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# Being Mainstream, Being Radical: How do Young People Understand Radicalism in Croatia

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## Introduction

To understand new modes of terrorist attacks that were happening in USA and Europe at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, policy-makers and researchers in terrorist studies employed the concept of radicalisation. Since then, however, several authors have questioned the analytical use of radicalisation in explaining terrorist actions (e.g. Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Kühle & Lindekilde, 2010; Kundnani, 2012), as well as the lack of sound empirical support for radicalisation models and theories (Borum, 2011b; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; Geeraerts, 2012). Some authors have been explicit about the uselessness of the concept. For example, John Horgan (2013) stated in an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine that “the idea that radicalisation causes terrorism is perhaps the greatest myth alive today in terrorism research”, and Marc Sageman (2013) told in an interview for *Huffington Post* that “the notion that there is any serious process called ‘radicalisation’, or indoctrination, is really a mistake”. Regardless of the negative tone of these quotes, it is clear that the concept of radicalisation is present in the (USA) mainstream media. Keeping the above-mentioned caveats in mind, this article has two goals. First, we offer an elaboration of the way researchers have used radicalisation in the past, point to several issues, and offer a relativistic and contextual approach to it (following authors like Sedgwick (2010), Onnerfos & Steiner (2018), and Neumann (2013)). With this approach radicalisation can be studied in a broader context (non-Western, as well as non-democratic states), and not necessarily limited to political

violence and terrorism. The second part of the article discusses a qualitative empirical study that was done using focus groups with youth in Croatia. The goal of the study was to grasp how young people in Croatia understand the concepts of mainstream and radical individuals.

### Radicalisation – Short History and Major Issues

When one is confronted with the vast literature and definitions of radicalisation, one finds that the only thing common among them is that they portray radicalisation as a process, i.e. a change, a shift from being a non-radical to becoming a radical. All other aspects are debated and contested – what does it mean to be a radical; are there multiple ways of becoming one; what is the relationship of radicalisation with violence and terrorism; is it a change in attitudes and/or behaviour, etc.

It is perhaps best to start with the meta-approaches to radicalisation. Neumann (2013) makes a distinction between the Anglo-Saxon and the European approach to radicalisation, the former focusing on the behavioural aspects of radicalisation (such as terrorism and violence), while the latter shifts the focus a bit more towards radical ideas<sup>1</sup>. The Anglo-Saxon approach to radicalisation was the one that came first in the post-9/11 era, solidifying with the so-called NYPD model (Silber & Bhatt, 2007). Within this model, radicalisation is the change that happens within individuals before they plan and execute a terrorist attack. Radicalisation includes four distinct phases – pre-radicalisation, self-identification, indoctrination, and Jihadisation. The model is reminiscent of the staircase model to terrorism (Moghaddam, 2005) according to which individuals, who perceive a certain unfairness or relative deprivation, go up five “floors” after which their inhibition of killing is removed and they perform terrorist acts. Both models were important for dismissing the ideas that all terrorists are people with psychological problems or are motivated primarily by their low economic status. Instead, they point to psychological factors as being key for terrorist actions, such as the processes of identification, anger, moral reasoning, cognitive process of categorisation, feelings of helplessness, etc. At the same time, these authors are aware, and are explicit about, the fact that not all individuals that start on the radicalisation pathway end up as terrorists.

On the other side of the Atlantic, especially following the London and Madrid attacks, policy makers and academics have also adopted the

<sup>1</sup> Neumann (2013) points out that this distinction is probably due to the emphasis that American society has on free speech. Thus, the act of violence is problematic, not radical ideas, since ideas are not illegal and going down the path of intervening into that sphere is seen as going against freedom of speech.

radicalisation discourse and framework for understanding terrorist acts (e.g. Khalil, 2014; Lindekilde, 2012b; Slooman & Tillie, 2006). In line with the Anglo-Saxon approach the outcome of the radicalisation process concerns violent acts. However, the difference is in the explicit separation between cognitive radicalisation (thoughts, ideas, or attitudes), and behavioural radicalisation. In both instances violence is present, i.e. in “increasing motivation to use violent means” (Doosje et al., 2016: p. 79), “change in beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence” (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2008: p. 416), “active pursuit or acceptance of the use of violence to attain the stated goal” (Veldhuis & Staun, 2009: p. 4), or “a movement in the direction of *supporting* or *enacting* radical behaviour” (Kruglanski et al., 2014: p. 70). Borum (2011a: p. 9) differentiates between “...developing extremist ideologies and beliefs...” and “engaging in terrorism or violent extremist actions”, while Busher and Macklin (2015) use the terms extreme narratives and extreme forms of action. Perhaps the best known model of this approach to radicalisation is McCauley and Moskaleiko’s (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2008; 2014; 2017) two pyramid model. They argue that “it is necessary to separately theorise radicalisation of opinion and radicalisation of action” (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017: p. 213) precisely because they are psychologically different phenomena. According to the model, a person goes up or down the opinion or action pyramid. On the former, one can be neutral, believe in a cause but not justify violence, believe in a cause and justify violence, or feel a moral obligation to act violently to promote the cause; on the latter, one can do nothing for a cause, engage legally, engage illegally, or engage illegally toward civilians. Given the point that these are two distinct pathways of radicalisation, they argue that security counter-measures must use different policies and actions to prevent ideas and actions.

Regardless of the differences between these two approaches, both come from a securitisation frame, i.e. they are focused on “how one becomes a radical”. Since the consequences of the radicalisation process are clearly negative and can hurt the fabric of a society, understanding how that process occurs has major security implications. But even more, the securitisation frame creates “an atmosphere of a ‘state of emergency’ which calls for extraordinary policy measures” (Lindekilde, 2012a: p. 339). Onnerfors and Steiner (2018) juxtapose this with the socio-cultural frame, within which the question is why certain individuals or groups radicalise. The answers usually come from contexts, discourses, anthropological factors, narratives, etc. For example, Hafez and Mullins (2015) argue that the answer to the “radicalisation puzzle” must include micro,

meso, and macro levels of understanding, which in turn include grievances, existing networks, ideologies, support structures, foreign policies, etc. Hörnqvist and Flyghed (2012) argue that radicalisation can be understood as a consequence of the clash of civilisations, lack of integration, dissolution of civil society, and even as the result of the counter-terrorist measures that were intended to prevent it (Lindekilde, 2012). On the other hand, Costanza (2015: p. 14) points out that a “theoretically-grounded discursive approach that seeks to understand individuals within their sociocultural environment seems better suited to capture the changing nature of behaviour within context”. This includes studying cultural narratives of different social structures that include family, school, peer groups, and local community. If we think about the Anglo-Saxon and European approach as bringing the psychological process into the field of political violence and terrorism, the socio-cultural frame offers a “step back” outside of an individual’s thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. However, it is important to keep in mind that the socio-cultural frame is not incompatible with the securitisation frame; it could be viewed as the causal background of the radicalisation phases through which an individual goes. For example, the concept of radicalisation that the authors want to understand still includes an extremist worldview and legitimising violence (e.g. Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Hörnqvist & Flyghed, 2012).

There are three broad issues that are present within the above-mentioned approaches. First, the definition of radicalisation, and its relation to close concepts is inconclusive/ambiguous. For example, is the end point of radicalisation extremism (e.g. McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Mandel, 2009), terrorism (e.g. Al-Badayneh, Alhasan, & Almawajdeh, 2016; Kruglanski et al., 2014), or is attaining extremist beliefs a step in the radicalisation process that ends in terrorist acts (e.g. Doosje, Loseman, & van den Bos, 2013)? Furthermore, if we accept any of these end results of radicalisation, we are left with the question – what characteristics constitute a radical person? This issue is even more troubling when authors study radicalisation without defining it (e.g. Grattan, 2008; Quayle & Taylor, 2011; Rousseau, Hassan, & Oulhote, 2018). One can only agree with Neumann’s (2008: p. 4) widely cited statement that “experts and officials started referring to the idea of ‘radicalisation’ whenever they wanted to talk about ‘what goes on before the bomb goes off’.” Still, it seems that the key outcome, or rather ingredient, of the radicalisation process is violence; increasing the justification of violence of relevant groups and/or increasing the probability of performing violent acts (e.g. Della Porta & LaFree, 2012; Doosje et al., 2016; Jaskoski, Wilson, & Lazareno, 2017; Khalil, 2014; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Yet,

researchers have pointed out that radicalisation can be non-violent (e.g. Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Kundnani, 2012; Schmid, 2013), and some use the term “radicalisation to violent extremism” to distinguish between these two types (Borum, 2014). Thus, we are left with a theoretically extremely contested term, and without any agreement even on its basic definition. Due to its versatility and usage in various disciplines, radicalisation is in fact something scholars in the field of humanities call – travelling concepts. This basically means “they travel – between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities” (Bal, 2002: p. 2).

Unfortunately, when we move to the empirical findings the situation is even worse. First of all, there is a general paucity of empirical studies on the topic of radicalisation (see Borum, 2011b; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). Second, studies that use empirical data usually do not study the processes of radicalisation, even though the transformation to extremism or radicalism is the key aspect of the concept. Instead, for example, they study the characteristics of individuals already identified as radicals (Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Jaskoski et al., 2017), use a questionnaire to determine the level of radicalisation within individuals (Al-Badayneh et al., 2016; Chebotareva, 2014), identify determinants of radical beliefs (Doosje et al., 2013; Doosje, van den Bos, Loseman, Feddes, & Mann, 2012), etc. This by itself would not be a problem if not for the lack of studies dealing with the processes of radicalisation, not just with the characteristics and determinants of radicals<sup>2</sup>. Finally, the studies on radicalisation are geographically and sample-wise narrow – they almost exclusively deal with Western democracies and Muslims<sup>3</sup> (see Della Porta & LaFree, 2012). Kundnani (2012: p. 5) captures these issues stating that research on radicalisation is “in practice, limited to a much narrower question: why do some individual Muslims support an extremist interpretation of Islam that leads to violence?”

Finally, several authors have been critical of what could be dubbed “the sociological background” of radicalisation studies. Since the beginning of the surge in radicalisation studies, academia has been closely connected with security and public policy experts. From one point of view this is expected – the former can gain data, the latter insights that can be used for de-radicalisation policies. On the other hand, Kundnani (2012:

2 Studies dealing with the processes use post-hoc accounts of radicals (mostly terrorists) or close acquaintances which is of course subject to major rationalisation processes (see Pissou, 2013).

3 This is clear in the “symbolic purging of the NYPD radicalisation report” (Jenkins & Daddario, 2016).

p. 4) argues that “the radicalisation discourse was, from the beginning, circumscribed by the demands of counter-terrorist policy-makers rather than an attempt to objectively study how terrorism comes into being”. The de-radicalisation efforts have been portrayed as “industries” (Kühle & Lindekilde, 2010), while Githens-Mazer & Lambert (2010: p. 901) argue that academics, politicians, and the media use conventional wisdom on radicalisation to ensure that the public feels safe – “Deviation from conventional wisdom requires one group of participants to break this cycle—at the tangible risk, variously, of livelihood, of not being re-elected, of losing sales, and of losing research funding”.

After this brief overview of radicalisation studies, we can conclude that most of them use non-empirical methodology and are based on contested models of radicalisation to violent extremism of Muslim youth in Western democracies. Furthermore, they are mostly embedded within the securitisation frame, and as such have been under the influence of public policy agendas and needs. At the same time, there are several voices that argue that a different approach to radicalisation is not only possible, but theoretically clearer and analytically more useful.

### Radicalisation – An Alternative Approach

It should be clear that radicalisation is a term that has “terminological ‘baggage’” (Khalil, 2014: p. 199). It has a negative connotation, usually connected with extremist positions and political violence. At the same time, several authors have pointed out that the radicalisation process is highly context dependent (e.g. Lub, 2013; Mandel, 2009; Onnerfors & Steiner, 2018). Neumann (2013) points out that the term “radical” has no meaning on its own, and what gives it meaning is its position to the mainstream, to the status quo. Bartlett and Miller (2012: p. 2) also state clearly that “to be a radical is to reject the status quo”. This means that there is no single ideology or position that is universally radical, and one can be a radical democrat in an authoritarian regime or a radical anti-democrat in a democratic regime; an extremist, a terrorist, or a defender of human rights (Schmid, 2013). In this sense, mainstream and radical positions are mutually co-determined and can shift, which means that today’s “radicals” can be tomorrow’s “regulars” (Onnerfors & Steiner, 2018). It’s important to note that based on this approach extremism is only a specific type of radicalism – it includes anti-democratic tendencies and values within a democratic setting (mainstream).

But it is not only the relative (o)position to the mainstream that defines radicals, it is also the desire for a fundamental and immediate change of society’s dominant values and/or political regime (McLaughlin, 2012).

This desire can, but does not necessarily encompass, violent behaviour or support for violent actions. Following this approach, radicalisation can be defined as a shift toward adopting more radical values and positions. This approach is relatively new, and there are a lot of open issues – such as what are the differences in radicalisation in different settings, are there any universal phases or steps in the process, under what conditions is violence present or supported, what is the relationship between radical values and radical behaviour, etc. However, these issues are open within the studies of Islamist radicalisation to violent extremism, which means that we are not “losing” any insights by adopting an alternative approach to radicalisation. On the other hand, this allows us to broaden our scope of research, both in different socio-political settings as well as within groups and individuals with different ideological positions. Furthermore, this approach points out potential fallacies in simply assuming what the normative/mainstream position is, and who the radicals are, as was done in the majority of studies so far (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; Sedgwick, 2010).

### Radicalisation and Youth

The field of radicalisation studies is young, and once we adopt an alternative approach to radicalism it becomes even younger. Thus, the goal of this study is to take a few steps back toward the basics of radicalisation and study the relationship between the mainstream and radical positions and put it in the context of young people. One way to do this is to see how citizens/young people themselves see these terms and what they think are the defining characteristics of radicals.

Growing literature in the area of security studies points out youth as a group particularly prone to radicalisation. Young people are thus seen as a “growing concern for counter-terrorism policy” (Bizina, Grey, 2014: p. 72), relatively easy to recruit for violent radical acts and extremism (Özerdem, Podder 2011; Costanza, 2015), or even as an emerging issue for national security in various national contexts (Yom, Sammour, 2017; Doosje et al., 2017; Bezunartea et al. , 2009). Even though relevant sociological research also pinpoints young people as being more predisposed to extremist values than adults (Ilisin, 1999), this notion should not be taken for granted without taking into account other variables that influence youth behaviour, such as political culture of a specific state, economic situation, the quality of governance and democracy as such, social values constellation and so on. That being so, there is a tacit consensus among youth researchers that young people should be involved not only in policy-making but also in research when investigating their universes. In other words, it is advisable to give voice to young people when studying

phenomena related to them in order to assure greater accuracy and ample analytical value. Considering the fact that the aforementioned research papers stem from security studies rather than youth studies, they fail to assure youth voices when constructing arguments on youth radicalisation. As a result, this paper seeks to deconstruct the meaning behind radicalism and put this originally Western European concept emerged within the security studies paradigm (Borum, 2012), in the context of Croatia and youth studies. More concretely, the goal of this paper is to analyse how radicalism is understood by Croatian youth. We believe that by focusing on youth radicalisation from the perspective of youth studies we could get clearer and more substantial understanding of radicalism which can result in more effective policies in that area.

### Youth in Croatia

The situation regarding young people in Croatia is rather ambiguous. On the one hand, the recent empirical studies on young people in Croatia (Ilisin & Spajic-Vrkas, 2017; Kovacic & Horvat, 2016; Ilisin et al, 2013) describe this generation of young people as “disillusioned”. Hence, they show “overall deterioration of the social standing of young people compared to that of young generations 10-15 years ago” (Ilisin & Spajic-Vrkas, 2017: p. 422), further weakening of youth’s trust in the social perspective, retraction into a private sphere, and distancing themselves from social and political matters (ibid), as well as a growing process of retraditionalisation (Kovacic & Gvozdanovic, forthcoming). On the other hand, there is a trend of diminishing gender differences, better understanding of the importance of political participation, and growing personal optimism (Kovacic & Horvat, 2016). When describing youth mainstream in Croatia, authors claim that “young people are actually still predominantly oriented on pragmatic adaptation to requirements of the environment for the purpose of personal prosperity, by relying on individual and family resources, without worrying too much about large topics and problems of society” (Ilisin et al, 2013: p. 145). Still, in order to understand these findings, they should be analysed within Croatian social and political reality.

Paradoxically, in the years after joining the European Union in 2013, Croatia entered a politically and socially turbulent period. In less than a year, the government changed three times, numerous independent political and public institutions were censured or pacified, public discourse shifted towards neoconservative values, the sphere for progressive civil society organisations shrunk, and several normative acts changed in order to

limit different minorities' rights<sup>4</sup>. As demonstrated, young people on average are not as interested in greater societal and political occurrences and their actors which cannot be said vice versa. In other words, even though young people do not find radical societal actors important, young people are important to them because they wish to influence them. In Croatia, topics of young people and education are of great interest for various societal actors due to their importance for shaping (future) society. Both progressive and (neo)conservative social and political actors seek to influence curricula and young people in order to perpetuate and strengthen their values and points of views on society. Kovacic & Horvat (2016) in their book analyse civic competences of young people in Croatia and point out the progressive actors' agenda to empower young people, teach them to think critically, and engage them in society and politics via quality implementation of civic education in schools. Complementary, Petricusic et al. (2017: p. 69–70) point out that “the religious-political movement objects to the introduction of health and civic education programs in school curricula on the grounds that learning about sexuality in elementary and high schools is contrary to parental rights and interests of educating their children in accordance with their own value systems”. Latter actors are particularly important in the context of radicalisation due to their wish for fundamental and immediate change of society's dominant values and/or political regime which is how McLaughlin (2012) defines radicalism. Furthermore, both conservative and progressive actors consider the other one radical. Thus, one of the incentives for this research was to see what do young people understand as being radical and what is mainstream from their perspective.

## Methodological Framework

For that purpose, six focus groups, each consisting of nine questions, were conducted encompassing a total of 33 young people between the ages of 15 to 30, from five Croatian cities and towns (Zagreb, Split, Šibenik, Sinj, Dalj), throughout May and June 2018. All focus groups were transcribed and analysed by using Nvivo software. Focus groups were used because this qualitative research method technique allows researchers to explore participants' knowledge and experience in order to examine how they

4 Petricusic et al. (2017: p. 69) in their text on the rise of the neoconservative movement in Croatia describe the hallmark of this movement, namely the “initiative ‘In the Name of the Family’ that managed to include the definition of marriage into the text of the Croatian constitution as a union between a man and a woman. In this way they were able to create a constitutional prohibition of same-sex marriage and the impossibility of marriage equality for LGBT individuals”

think, construct reality, and why they think in that way (Kitzinger 1995). Considering the fact the main research question of this empirical study is to comprehend where the line between “radical” and “mainstream” is for young people and what does radicalism means for them, it was important to assure the platform for participants’ interaction. This aim is particularly relevant because it will assure researchers in the field of radicalism use it in a way that is in line with youth’s understanding of it. Therefore, the methodological design built upon focus groups has been chosen. Furthermore, relying on previous studies which define radicalisation as context dependent (e.g. Lub, 2013; Mandel, 2009; Onnerfors & Steiner, 2018), and bearing in mind that the studies on radicalisation almost exclusively deal with Western democracies and Muslims (see Della Porta & LaFree, 2012), we decided to conduct research in Croatia, a country that has a different context from previously studied country cases.

Since the starting point of the research was to study how young people conceptualise the radical and the mainstream, both constructs were operationalised into the focus groups’ questions, which can be seen in Table 1. Participants were asked to assess general characteristics of Croatian society and specifically the situation regarding themselves - young people. Additionally, they were asked to offer their conceptualisation of radicalism, both in the general public and youth specifically.

Table 1. Operationalisation of the relevant constructs.

Mainstream	Radical
How would you describe a good citizen? What characteristics does a typical/ordinary citizen have?	How would you describe a radical citizen? What characteristics should a radical citizen have?
Who is a typical/ordinary citizen in Croatian context? Describe one’s characteristics	Who is a radical citizen in Croatian context? Describe one’s characteristics
What does it mean to be a typical young person today?	What does it mean to be a radical young person today?

## Results and Discussion

Being “between the hammer and the anvil” or struggling to exercise their autonomy and innovation by expressing their creativity in a setting where society has expectations from them to perpetuate existing value patterns and societal norms, young people of today mature in a perplexed, confused, and hectic environment reinforced by uncertainty, prolonged economic dependence on their families, insufficient inclusion in decision-making, and growing disparities among the rich and the poor. Thus, the youth perception of the society they live in is an important insight for

sociologists and political scientists. Hence, by understanding their perception one can analyse the position of young people in society, current developments and projections for future development of society, and the structure and constellation of societal values due to youth's characteristic of being "one of the most sensitive seismographs of social change" (Ilisin et al, 2013: p. 9).

Results of the data obtained from the focus groups conducted with young people, point to some rather compelling findings (Table 2). Generally, young people are rather pessimistic when characterising society as well as themselves. Despite nominally claiming radicalism to be a neutral concept, they in fact perceive it negatively, particularly when describing a radical young person. In continuation we analyse each set of characteristics and discuss wider consequences of these findings for society.

Table 2. Youth perception of mainstream and radical individuals in Croatian society.

	Mainstream	Radical
Citizens	apathetic; incompetent and non-informed; dissatisfied and lazy; prone to media manipulation; single issue activism; (non)solidarity; dependent on the context	shift from mainstream; (in)competence; set of values; neutral concept; reductionism; reaction on society
Young people	similar to typical citizens; confused, anxious, impatient; disinterested and non-informed; pliable; dependent on the system; identity issues; prospective	enthralled; exclusive; the importance of public expression; the importance of set of values; machiavellianism; solidarity;

### Corrosive Apathy

It is no surprise young people believe Croatian *citizens* are relatively passive and apathetic. In public discourse there is an ongoing perception that the average Croatian citizen is disinterested, dissatisfied, or even lazy when it comes to standing up for society or themselves (Gvozdanovic & Bagic, 2015). Interestingly, young people very distinctively address prevailing problems of Croatian society, namely corruption, nepotism, lack of responsiveness between the government and society, weak economy, low salaries, etc. Young people claim the average citizen is aware of these problems but not ready to actively engage in changing their reality. When asked whom to blame for this, the unfavourable situation Croatian

society is in, they point to both passive and lazy citizens as well as the incompetent government.

One of the key elements of this apathy is certainly the lack of competences that could motivate citizens to rebel in case they are not satisfied. One of the participants addressed it as follows:

I would like to emphasise one other thing; we love to talk a lot but we don't have tools and means to act. We can sit and discuss for hours while having coffee but we don't know how to act. (Zagreb)

Similarly, a participant from Dalj believes that there are mechanisms to raise one's voice, but they are not used by Croatian people.

We don't do anything! Whatever will be, will be! They complain a lot about their bad situation but when there are protests organised about it, half of them don't attend them, they are too lazy to appear, they just sit at home.

Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to claim citizens in Croatia do not fight for their rights. However, young people believe these are relatively isolated acts and when they exist they are connected with so-called single-issue activism. Citizens in Croatia rebel when their (way of) life or the life of people close to them is being jeopardised.

I would like to point out that here we are discussing the average citizen of the Republic of Croatia, and I don't think they are not as active. In order to activate this trigger [for activism] the life of this individual or one's children has to be in danger. Furthermore, the percentage of people that have this trigger is small... (Zagreb)

All aforementioned circumstances make citizens prone to media manipulation. Media, according to young people, has an important role to educate citizens and yet it is providing useless information which pacifies citizens who stop following the news and retract into their private sphere. Our participants feel that this modus operandi is intentional, since political elites prefer disengaged citizens who are not vigilant nor adequately informed about the way the polity works.

### “Youth in the Chains of Society”

Another dimension studied in this research was self-perception. Young people were asked to describe themselves – *young people in Croatia*. The analysis of their responses confirms sociological insights that young people are the mirror of society. Most of the attributed characteristics for citizens can be applied to young people too. Young people describe their

generation as confused, anxious, impatient, disinterested, and uninformed. On top of that, young people are pliable and rarely engage in the deconstruction of certain processes and constructs but rather “go with the flow”.

A young person does not take any responsibility, we have one of the lowest election turnout rates. (Sinj)

Generally, to be popular is the main goal right now, but there are exceptions; however, for most young people this is an imperative, to have as many followers as possible on Instagram.... As many “likes” as possible.... And if someone goes out on the weekends and does something like getting drunk then everyone else feels they need to do the same. (Dalj)

The most convincing explanation for this situation is a system which is not responsive, nor recognising of the needs and potentials of young people. Due to their limited access to power, young people are much more dependent on the system than adult citizens, thus they feel the flaws of the system much more. For instance, a participant from Dalj summarised this problem very well by claiming that the scarcity of investment in young people makes young people disappear.

I think there are two things... there are... how to say two things.... There are no young people because there is no money and there is no money because the country is deteriorating.

Contrary to citizens, young people are characterised as being full of potential. Despite this rather negative view of young people, participants believe young people in Croatia have certain potentials that could be used for the benefit of themselves and society. Participants once again pointed out that the state does not allow young people to express themselves and use the potentials they have. They offer some examples of young people who left Croatia and succeeded in their intentions due to a better system.

But then what I see is that they have certain knowledge which is boring for them, which was not accessible before the internet. They have more opportunities and they are aware of them but I think they lack self-confidence to use them. I dunno how to describe that... (Zagreb)

I believe that plenty of young people that go abroad to make some money for their future life if they're gonna get married or something, they see that abroad is better because people are more fair and more kind and that the mentality is different than in Croatia. Perhaps they like that more, they decide to stay, find a job and have a good salary. (Dalj)

To sum up, just as regular citizens, Croatian youth is facing the ills of contemporary Croatia. They react by retracting from the public sphere and ignoring potential means for active involvement in society and politics. This relatively gloomy picture of Croatian youth is to some extent mitigated by the perception of young people being full of potential; however, they need to be given a change to exercise it adequately. After getting the picture of an average (young) person in Croatia, our second goal was to see what it means to be a radical in Croatia and how this perception relates to the mainstream.

### “Radical vs. Mainstream”

The analysis of responses from participants shows that young people were able to do two things when conceptualising *radicalism*. First, they offered their view on radicalism by contrasting it with the mainstream, which is in agreement with our theoretical concept. Second, and rather impressive, young people managed to identify the roots of radicalism.

When asked to explain the term radical, participants understood it as a great change or a shift from the average. Thus, any oscillation from something that is widely accepted and widespread in society is, from the point of view of young people, radical.

*The radical act is one that makes a great change, a turn from something that is the norm, a norm that one society decides to set. We can suppose that the norm in society in Croatia is centre-right, I don't have any empirical evidence, but let's just assume it is – society does not have any far-right attitudes but is more prone to accept them than the values from the left. However, there are some elements from the left that society embraces, for instance public services. Radicalisation is oscillation from that norm, that's how I see a radical citizen. (Zagreb)*

*Firstly, I'd set a hypothesis that a radical citizen is a person that diverges from the mainstream, for example that you are not in some liberal mainstream and have some conservative opinion – that you are a fascist, a Nazi. A radical citizen is someone like Željka Markić, who is Opus Dei. (Split)*

*Another example of a radical citizen is one on the other side of the ideological spectrum who does not care about anything apart from progressive values, such as LGBT rights, gender rights.... I think this is a bit premature for our country. (Split)*

For radicals, it is important to have a certain set of values which creates solidarity within the group.

*Having a set of values clearly organised is important. In other words, the system of values in which one believes in. Furthermore, the set of values as such has to have a hierarchical setup. (Zagreb)*

Another interesting finding is that, nominally, young people characterise radicalism as a neutral concept which can be filled with meaning depending on the context, just as this participant from Zagreb claims:

*For me, for this is important to define what it means to be radical because, for me, this concept is not necessarily negative, it is neutral and being filled by negative and positive connotations. A certain type of radicalisation can be very useful if directed adequately, it can be productive for societal change and in some cases it is even necessary. On the other hand, it can be very problematic when it is directed towards those at the bottom. If radicalisation is directed towards the top, towards the power structures then it is acceptable, but if it is directed towards the bottom, towards those who are weak then it is very problematic.*

However, when we analysed later responses (even from participants who described radicalism neutrally), it is evident that our participants view radicalism as in fact a negative occurrence. Attributed with reductionism, exclusion, lack of tolerance for others, and belief of superiority of one's set of values, for young people radicalism is unwanted. This claim is supported by their diagnosis of how radicalism is being created. According to participants the combination of reductionism and reaction to societal problems creates a radical response. Young people therefore see radicalism as a product of narrow-mindedness and a tainted system which is clearly a negative attribution of a concept.

*A radical citizen is someone who looks only in one direction and sees nothing left or right and does not agree with other attitudes. He does not accept other opinions/attitudes and stubbornly pushes his head against the wall. It doesn't matter in which direction this radical is looking, right or left, but he does not accept anything except his framework which is there since his childhood. (Split)*

*Radicalism is a consequence of not seeing the whole picture, not looking at the wider context, but only how your family has educated you. (Zagreb)*

This discrepancy between the text and subtext is of a particular value because it shows that young people in fact reluctantly accept everything that diverges from the average or common. This clearly demonstrates that young people have “fallen into society's trap”; they predominantly want to replicate existing social patterns and values and want less to enforce innovation and creativity. The perception of young people is that everything

that challenges the status quo, no matter in which direction, is seen as radical.

Lastly, young people were asked to define *a radical young person*. Here, again the negativity of the concept comes to play. Young people described a radical young person as being enthralled, exclusive, and focused on goals rather than the means.

*That's the group of people that talks only among themselves. They have relatively similar opinions and every time this opinion reflects to themselves back and forward. And if somehow another opinion shows up, the opposite from theirs then they will attack that person and just say: 'you're a fool, what you think is idiotism' and keep thinking what they were thinking before. (Split)*

*Some characteristics of a young radical is not allowing the intervention in their opinions or any shift from that. They might think it is, I dunno, OK to hit a woman. (Zagreb)*

*I'd say one is perhaps a bit ignorant because he/she accepts only one form of opinion and one type of information. (Sibenik)*

For young radicals it is important publicly to express their attitudes and opinions. They are not quiet and wish to impose their point of view as dominant.

*They are very loud and like to draw attention to themselves. They try to be a loud minority because they believe that what they believe should be so. (Split)*

As seen, young radical people are negatively characterised which is a rather peculiar situation. From the description of the mainstream young people believe the status quo is negative and thus it is plausible to expect that a radical young person in Croatia will be positively described, especially because youth is earlier described as being full of potential. However, this does not happen. Surprisingly, both mainstream and radical young people are viewed equally negative. One of the potential explanations for this is the worrisome epidemic of apathy and hopelessness among Croatian citizens and youth. This explanation is supported by the huge emigration rates of Croatian youth due to economic instability, ideological divisions, and ineffective government (Adamovic & Potocnik, 2018), coupled with the relatively low 88<sup>th</sup> position on the World Happiness Report for 2018 (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2018).

## Discussion and Conclusion

Many authors have tried to define the phenomena of radicalisation and radicalism and their complexity resulted in many different concepts and

definitions. Most of these definitions have been conceptualised in the context of terrorist attacks in Western Europe and the US, while the intention of this study was to investigate different forms of radicalism in a country without terrorist attacks, with the focus on young people.

Encouraged with the unclear and confusing use of the term radicalisation, the general lack of empirical studies on the topic of radicalisation (see Borum, 2011b; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010), and relying on the existing literature which suggests that young people have been particularly prone to radicalisation (Özerdem & Podder, 2011; Costanza, 2015), we conducted empirical research to reveal what young people in Croatia understand under the term “radical” and what they perceive as elementary characteristics of radical individuals. To get these answers we conducted six focus groups among young people in Croatia.

This rather new approach to studying radicalism resulted in several interesting observations. Firstly, our research confirmed that the radicalisation process is highly context dependent (Lub, 2013; Mandel, 2009; Onnerfors & Steiner, 2018). When giving some examples of radicals from their point of view, our participants recall politicians and different “advocacy” groups on the extreme right or extreme left political spectrum in Croatia. Although terrorist group ISIS has been recognised as an example of radicals, our research revealed that terrorists in the Croatian context, which luckily never suffered terrorist attacks, are not among the first associations with the term radical. Furthermore, when emphasising the importance of the context for explaining what is radical, authors underline the mainstream, i.e. the status quo, defining radical as a shift from that status quo (Neumann, 2013; Bartlett and Miller, 2012). Findings from our research immensely support this definition that sees radical as a shift from the mainstream. Following, from the point of view of young people in Croatia, any oscillation from something that is widely accepted and widespread in society is, radical. As mainstream, or as a “norm” in society, they posit centre-right political beliefs and related sets of values. Consequently, as radical citizens they identify for instance politicians who do not fit into the “norm”, like Ivan Pernar, one of the leaders of leftist populist party *Živi zid*, or former politician and leader of green liberal party *Orah*, Mirela Holy.

Further, young people in Croatia describe as radical Željka Markić, the leader of the Croatian neoconservative movement “In the Name of the Family”, that among other things fights against marriage equality for LGBT individuals. Interestingly, while on the one hand they see Markić as radical, they also see as radical all those people who fight for LGBT rights! Protesting for LGBT rights or showing an LGBT flag as an act of

support, they also see as radical, because, as one respondent said, “that is a little bit too premature for our state”. Not only should the importance of context be emphasised here, but also what Schmid (2013) argues that no single ideology or position is universally radical, and that one can be a radical democrat in an authoritarian regime or a radical anti-democrat in a democratic regime; an extremist, a terrorist, or a defender of human rights (2013). Moreover, Onnerfors & Steiner (2018) find that mainstream and radical positions are mutually co-determined and can shift, which means that today’s “radicals” can be tomorrow’s “regulars”. In line with this notion our respondents provided an example of women rights activists who were identified as radicals at the time, while today young people in Croatia see as radicals those who offend women’s rights.

Secondly, our findings revealed the presence of a corrosive apathy among Croatian youth. Young people described a typical young person in Croatia using negative terms, captured in the negativity and problems of the entirety of society. While one could expect that this could be fertile ground for radicals to bring change or a “shift from the status quo”, this does not happen. Surprisingly, both mainstream and radical young people are described as equally negative. Although young participants in our research claimed that radicalism is not necessarily a negative term and that it depends on the context and content, obviously the “terminological ‘baggage’” (Khalil, 2014: p. 199) was heavier and the negative connotation of the term prevailed.

Feeling helpless in the chains of numerous problems in the state, young people in Croatia have fallen into corrosive apathy. Only single-issue problems and personal involvement in a particular thing can motivate them to stand up and try to change what bothers them. But, most of the time, they feel deprived and abandoned by society, and yet, they are not ready to do anything to change that. It seems they just want to fit into existing norms and structures, and be part of the “status quo”. However, that would be perfectly understandable if they did not describe that same status quo as corrupted, lazy, missing cultural norms, poor, etc. Their apathy is obviously strongly correlated with state affairs, because, on the one hand they are ready to leave the country and change their lives from the roots, whereas on the other hand, while in Croatia, they are not even ready to vote in elections.

Thirdly, describing a radical young person as enthralled, exclusive, as a public attention seeker, as someone who has a specific set of values, someone who is in solidarity with one’s group, and who favours Machiavellianism, and giving examples of radicals who do not use violence to achieve their goals, young people in Croatia confirmed that

radicalisation has many different faces and that it can be non-violent, as some scholars already stated (Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Kundnani, 2012; Schmid, 2013). Our participants perceive radicalism as something that is omnipresent in different political spectrums in Croatia. Furthermore, many questions arise from our research: what are the causes and origins of radicalism in Croatia, how does the process of radicalisation start, where is the line between radical ideas and radical actions? Existing literature dedicated to radicalisation, published dominantly in the area of security studies, does not provide sufficient answers to our questions. Therefore, we believe that further research that will study radicalisation interdisciplinary in different research areas, in youth studies, cultural studies, media and communication studies, is not only necessary, but obligatory. Also, most scholars agree that radicalisation is always context related, hence, we believe more research should be conducted in different contexts and from different points of view. For example, a major issue in research on radicalisation is the relationship between radical ideas and radical action. One way to think about this is to use the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 2002), according to which behaviour is in part a result of an individual's perception of social norms. Thus, the key aspect by which individuals turn their radical ideas into radical behaviour could be their perception of societal rules, dominant norms, and, of course, who occupies the mainstream and radical positions in society.

Even though this research demonstrated several important insights about young people in Croatia and their relation to radicalism, there are still several caveats to it. Firstly, our sample consisted of 33 young people from Croatia, so our generalisation scope is limited. However, as our main goal was to investigate the concepts of mainstream and radical in more depth, this methodological design was chosen deliberately. Furthermore, the results of this research are in line with studies conducted on larger samples using quantitative approach. Even though this paper focused exclusively on Croatia, being a single-case study, it is advisable to replicate this type of research in different contexts, as well as using a broader sample within Croatia. Secondly, the focus of this paper was not to study individuals that would be identified as radicals from the point of view of society, or from dominant approaches to radicalisation. Thus, we could not study the radicalisation processes or characteristics of such individuals. However, the idea of this paper was to grasp the conceptualisation, perception, and notions about radicalism of young people in Croatia, which is in line with the relativistic and context-dependent approach to radicalism.

Finally, even though this paper did not provide a straightforward way of identifying radical individuals, its innovation lies in the fact that for the first time young people's perceptions about radicalism were studied. Therefore, this paper should serve as a starting point for researchers particularly interested in non-violent radicalisation in non-Western contexts.

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