves; in those cases we took into account claims that had non-youth actors as object. However, Figure 1 shows a first interesting result; at the aggregate level, positive claims towards youth objects are predominant both in centre-left (64.7 per cent) and centre-right (71.7 per cent) newspapers.

<INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE>

Table 2 also confirms that the mean is positive for the overall claims on youth actors. Looking at the values of the standard deviation, we also see that the public debate on youth actors – and accordingly, on the appraisal of young people – is generally less polarised than the debate on non-youth actors, where conflicting claims are far more present. These results clearly show that the coverage of youth in the public debate is similar if we compare centre-right to centre-left newspapers. The data might suggest that when youth constitutes the object of discourse, as a “group” constructed by media discourses, no relevant difference between the different political leanings can be identified. Consistent with this, as Eilders suggests, is the fact that “the corresponding standardized attention criteria and interpretation strategies, the uniformity of professional and class interests, the media’s observation of each other and their reciprocal co-orientation are likely to produce high levels of correspondence in the media system” (2003, p. 4). This first result is in agreement with much research on partisanship in media coverage (Baumgartner & Chaqués, 2015; Salgado & Nienstedt, 2016), where we see how a newspaper’s ideological affiliation does not necessarily correspond with a bias in the coverage of certain issues; some questions may also provoke a higher level of consonance.

However, as we will see in the course of the following paragraphs, although little or no difference exists between positive or negative stances when looking at youth as a homogeneous group, different nuances of this representation emerge, which concern the role that different categories of youth play as objects of public discourse. Similarly, variations in the forms of intervention and issues adopted by non-youth actors become visible, allowing us to problematise the media’s discourse on the “youth question” more broadly.

<INSERT TABLE 2 HERE>

After having observed youth as a homogeneous group, we look closer at the various categories of

youth present in the analysis, as in Figure 2. Our data show that university students are the most frequent objects across all newspapers (37.3 per cent), and that they are covered most in centre-right newspapers (42.3 per cent versus 31.7 per cent for centre-left newspapers). Furthermore, all newspapers tend to cover university students with the highest positive evaluation (67.1 per cent for the centre-left, 66.1 per cent for the centre-right), in comparison to the other categories of young people. This finding also hints to the assumption that higher-educated youth in positions closer to the privileged sectors of society receives more coverage in across newspapers.

Moving forward, we notice that the most significant difference between centre-left and centre-right newspapers concerns the category “youth in general”, which is almost twice as much in centre-left newspapers, while group-specific youths are slightly more present in centre-right newspapers. In addition, it is interesting to note that political youth and associations are far less presented as the object of discourse in centre-left newspapers, and that these also have a negative positioning (63.6 per cent). Here, again, while bearing in mind the overall misrepresentation of youth disengaged from politics, one would expect different non-youth, societal actors to further problematise this issue, by actually showing concern for and interest in politically engaged youth. The negative positioning towards the interests of politically engaged youth, at least in the centre-left newspapers, might also indicate that young people who are more closely or properly engaged in politics are indeed misrepresented—this finding could echo what was described before as the delegitimisation of youth active in politics, or as being incompetent or disorganised.

Finally, in centre-left newspapers, state actors and the judiciary focus more on teenagers and school students (35.3 per cent), while in centre-right newspapers, the objects of their claims tend to be university students and young adults (44.8 per cent). This might suggest that centre-right newspapers are predominantly concerned with, and provide more visibility to, older groups of young adults, while centre-left newspapers are keen to pay attention and give more visibility to younger age groups, such as school students and teenagers.

<INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE>

Interestingly, political issues, which cover an important part of the topics addressed by youth actors, play a marginal role in the discourse of non-youth actors, particularly in centre-left newspapers (10.2 per cent against 30.3 per cent for youth actors), whereas centre-right newspapers are more balanced (9.0 per cent against 10.8 per cent for youth actors). This constitutes an important finding, as it stresses the fact that the representation of youth disaffected by politics comes from non-youth actors, and is therefore a social construction made by adults, the media and other institutional actors, which contributes to perpetuate this image of youth in public opinion. Finally, as we have stressed in previous sections, dominant sources such as the media and experts can exert a considerable influence on how “youth questions” are dealt with and controlled. In particular, issues of unemployment and law, crime and disorder, but also education, can become the object of institutional practices aimed at controlling young people’s behaviour. Data have already revealed that, in centre-right newspapers, this type of issue (i.e. socio-economic, employment and education) receives greater coverage. In addition, we have noted that in centre-left newspapers, issues of law, order and crime are somewhat important to non-youth actors as well, and we will see that young people themselves, by contrast, do not perceive this type of topic as part of their representation and discourse (only 3.7 per cent of all issues).

Thus far, through a comparison between centre-right and centre-left newspapers we have identified only minor differences in the coverage of youth in the public debate, although with different levels of polarisation in the debate, depending on the object. We will now continue by investigating to what extent youth actors are given the opportunity to make their voice heard in the public debate, comparing centre-right to centre-left newspapers.

In the countries and newspapers we examined for our research, young people most frequently make claims in public debates about youth issues (29.2 per cent), followed by state actors (26.1 per

cent). These data nonetheless confirm the overall tendency to provide young people with a voice and visibility in the press, although with different nuances. Furthermore, as Figure 3 demonstrates, in most cases youth actors are more covered in centre-left newspapers (36.8 per cent), while state actors appear more frequently in centre-right newspapers (29.1 per cent). Hence, as “protagonists” endowed with agency and voice, youth appears to receive more coverage in the public discourse of centre-left political media and audiences. Education-related actors are the third claimants (15.3 per cent), and are more frequent in centre-right newspapers (16.7 per cent), a finding which is consistent with the great predominance of education as an issue of interest for both youth and non-youth actors. With the exception of labour organisations and economy-related groups, which are more present in centre-left newspapers (6.1 per cent), all the other categories of actors (i.e. political parties, professional organisations and other civil society organisations) are more frequently covered in centre-right newspapers. We can thus reaffirm that, although in centre-right newspapers more actors are given a voice in the discussion of and intervention in “youth questions”, and with a higher frequency, in the centre-left press young people and their actions figure more clearly at the centre of the debate.

<INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE>

Looking at the distribution of the claims raised by young actors across their various groups, political youth groups and youth associations are overall the most visible claimants (38.2 per cent), followed by young adults and university students (33.5 per cent). As for political groups and teenagers, they are more present in centre-left newspapers (42.2 per cent and 17.4 per cent respectively), while for the other categories differences are not statistically significant (Figure 4). This finding reflects the idea that centre-left newspapers are not only keener to portray youth as the protagonist of the public debate about the “youth question”, but *politicised* youth in particular. This must be contrasted with the previous observation about political youth being an object of discourse,

which appears significantly less represented in centre-left newspapers, and with a negative positioning (that is, we assumed, as delegitimised and immature, disorganised political actors). The portrayals of youth as disengaged from politics are not backed by evidence in this case. Although the share of political groups and associations is not very large, youth turns out to be engaged in them, and reported as such particularly by the left-leaning press in contrast to centre-right newspapers.

We must also remember that youth is more represented as an *object* of public discourse in centre-right newspapers, with a difference of 10 per cent, while it is given agency and voice as *actor* of the discourse in centre-left newspapers, with a difference of 15 per cent. This finding also suggests that, in the centre-left newspapers' representation of youth, once young people express themselves in the public they tend to do so as a collective, politicised actor rather than as youth-specific groups, as happens in a centre-right media representation. This is an interesting finding as it problematises some of the questions raised in the literature.

On the one hand, there is a tendency to speak about youth as a “colonised community”, that is, the object of discourses in which young people are perceived as incapable of self-representation; this appears to be a more distinct feature of a conservative approach in the media. On the other hand, the idea seems to take shape that young people are also depicted as “would-be citizens” (Messenger-Davies, 2001), while actually engaging with politics. This confirms the thesis of Johanna Wyn, who has pointed out another dichotomy that affects media representations in this field: if young people are described as a social problem, at the same time they are the “hope for the future” (2005, pp. 31-32): as workers in the new economies, as symbols of a changing society or as cutting-edge consumers and fashion trendsetters, a commodity and/or a target market either to sell “youth” to an aging adult population or to sell products to young people themselves. Viewed from this last perspective, young people are positively acknowledged as a potential political force, and play an important role in the transition to a new social order, characterised by dislocation, flux and globalisation (Harris, 2004).



<INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE>

If we examine the forms of intervention privileged by youth, verbal statements (73 per cent) and demonstrative protest actions (9.1 per cent) are more present in centre-left newspapers (against 58.9 per cent and 6.4 per cent respectively, in centre-right newspapers). At the aggregate level, verbal statements are used consistently by youth (29.2 per cent). All the other forms of intervention are prevalent in centre-right newspapers. Thus, in both centre-left and centre-right newspapers, young people are more prone to use verbal statements (57.8 per cent and 35.4 per cent respectively) and demonstrative protest actions (19.3 per cent and 23.1 per cent respectively) (Figure 5).

Overall, centre-left leaning newspapers seem to imply that, once young people are given a voice, this is because they use both conventional (statements, political decisions and actions) and unconventional forms of action (protests and demonstrations). By contrast, in centre-right leaning newspapers young people are more often given a voice once they use unconventional, confrontational and violent actions. In a way this reflects the main representation present in scholarly literature, namely that of “youth as offenders” and as “dangerous”. These findings are notably in contrast with those pertaining to non-youth actors; as we have seen, in centre-right newspapers a majority of conventional forms is used to treat and discuss youth objects. In this case, although young people maintain more visibility and voice in centre-left newspapers, and as protagonists of their own discourses (through verbal statements), we clearly see that youth, independently from the newspaper’s political leaning, is represented as engaged in rather unconventional forms of actions, including confrontational and more violent types of actions. An image therefore seems to emerge that reveals a “dichotomy” between forms adopted by non-youth and by youth, particularly in the representation offered by the centre-right press, which opposes conventional and unconventional repertoires of actions.

<INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE>

## **Conclusions**

The focus of this article has been on plurality in the media coverage of young people (specifically with regard to youth issues). It has endeavoured to challenge the reading that there is only one way in which newspapers cover the theme of youth.

Our analysis shows that, in terms of coverage, centre-left and centre-right newspapers do not differ much from each other, as they substantially converge in their ways of giving space to young people in the public debate also considering that we have selected countries characterised by a Polarised Pluralist Media Model, where we expect political differences between newspapers to be higher. In fact, positive claims towards youth objects prevail both in centre-left and centre-right newspapers.

If youth generally doesn't vary in media coverage, we have nevertheless seen important differentiations emerge in the newspapers' contents, when we focus on multiple aspects of youth political participation. For example, if we look closer at the different categories of youth, we notice that centre-left newspapers offer a lower (and more negative) coverage of political youth and associations. This approach is in line with the leading journalists' general narrative strategy (with few differences among the political spectrum) towards youth's political engagement; journalists tend to delegitimise, minimise, marginalise and render young people's political actions meaningless. As studies have shown, this strategy corresponds more with a set of journalistic practices, routines and news templates than with any deliberate and organised journalistic strategy to discredit young people acting in the public debate (Kitzinger, 2000; Cushion, 2007).

At the same time, though, the representation that emerges when we consider young people as actors of claims differs if we examine centre-left versus centre-right newspapers; in this respect, the data reveal that centre-left newspapers provide better opportunities for young people to speak for themselves as opposed to centre-right newspapers. Furthermore, we see that once young people are

offered the opportunity to make claims, they tend to be presented as collective and politicised actors. This finding is supported by results on youth actors' prevalent issues in centre-left newspapers; here, political issues are in fact more often discussed than in the centre-right press. By contrast, if we look at non-youth actors' prevalent issues, mostly present in centre-right newspapers, the data reveal a general disengagement with political issues. This confirms what has been said earlier on media's misrepresentation of youth, as being alienated by politics. Above all, it highlights the fact that different narratives may emerge when young people are enabled to get their word out (Pecora & Mazzarella, 1995; Mazzarella, 2003).

Moreover, young people's public discourse in the centre-left leaning press shows that they widely vary the objects of their discourse, as well as the issues discussed. Youth's greater agency as a collective actor matches the current process, in which youth is renegotiating traditional patterns of political participation. Thus, we might assume that the centre-left press is able – more than the centre-right press – to recognise the existence of many new forms of youth politics and action repertoires, which have emerged in recent years and which have broadened the range of possibilities to define and represent the arena of youth participation. The more favourable approach towards youth participation is reflected in the way centre-left newspapers report the forms young people use to make a political claim; when young people are given a voice, centre-left newspapers do not stigmatise them by highlighting the confrontational and violent forms they use, as happens in centre-right newspapers. The latter, in fact, exaggerate the “violence template”, which creates the risk of eclipsing the many different forms of activism young people are capable of playing out (Cushion, 2007, 2009).

We hope that this article will contribute to the discussion on young people's coverage and representation in the public debate, and to existing research in this field, in that it provides an outline for a number of follow-up studies. Our study can, in fact, be expanded with more detailed and in-depth studies of the different ways in which young people are covered in local versus national, mainstream versus non-mainstream newspapers. Of special interest would be a study

clarifying the role of digital and social media in different representations of young people in the public debate.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> The notion of “media representation” refers to the ways in which media literally construct social groups (based on age, sex, race, socio-economic conditions, education, etc.), using what Lippman refers to as “pictures in our head” (1991 [1922]), that is, culturally determined ideas that help media reach a wider audience, appealing to preconstructed images. In our analysis, it is important to underline that we build on the notion of representation starting from the one of coverage, i.e. indicating the extent, attention – in terms of frequency and content – given to youth across different newspapers.
- <sup>2</sup> Despite the concise definition provided, this contribution is aware of the controversial sociological debate around “agency” as a category in youth studies. For a more detailed analysis of the issue, see Coffey and Farrugia (2014).
- <sup>3</sup> A political claim is a strategic intervention, either verbal or non-verbal, in the public space made by a given actor on behalf of a group or collectivity and which bears on the interests or rights of other groups or collectivities. In other words, a claim is the expression of a political opinion by verbal or physical action in the public space (EURYKA WP2 2018).
- <sup>4</sup> In 2008, Hallin and Mancini, together with a number of other researchers, conducted a study based on the three ideal models identified in 2004, but now complemented by a fourth ideal model: The Eastern European/Post-Communist Media Model, which included the Eastern European countries that were excluded from the study of 2004.
- <sup>5</sup> Our article does not aim to use the *Comparing Media System* for theory development, to test it or operationalise concepts discussed there. Rather, we are interested in using it for the purpose of case selection, first of all in order to test the impact of the media’s political leaning on the

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representation of young people; secondly, to verify the hypotheses that we have drawn from the literature on youth studies.

- <sup>6</sup> Claims focusing on the representation of young people and youth-related issues were coded by random sampling and cleaning of 4,500 claims, selected from 45 newspapers (100 claims per newspaper and five newspapers per country) in the period ranging from 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2016, in nine countries: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. They were selected with the aim of building a representative sample in terms of geographical distribution, political leaning and reporting style (EURYKA WP2 2018).
- <sup>7</sup> We have no data on Portugal, while we deliberately excluded France, given that Hallin and Mancini describe it as a “borderline case” (2004, p. 90). In addition, France has not suffered the same type of economic crisis as the other three southern countries, during the years examined for our research.
- <sup>8</sup> The selection was made on the basis of the newspapers’ sampling, carried out by each national team taking part in the EURYKA project, as well as through the collection of additional information from previous studies (Salgado *et al.*, 2016), and the use of the Eurotopics database, accessible at: <https://www.eurotopics.net/en/142186/media>.
- <sup>9</sup> We must recall that non-youth actors include the following summary categories: 1) state actors and the judiciary; 2) political parties/groups; 3) professional organisations/groups; 4) labour organisations and economy-related groups; 5) education-related actors; 6) other civil society organisations and groups; 7) other actors.

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## **Figures and tables**

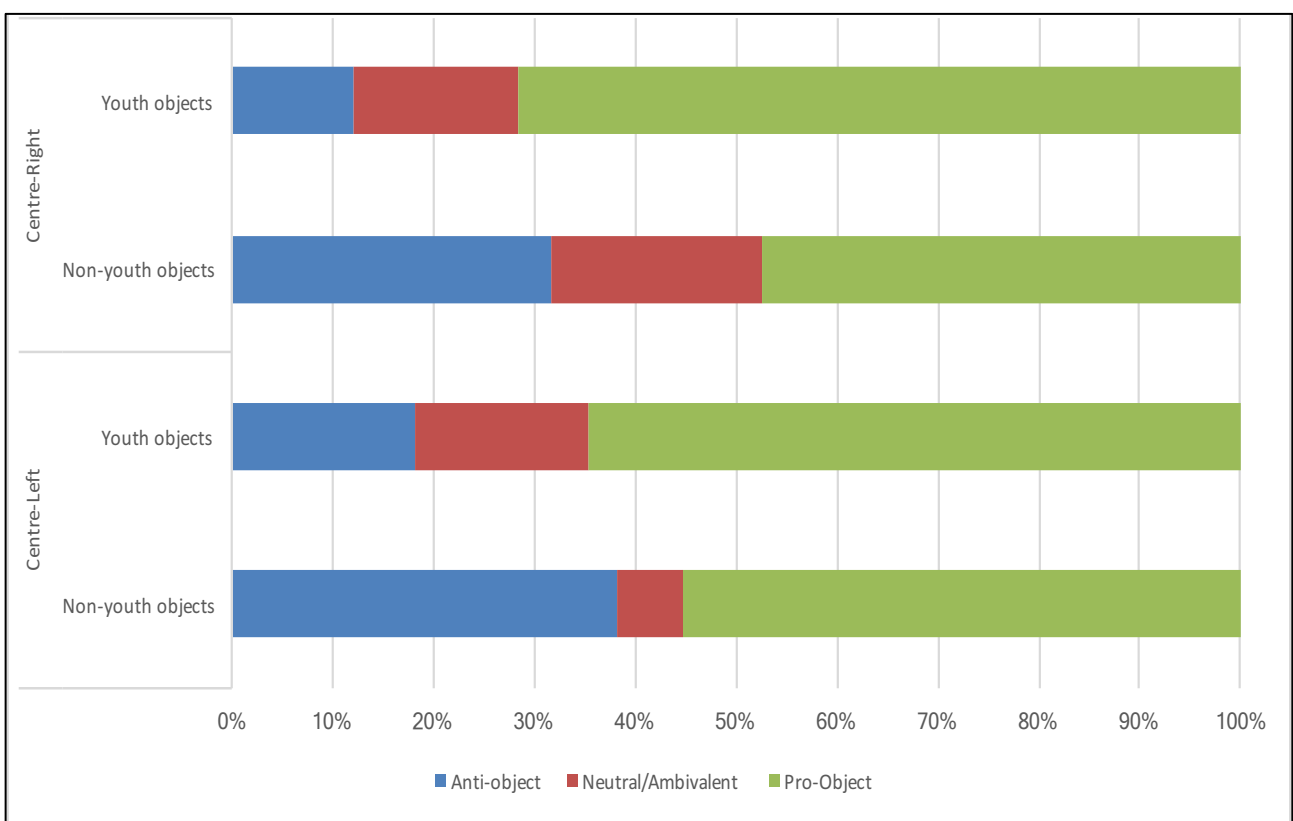
**Table 1.** Newspaper Selection.



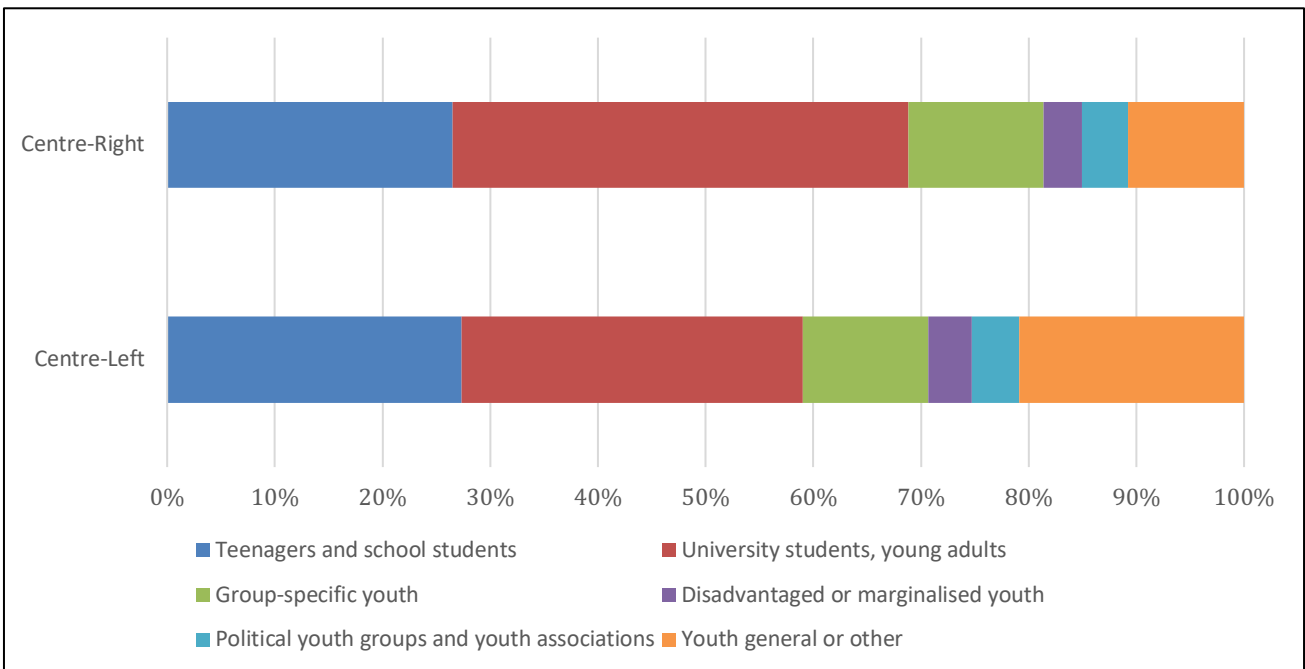
Country	Newspapers' political orientations	
	Centre-Right	Centre-Left
Greece	<i>Kathimerini</i>	<i>Ta Nea</i>
Italy	<i>Il Giornale</i>	<i>La Repubblica</i>
Spain	<i>El Mundo</i>	<i>El Pais</i>

**Table 2.** Position by Object Category and Political Orientation of Newspapers.

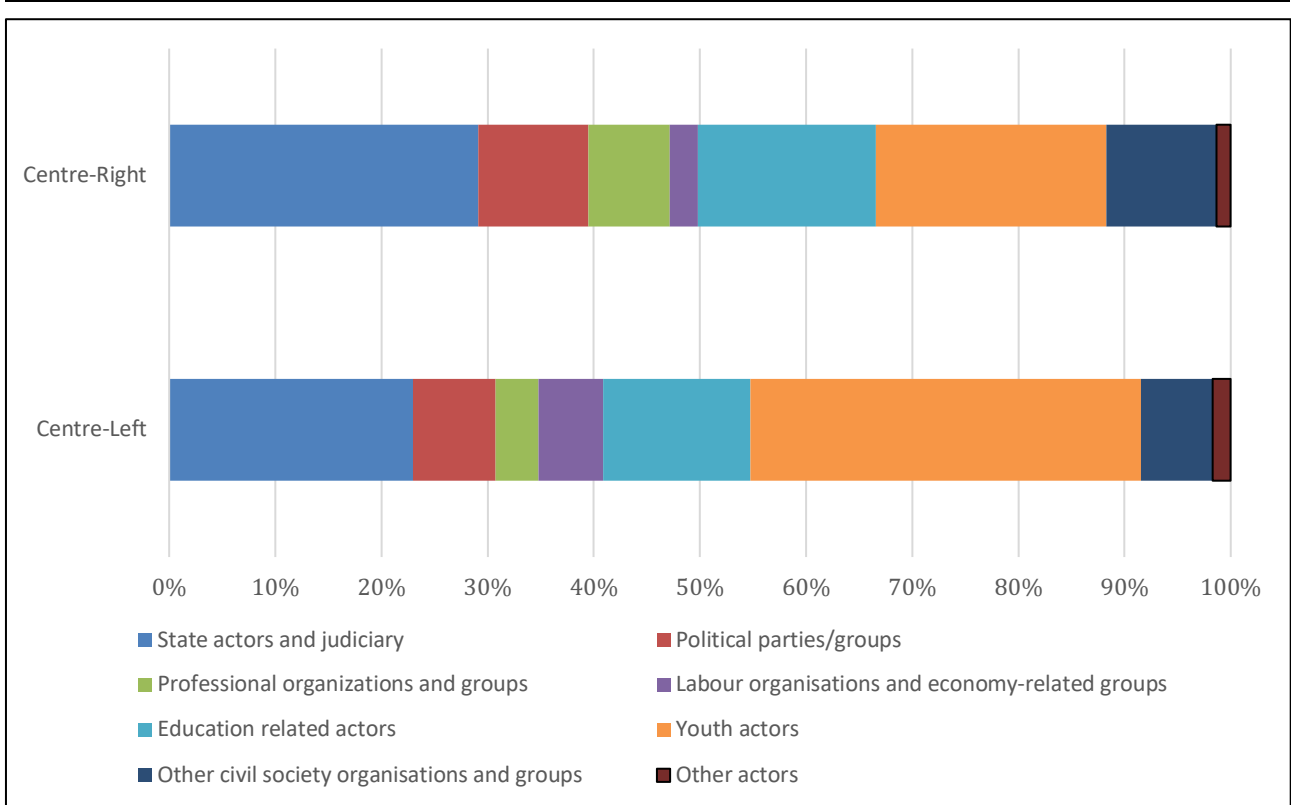
Newspaper orientation		Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Centre-left	Non-youth Actors	0.16	49	0.965
	Youth Actors	0.47	251	0.781
	Total	0.42	300	0.820
Centre-right	Non-youth Actors	0.16	19	0.898
	Youth Actors	0.60	281	0.696
	Total	0.57	300	0.717
Total	Non-youth Actors	0.16	68	0.940
	Youth Actors	0.54	532	0.739
	Total	0.50	600	0.773



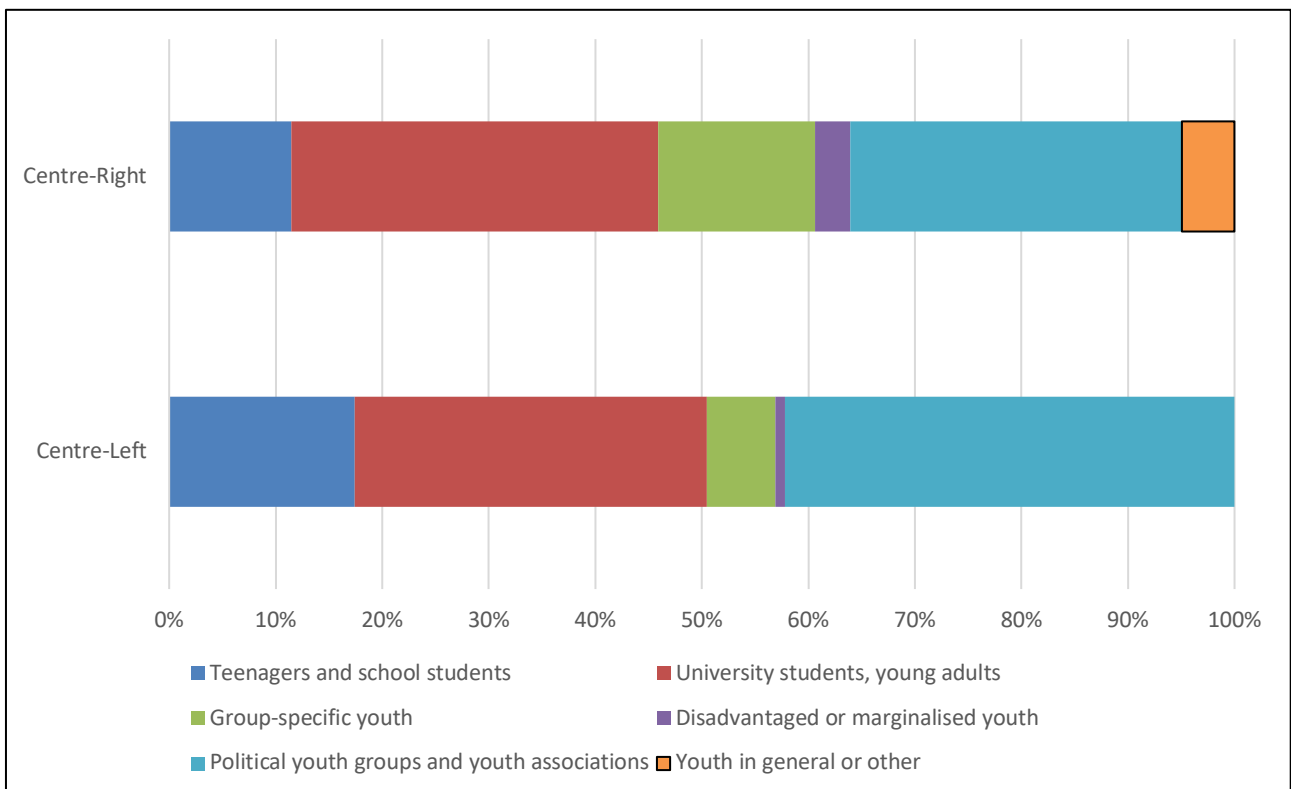
**Figure 1.** Positioning Towards the Object by Political Orientation of Newspapers.



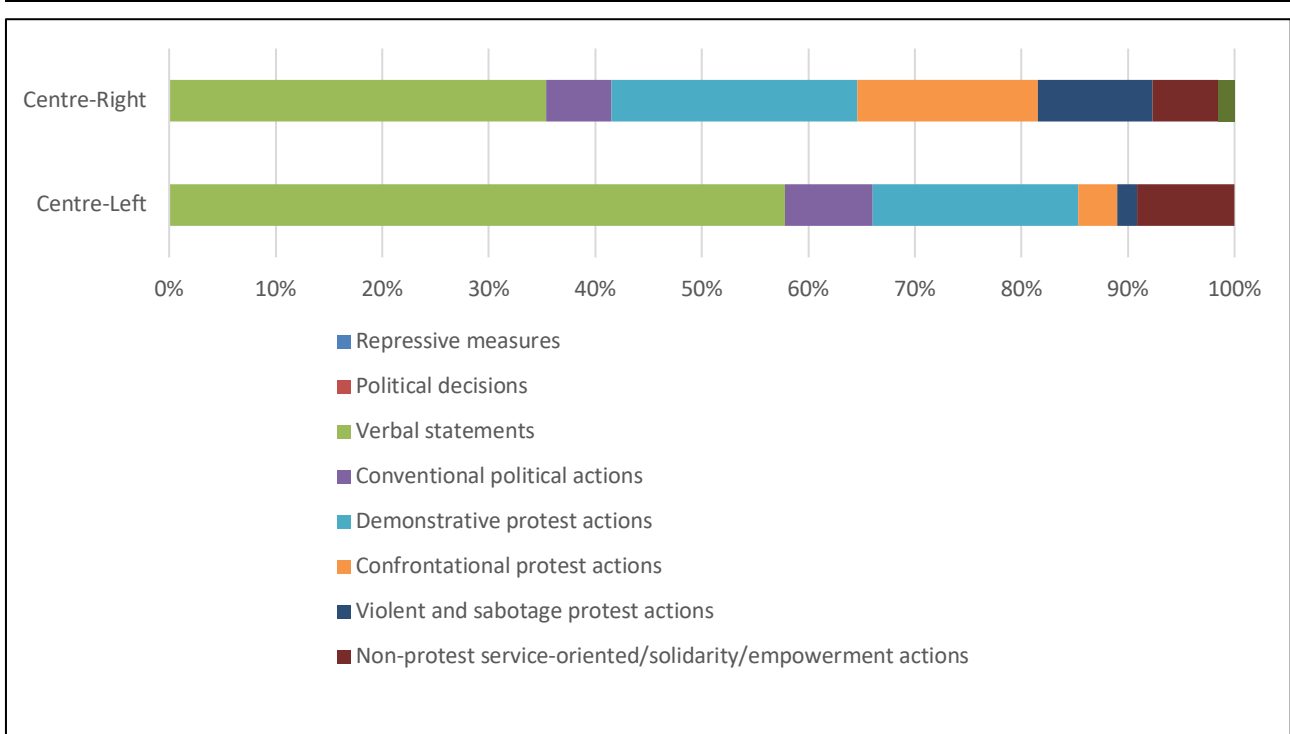
**Figure 2.** Frequency of Youth Objects by Political Orientation of Newspapers.



**Figure 3.** Frequency of Different Actor Types by Political Orientation of Newspapers.



**Figure 4.** Frequency of Different Categories of Youth Actors by Political Orientation of Newspapers.



**Figure 5.** Forms Employed by Youth Actors by Political Orientation of Newspapers.