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WORKING PAPER:

Fixing the EU Democratic Deficit:
An Instrumental View of Citizenship?

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Introduction

One of the main contributions of sociological approaches to the academic debates about the European Union (EU) democratic deficit is to focus on the social acceptance of the EU. Nowadays, EU institutions themselves seem to share the same focus on citizens' subjective perceptions. Indeed, fostering a sense of belonging to the EU becomes one of the strategies to fix the EU democratic deficit and strengthen its legitimacy. For EU institutions, it is necessary to bring the citizen closer to the EU as this would provide, at least partly, the solution to the democratic deficit. Hence, sociological approaches should now widen their focus, so to include the effects and adequacy of these EU policies among their research objects.

Our paper aims at furthering sociological approaches by taking into account at the same time citizens' perceptions and European institutions' policies engaging with these representations. We argue that the vision of citizenship promoted by EU institutions through different policies is very often reduced to its instrumental dimension.

The topic of *freedom of movement* proves to be a good case study. EU institutions often use the achievement of the freedom of movement to enhance the feeling of belonging, relying on the idea that "it is the EU right most cherished by the Europeans". However, the study of citizens' representations of the EU tends to show that freedom of movement alone, even when citizens exercise this right, is not enough to support this feeling of belonging. This (partial) disconnection between EU institutions' policies on citizenship and citizenship's perceptions falls short in fixing the democratic deficit.

The paper is divided in three parts. The first section (1) comes back to different studies which link freedom of movement and the ways citizens imagine the EU. We mainly present two streams of research: *free movement as an explanatory variable* for explaining citizens' support towards the EU; and *free movement as* a *frame*, used by citizens when they imagine the EU. From this second view, free movement is not limited to a practice. Our research is based on the latter approach, as it promises a deeper understanding of the place ascribed to free movement when citizens imagine the EU. This kind of approach promises to help us to understand the gap between institutional discourses about free movement and citizens' discourses. In the second section (2), we analyze the Commission's discourses about the 'European Year of Citizen' (2013-2014). This permits to understand the limited *utilitarian vision* of citizenship adopted when dialogue is opened with citizens. In the third section (3), we confront these analyses with citizens' representations collected through collective interviews organised with a specific group of citizens: young people living in Brussels. This

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move to the micro-level deepens the understanding of EU citizenship by juxtaposing the EU institutions' strategies with the analysis of citizens' perceptions

1. Free movement of people: an *explanatory variable* or a *frame of perception*?

As mentioned above, a first way of addressing free movement is to consider it as an *explanatory variable*: the use of this right could trigger public support for European integration or even strengthen the sense of belonging to EU. This is mainly the approach adopted by the Commission that we analyse in the next section.

Free movement of people is presented very often, especially in transactionnalist approach, as an important benefice of European integration. European citizens, in their daily life, have many occasions to interact across the borders of EU member states. The intensification of theses interactions were analysed as an engine for public support. According to Karl Deutsch, in his transactionalist theory, the rapprochement between member states would be able to promote the interactions between individuals at different levels and, ultimately, would foster an individual sense of belonging to this new political community[1]. Transactionnalist theory had some impact on European integration studies and on European policies that tried to "foster a common European identity and support for further integration by bringing Europeans together to work, study and live"[2], such as the Erasmus programme.

Recently, Theresa Kuhn tested Deutsch's expectations using statistical analyses of Eurobarometer survey. The starting point of her research is a statement that challenges the Deutschian assertion: while "transnational personal contacts and information" increase quickly, support to EU membership and European identification decrease in the same period.[3] Furthermore, euroscepticism has also abounded. These results, for Theresa Kuhn, do not necessarily lead to a complete calling into question of the transactionalist theory. As she notes:

> "[…] in line with Deutsch's expectations, there is a significant relationship between transnational interactions and orientation towards European integration *at the individual* level, but that transactions are (1) socially stratified (2) their effectiveness depends on their purpose and scope and (3) they can foment negative externalities among Europeans who are not transnationally active themselves."[4]

Indeed, as Neil Fligstein has already shown, only a little portion of Europeans do really engage with this transnational interaction.[5] Another factor plays a crucial role: the EU is enshrined in a larger phenomenon of globalisation that certainly can mask some advantages of the European integration process. If we come back now to Theresa Kuhn's work, she evaluates the level of *individual transnationalism,* the way an individual is involved in transnational interaction with three indicators: origins, practices and cultural capital. Free movement is here understood in a larger way. Theresa Kuhn shows that only a highly skilled and young minority interact across border (some authors call them the *movers*[6]) but when they do so, a smaller proportion expresses a rejection of the European Union. But it is a small, "avant-garde section of the public" and "it is not sufficient to model the EU support as a function of the aggregate level of transnational interactions".[7] Then, Kuhn's work confirms the findings of other studies focusing on intra-European migrants developing identification to the

[1] DEUTSCH (Karl), *Nationalism and Social Communication. An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality*, New York, Technology Press of Massachussetts Institute of Technology and Wiley, 1953.
[2] KUHN (Theresa), *Experiencing European Integration. Transnational Lives & European Identity*, Oxford University press, 2015.
[3] KUHN (Theresa), « Individual transnationalism, globalisation and euroscepticism: an empirical test of Deutsch's transactionalist theory », *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 50, n°6, 2011, p. 811-837.
[4] KUHN (Theresa), *Experiencing… op. cit.*, p. 6.
[5] FLIGSTEIN (Neil), *Euroclash. The EU, European Identity and the Future of Europe*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.
[6] FAVELL (Adrian), *Eurostars and Eurocities. Free Movement and Mobility in an Integration Europe*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2008.
[7] KUHN (Theresa), *Experiencing… op. cit.*, p. 7.

EU[8], or who see it, for utilitarian reason, as a source of opportunity.[9] To counter euroscepticism, she suggests extending the opportunity to other publics to develop cross-border interactions.[10] By analysing the impact of the Erasmus exchanges programmes on European identity, she submits the same conclusion: the impact is limited because only few students, already educated, already linked to Europe, make use of this programme.[11] In her last book, Theresa Kuhn also affirms that the interactions produce for socializing between Europeans "are shown to play a greater role in predicting public orientations towards European integration than purely instrumental ones such as trade. Considering that the lion's share of intra-European transactions are instrumental by nature, this finding helps to explain why we find little support in spite of increasing levels of transaction."[12] The *purpose* is then important to explain the *effects*.

We would like to focus on a *second way to apprehend free movement*. For other researches, free movement is more a frame of perception mobilized for making sense of the EU. They do not aim at measuring the impact of the practices of free movement on the rejection or the support for European Union; the goal is to understand how free movement is mobilized when the citizens evoke the European Union. These researches aim at understanding on which elements the citizens assess concretely the EU. Medrano explains that "people's attitudes and behavior towards objects or problems depend on how they conceive of, frame, or represent them"[13].

While the possible justifications of the EU are often analysed from above, more and more researchers are interested to understand it from below. Instead of estimating the way the political decisions are taken or how institutions work from normative criteria, these researches are rather interested in the social acceptance of the EU, from the point of view of the citizens. While not ignoring postulates formulated by quantitative researches, the "microscopic" approaches explore closely the European citizens on diverse grounds. They try to clarify the processes structuring the attitudes of individuals towards the EU, and they aim to enlighten the correlations claimed by the quantitative approaches. The complexity of the relationships to the political is more explicit in this approach, and is far from the explanation in terms of support *versus* rejection. These researches can be classified in two groups.

In the first, some researches are interested, from below, in the category of the *movers*, in order to put in perspective their attachment, by default, (or their supposed attachment) to the EU. For example, Adrian Favell realized individual interviews with so-called "Eurostars", professionals from superior and middle classes who have settled in some cities in another member state (London, Amsterdam and Brussels).[14] These interviews reveal the low level of interest for the EU, even if these Eurostars seem to benefit directly from opportunities offered by the EU, and in particular thanks to free movement. These citizens know the EU, they practice free movement concretely, but they do not feel attached to the EU. These results contrast with the Eurobarometers in which this category of individuals is mainly considered as "Europhile". A gap appears here between the practice and the frame of perception.

The second set of research investigates the main frames of perception mobilized by the

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[8] ROTHER (Nina) et NEBE (Tina), « More mobile, more European? Free movement and EU identity », in *Pioneers of European Integration: Citizenship and Mobility in the EU*, Ettore Recchi et Adrian Favell (éd.), Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2009, p. 125-155.

[9] KRIESI (Hanspeter) et al. (2006). Globalization and the transformation of the national political space: Six European countries compared. *European Journal of Political Research,* vol. 45, n°6, p. 921–957.

[10] KUHN, 2011, *op. cit.*, p. 828.

[11] KUHN (Theresa), « Why educational exchange programmes miss their mark: cross-border mobility, education and European identity », *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 50, n°6, 2012, 994-1010.

[12] KUHN (Theresa), *Experiencing… op. cit.*, p. 14

[13] DIEZ MEDRANO (Juan), *Framing Europe. Attitudes to European integration in Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom*, Princeton/Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2003.

[14] FAVELL, 2008, *op. cit.*

ordinary citizens, the *stayers*, where we can identify centrally free movement as a frame used when speaking about Europe. Juan Diez Medrano, for example, enlightens the national logics structuring the attitudes of the individuals. By associating results of quantitative research with the analysis of newspapers, public speeches and individual interviews with elites but also with ordinary citizens in the United Kingdom, Germany and Spain, it shed lights on frames which are specific to every member state and which participate in the structuring of the attitudes of the citizens.[15] Free movement is one of the first frames of perception which is mobilized for making sense of the EU. For example, the research led by Sophie Duchesne and her team within the project CITAE (Citizens talking about Europe) was interested in the social and national logics of attitudes towards the EU. It relies on the constitution of 24 collective conversations between 2005 and 2006 in the United Kingdom, France and Belgium. Their guide of interview brought the individuals to take various looks at the EU, at the same time synoptic and focused on specific aspects of the integration. The title of their work "*Overlooking Europe*" already indicates it: while the citizens are able to speak about the EU, it does not mean that the EU makes sense concretely for them. Free movement is again a frame of perception in the interviews with these ordinary citizens.

In both groups of researches, the authors identify the main frames of perception of the citizens when they speak about the EU. Among the four big categories that they identify, we find "the common market", "states are too small ", "the removal of borders "or "governance". Free movement is part of these main frames, coded as "removal of borders".[16] This frame of perception is declined in different ways in the discussions. It is mainly mobilized in a positive way to approach the advantage of a mobility facilitated by the absence of border controls or by the existence of a single currency in the more recent conversations. In this perspective, free movement would lead, at least for certain participants, to a strengthening of the understanding between people. For others, free movement is also mobilized for expressing reluctance - even a rejection - of the European project, particularly through the mention of immigration and insecurity. Two elements stand out from these researches: free movement is a central frame of perception in the cognitive construction of the citizens towards the EU, and this one is especially mobilized, at the moment of these researches, to justify positively the existence of the European project.

In the following section, we shall deepen the understanding of this last approach from the material collected with a particular group of citizens: young people living in Brussels. This microscopic point of view brings an interesting nuance to revisit this frame of perception. Besides the mobilisation rather commonly evoked by citizens about free movement, both in a positive way – opportunities of mobility – and denial – competition with newcomers, we question especially the mobilization of this frame of perception to explain and express a certain *distance* towards the EU as a political actors.

2. The *European Year of Citizens*: What kind of citizenship for the European Commission?

In this section we focus on the European Year of Citizens in 2013, and more specially, we analyse the discourses and the implementation of decisions around this case which can show how the European Commission links citizenship and free movement.

The decision to make 2013 the European Year of Citizens was adopted by an ordinary legislative procedure[17]. The background is interesting to study. This idea can be found in the 2010 report on the citizenship of the European Union. The Parliament, in its resolution of 15

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[15] DIEZ MEDRANO, 2003, *op. cit.*
[16] VAN INGELGOM (Virginie), 2014, *op. cit.*, p. 132-134 ; DIEZ MEDRANO (Juan), 2003, *op. cit.*, p. 30-31.
[17] Decision n° 1093/2012/UE from the European Parliament and Council, 21 November 2012. Journal Officiel 23 November 2012. JO L 325/1 23/11/2012.

December 2010 on "the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union – effective implementation after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon" also invited the Commission "to make the year 2013 the European Year of the Citizens". The initial formal proposal of the Commission, presented in 2011, was modified as a result of the interventions of the European Parliament to end in the definitive decision, and we shall see in which direction. We shall rely essentially on these documents as a first step.[18]

The European Parliament, in its resolution of 15 December 2010, calls on the Commission:

> "to make 2013 the European Year of Citizenship in order to give the momentum to the debate on European Citizenship and inform EU citizens of their rights, in particular the new rights resulting from the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon".

The focus on citizenship is linked to information that has to be given to the citizens but also on the new rights included in the Treaty such as the European Citizens Initiative (ECI). However, in 2011, the Commission presents a proposal in which the European Year of Citizens is almost exclusively focused on a specific right for the citizens, the right of free movement. For the Commission, citizenship seems to be a close synonym for free movement, given that is also an advantage of this citizenship. This quote is particularly explicit: "Freedom of movement is virtually synonymous with Union citizenship, constituting the most tangible expression of the benefits related to Union citizenship."[19]

The European Commission emphasizes the fact that it is by moving, by crossing national boundaries that citizens can really appreciate the European citizenship. For the Commissions, exercising this right "contributes to giving concrete significance to Union citizenship in the daily life of citizens". From this perspective, the Commission wants to continue to break down the barriers to the exercise of this right. Actually, lack of information about this right is considered/defined as the most important barrier preventing the use of the right to free movement. Moreover, by raising awareness of the benefits of these rights, the Commission also hopes to "contribute to a stronger sense of belonging and adherence to the Union" (p. 11). The Commission seems clearly to adhere to the main transactionalist perspectives that we describe in section 1.

As we said earlier, for the Commission, there are still too few citizens that are aware of their rights. The Commission must therefore contribute to:

> "the dissemination of information to Union Citizens about their rights as such and in particular about their free movement rights. The designation of 2013 as the European Year of Citizens, […] is this listed in the EU citizenship Report 2010 as one of the actions to implement in order to remedy this lack of awareness" (p.2).

For the Commission, the logic goes like this: it is enough to strengthen the awareness of the existence of the right of free movement to support citizenship because this free movement right is already the most well known right, the one that is emblematic of the European citizenship, "highly valued by Union Citizens". The Commission continues to hammer home the point. Above all, what matter are the rights in a cross-border context, or the rights of citizens "while living in another Member Stave". "Exercising the right to free movement and residence therefore contributes to making Union citizenship a tangible reality in the daily life of citizens" (p. 9) What is astonishing is that for being a European citizen, to exercise his

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[18] European Parliament resolution of 15 December 2010 on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union (2009) – effective implementation after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon – P7_TA(2010)0483; Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Year of Citizens (2013) - COM (2011) 489 final; Commission Staff Working paper – European Year of Citizens 2013 – Ex-ante evaluation ; Report on the proposal from the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, 21 September 2012 ; Debates on the report and concerning the European Year of Citizens (European Parliament – plenary session- 22 October 2012).
[19] (p. 1, COM(2011)489 final)

legitimate rights, one should necessarily move, and be in a cross border context. We would like to show below that this logic seems to shut out the reality of most of the citizens.

The Commission insists also on the advantage, on the "benefit from EU rights and policies while living in another Member State" (p. 3). This is somewhat like saying (and we will see below that this is what actually the Commission itself states): if European Union did not exist, if European citizenship did not exist, living in another European country (and travelling and working and consuming) would be more complicated. Raising the awareness of citizenship is linked to an incentive, a utilitarian cost-benefice calculation. In the Commission proposal, when other rights are mentioned (such as the right to vote), it is only because of a "cross-border context" (p. 10). To illustrate this more explicitly, one of the objectives of the proposal is to raise "Union Citizen's Awareness of how they can tangibly benefits from EU rights and policies while living in another member State and stimulate their active participation in civic fora on Union policies and issues." The whole proposal is thus focused on the rights of free movement. Political rights are only linked to the cross-border experience of the few European citizens who live abroad.

Finally, in this initial version of the Commission proposal, the European Year aims more specifically at implementing dialogue,

> "[…] stimulating a debate about the impact and potential of the right to free movement as an inalienable aspect of Union citizenship, in particular in terms of strengthening societal cohesion and mutual understanding between Union citizens and the bond between citizens and the Union" (p.3)

We would like to make two comments on this quote. First, citizen participation to a public debate is also linked to free movement. Second, this discourse reiterates the idea that free movement would build a better consciousness of Europe, a better support for Europe, because citizens would be more aware of its benefits. While this reasoning resonates with the transactionnalist approach, we could mention, as Favell already said, that it is different to think in terms of "behaviour" (what people do when they travel, live in another country, and so on) and in terms of "attitudes" (how they feel about a political structure, for example). The link between these two concepts is not so obvious, as we shall see below.

After this initial proposal, the European Parliament intervention has an impact on the definitions of the objectives of this European Year of Citizens[20]. The European citizenship is not only described as the rights to move and reside in another Member States. Amendments proposed by Parliament remind that political rights of the citizens, the rights to participate to the democratic life of the Union, are also important, regardless of their location, regardless of a cross-border context. For instance, the Parliament recommends that "more emphasis should be placed on participatory democracy and the new rights derived from the Treaty, as for example, the Citizen's Initiative" (p. 46-Report).

In Article 2, which specifies the objectives of the European Year of Citizens, the first sentence is still focused on the rights to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States. However, the second one adds that the European Year "shall also promote the enjoyment by Union citizens of the other rights attached to Union citizenship" (p. 29). The Parliament intensifies the place of political rights of the citizens "in any member state in which they reside" (p. 30, report). For the rapporteur of the Parliament, this Year should also be replaced in the context of the "democratic deficit" and the upcoming European elections scheduled in 2014. This European Year should be a momentum to "tackle the democratic deficit and abstention in elections" (p. 47 – report). Then, in the final proposal, even if the

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[20] Report on the proposal from the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, 21 September 2012.

right to move continues to be the key issue, there is a little more place for the other rights linked to the European citizenship.

Citizens' Dialogues

One of the concrete translations of this European Year consists in the implementation of Citizens' Dialogues, a kind of discussion forum organised by the Commission with "ordinary" citizens. About 50 Citizens' Dialogues have been held in all member states of the European Union. The series of these dialogues started in September 2012 and continued until the European Parliament Elections in May 2014. Viviane Reding, then Vice-president of the Commission and Commissioner in charge of Justice, Fundamental rights and Citizenship, declared that it was on its initiative that the European Year of Citizen had been concretely translated by these dialogues[21]. Organized by the European Commission in partnership with national or local public actors, it is essentially Viviane Reding, who was involved, but other commissioners, including José Manuel Barroso, President of the Commission, participated in this initiative. These debates were kept under the following slogan: "It is about Europe. It is about YOU, join the debate" and invited the citizens to participate in this exchange.

The objectives covered initially different aims and were ambitious. The initiative was supposed to make citizen "participate", to "hold debates with citizens all across Europe – to listen to them and answer their questions", to raise the "direct involvement of citizens in building a stronger and more political union"[22], to "discuss the future of European Union", or to create "a new way of making policy" by "involving citizens before taking political decisions that directly impact upon their daily lives"[23], to hold "an open dialogue" with citizens, and so on.

Interestingly, in its definition of the scope of the Citizens' Dialogues, the Commission seems to adopt a broader view of citizenship, less instrumental. The dialogues are no longer about advantages and benefits of the right to move, but they are rather about allowing the citizens to express their opinion, listening and dialoguing with them and so on. However, the concrete translation of these objectives is disappointing regarding the political participation of the citizens. Within these dialogues, citizens were not able to influence policies or shape the future of Europe. Once again, the Commission took an instrumental stance, singing the praises of European Union and not giving the opportunity to really debate.

These conclusions are based on our field research. We observed three dialogues held in Belgium, in three different cities (Brussels, Namur and Mont-Saint-Guibert) in September and December 2013 and in january 2014. We would like to pinpoint some elements of our analysis.

In terms of procedures, the three observed Citizens' Dialogues are identical. The public who participates in the dialogue received an electronic box to vote when entered the conference room. In the three cases, the scenography was identical: a big screen, a stage or a podium, with two presenters, equipped with wireless microphone, with seats ready to welcome the speakers and the public who seated down in front of the scene. Before entering the "debate" strictly speaking, a movie of two minutes was proposed to the audience. The movie started with a question: "The European Union: would my life be any different if it didn't exist? Would it be better? Would it be worse?" After that, the film evoked the merits and the advantages of

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[21] E-book, Representation of the Commission in Belgium, « Europe : ce que nous disent les belges. Leçons des dialogues citoyens », http://ec.europa.eu/belgium/news/documents/ce_livre_citoyen_ebook_fr.pdf
[22] European Commission, "European Commission kick-starts the 2013 European year of citizens", Press release, 1 January 2013. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-2_en.htm
[23] European Commission, "Future of Europe Debate: Vice-President Reding Face to Face with Citizens' in Coimbra, Portugal", Press release, 20 February 2013. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-129_en.htm

the EU in terms of peace keeping, but above all of a larger market that contributed to a larger choice for consumers, to a better trade environment, to jobs opportunities and in terms of the chance to move and work in another country for citizens. The movie continued emphasizing with the need for the countries to get together in order to be stronger in a world dominated by the globalization, and stating the fact that European countries share the same values and concerns. It ended with the invitation to citizens "to express their views" about the next step for the EU. In other words, the short movie is clearly a short promotional film in which is enshrined a vision that seek to show how EU is beneficial for citizens.

The dialogues were then organized in different stages: interventions of the political speakers; closed questions via the big screen to which the participants answered by using their electronic box (with two options: "Yes" or "No"); comments on these results by the speakers; oral questions from the public; answers of the speakers to these questions, all chaired by the presenters. Most of the 'speaking time' was occupied by politicians representing the Commission and the regional authorities. When they answered actually to some questions (only 6 in the first case) from the floor, the replies were non-confrontational, depoliticized and used big promotional speeches of the EU.

The public was mainly put in in front of a well-organized show in which, as in 'interactive' broadcasts, the audience can push a button and see the result of the votes appearing almost simultaneously. Citizens appeared as a respondent of the 'media game' and clearly less as an actor of a democratic process during which the participants could have express themselves on political choices and deliberate with others participants. Even the Commission's questions addressed to the audience seemed to have missed their target of opening a dialogue. Sometimes they were excessively oriented, sometimes they were too vague, in general they gave rise to too different interpretations. For example, let us quote the following question: "Do you think that the politicians have to have a dialogue more often with the citizens? Yes - No". The answer to this question was "yes" with a highly significant majority (around 85 per cent). The citizens "around" the table could not have answer something else as they probably came for this purpose. Another question seemed at least confused: "For you, does Europe mean the solidarity between States? Yes – No". One can ask whether it was a normative question that would consist in knowing if EU needs more solidarity in the future or more a factual question about the functioning of the EU regarding to solidarity? Or does the question relate to the unstable context where the solidarity would be perceived as decreasing or increasing? Nothing is more subject to interpretation.

All in all, the participants did not contribute "to shape the outputs" of the EU or to give any impulsion to "the Europe of the Future", which were the goals of the European Year of Citizens/of the Citizens' Dialogues. It would have been necessary to use another methodology, as far as the dialogues never entered into a concrete debate on the actions of the EU, its effects. The Citizen's Dialogues were rather used as a communication tool: they were thought to promote the EU, to give some information, to raise awareness about the missions of the EU. Indeed, in the final report of the Commission on these dialogues, the Commission presented them as a "communicational tool". Far from the objectives initially determined.

3. A microscopic view on the link between free movement and the *justifications* of the EU

Through the previous section, we have tried to put emphasis on the vision proposed by the Commission when it comes to citizenship. The *knowledge* by citizens of the rights linked to EU citizenship (and especially free movement) seems particularly important for the Commission. It is based on the idea that if citizens link resources provided by free movement with the EU, they could feel closer to the EU. This recognition could, in turn, increase EU

legitimacy. Even if we have observed an evolution in the discourses, the *instrumental vision* is still one of the main foundations of the Commission's views on citizenship. This second part of the analysis highlights the discrepancies that exist between Commission's discourses and young people's perceptions.

In this section, we confront these analyses with citizens' representations collected through collective interviews organised with a specific group of citizens: young people living in Brussels. We believe that this move to the micro-level deepens and enriches the understanding of EU citizenship, as it permits to juxtapose to EU institutions' discourses the analysis of citizens' perceptions.

A micro-study of EU legitimacy implies to adopt a bottom-up perspective. The classical order of the bulk of research in this field is somewhat reversed. Rather than evaluating the ways in which political decisions are taken or the way in which institutions work, a micro-analysis focuses on the social acceptance of the EU by citizens, i.e. the way people accept or not the political order. From this perspective, the legitimacy of a political system is not only limited to compliance with legal and procedural aspects; social acceptance has to be investigated too[24]. Bottom-up research, especially qualitative oriented, promises not only a better grasp of the relationship of citizens towards the EU, but also of people towards politics more in general. It aims at investigating the subjective foundations of political legitimation processes.

This enquiry takes place in Brussels: at the heart of the capital of the European Union (EU). It is based on six collective discussions – focus groups – among 35 young people (16-26 years old), held between November 2013 and May 2014. These six focus groups of three-hours and half each have been conducted in the framework of a doctoral research. Four to seven young people participated to each group discussion. Participants came from different neighbourhoods in Brussels, with diverse socio-demographic features. Each focus group included participants coming from the same neighbourhood, and having spent at least the years of the secondary school in Brussels.

(FG1) Saint-Josse	(FG2) Molenbeek	(FG3) Anderlecht	(FG 4) Jette	(FG 5) Ixelles	(FG 6) Uccle
5 **Naima** (f/24) **Lila** (f/23) **Leila** (f/18) **Jordan** (m/22) **Abdel** (m/17)	4 **Asma** (f/17) **Mariam** (f/24) **Odomar** (m/17) **Yassine** (m/16)	7 **Nisrine** (f/24) **Amina** (f/19) **Nabila** (f/19) **Alexandre** (m/20) **Ilias** (m/18) **Bilal** (m/26) **Waleed** (m/17)	7 **Catherine** (f/23) **Nour** (f/19) **Lucie** (f/17) **Gabriel** (h/21) **Nathan** (m/26) **Adil** (m/21) **Yusef** (m/23)	7 **Aicha** (f/25) **Inaya** (f/19) **Danielle** (f/17) **Isabella** (f/22) **Mun** (m/20) **Louis** (m/17) **Maël** (m/25)	5 **Sophie** (f/22) **Elise** (f/17) **Julie** (f/24) **Théo** (m/19) **Nicolas** (m/21)

Without claiming having homogeneous profiles of individuals in each group, common characteristics were shared in each group in order to insure the conditions to identify "shared images". The groups of Saint-Josse (FG1), Molenbeek (FG2) and Anderlecht (FG3) were composed by young people originated from families that could be considered as part of the "working-class". They are Belgian (except two participants). They are also from the second or third generation of migrants in Belgium (Pakistan, Morocco, Turkey, Sub-Saharan Africa). In Jette (FG4), the profile of participants was mixed with participants from the "middle class". Some participants are also from second or third generation of migrants. In Ixelles (FG5), young people were from families of diverse backgrounds, "middle class" or "upper-middle class". In Uccle (FG6), young people were from families of the "middle" or "upper" class. These features are not considered as *explicative variables*, they however permit to deepen the interpretative analysis of the data. Indeed, young people's perceptions are constructed through their experience of the socio-political world. Knowing more about different features

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[24] Beetham (David) & Lord (Christopher), (1998). Legitimacy and the European Union. Londres/New York: Longman, p. 6.

that could help to understand their perceptions was central. It is why we asked participants to complete questionnaires to gather complement information on them, information they would not directly mention in the discussion but that could help the interpretation of the data.

The young people participating to the focus groups were asked during the first hour two questions: *What are the most important problems we have to address today?* and *Who should bring solutions to these problems?*. This allows people to speak about politics without always already pushing the EU at the forefront of the discussion. It avoids reifying the EU by default in the discussions and in the analysis. Participants were not asked to choose a clear – positive or negative – position on Europe, but rather to express the complexity of their views in a collective discussion. Hence, moments where opposition or consensus between participants arose are particularly interesting. During the next hour, they were asked two questions directly orientated towards political institutions (local/regional/national/European). Based on photos of these different political institutions, the third question was "*Do you feel close or far from these images? Why?*". Then the fourth question was directly orientated to the EU level *("What is the European Union for you?").*[25] These young people discuss the European topic within a wider discussion about politics. Even if most of participants express incompetence or inability to talk about politics, they show that they are able to share, spontaneously, their complex thoughts on politics, including Europe. They seem to consider the EU as one level amongst the others political levels.

Free movement has spontaneously emerged in 21 passages of the discussions, especially when young people discussed "what is the EU for them?". As shown in the table below, the topic of free movement represents only a small part of the overall discussions. However, it was particularly central when the EU was directly discussed. This leads us to consider it as central topic when young people imagine the EU.

(FG1) Saint-Josse	(FG2) Molenbeek	(FG3) Anderlecht	(FG 4) Jette	(FG 5) Ixelles	(FG 6) Uccle
Free movement = 1,64% of the exchanges	Free movement = 1,47% of the exchanges	Free movement = 8,18% of the exchanges	Free movement = 7,73% of the exchanges	Free movement = 4,72% of the exchanges	Free movement = 6,74% of the exchanges
30 292 (total of words)	30 948 (total of words)	35 224 (total of words)	31 037 (total of words)	34 844 (total of words)	40 056 (total of words)

Besides the numbers, it is interesting to grasp *how* the participants use this frame in the discussions. For this reason, in the rest of this section we focus on some passages[26] of the discussions so to emphasize the different discourses linked to free movement. As we will see, free movement is not always perceived as a benefice. The perception mostly depends on participants' socio-economical background and/or origins. Yet, participants recognize that free movement is an important benefice of EU integration, but they directly add that it is not *sufficient* to *justify* the EU. This potential paradox pinpoints the interest of thinking about the specific use of this *right* to justify the EU.

Free movement as a multifaceted frame
Free movement appears in different forms in the discourses. Some participants use it to undermine the EU project. Other rather express the "*banalisation*" of the EU. During the discussions in Anderlecht, Molenbeek and Saint-Josse, free movement is especially used to refer to negative outcome of EU integration: the economical competition from EU migrants.

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[25] QUESTION 5 : *How can you identify the groups of people to which you belong*? ; QUESTION 6 (material : six different maps per pair) *Which entities you feel part and why*?
[26] We have not systematically translated the quotes into English for this working paper. However, some quotes will be fully translated during the oral presentation and some parts of the selected quotes are partially translated in the following paragraphs. To facilitate the comprehension of the reader, We put into brackets the words that were not uttered but that are useful for understanding of the sentence. Also, while in the original transcriptions we did not use punctuation, we introduce it in this working paper to make the quotes easier to understand.

This becomes an important basis for undermining the European project. Even if these participants can recognize that free movement can facilitate mobility, they consider it mainly as an economical and social competition. Through their discourses, some participants radically reject this principle because of the negative social effects (quote below). EU's capacity of action is put into question through one of its most successful achievements.

> **(Quote 1, Saint-Josse)**
> **Lila** : Dans le CPAS [Centre public d'aide sociale]…[27] **Le fait qu'on donne plus facilement le CPAS par exemple, à des gens des pays qui viennent de rentrer dans l'Union européenne comme par exemple la Roumanie et la Bulgarie**. Et donc on voit tous ces gens qui sont rentrés il n'y a pas si longtemps… 'Fin, oui, quand même, il n'y a pas si longtemps mais on voit tout, tout, les personnes qui viennent de la Bulgarie, de la Roumanie. Ils ont tous droit à un CPAS alors qu'une personne qui est née ici, en Belgique, et qui, qui…
> **Naima** : Qui parle la langue.
> **Lila** : Qui parle la langue qui est dans … Qui n'a pas les moyens de vraiment vivre…
> **Jordan** : Qui même a travaillé pour son pays.
> **Lila** : Voilà, qui même, voilà. Et qui n'a pas de droit, à ses droits. J'ai envie de dire. Parce que c'est son droit aussi. On est né ici. Ils sont nés ici. On a travaillé pour eux. Et ne pas avoir le droit, c'est quand même… ne pas avoir ses droits, / c'est…
> **Jordan** :   / C'est frustrant…
> **Lila** : C'est frustrant. C'est ça, aussi, que je voulais dire.

Lila (cf. quote 1) explains "that it is not right that people from member states that just entered the EU (especially Romania or Bulgaria) may enjoy social benefits and receive money from the State" ["Le fait qu'on donne plus facilement le CPAS par exemple, à des gens des pays qui viennent de rentrer dans l'Union européenne comme par exemple la Roumanie et la Bulgarie"]. It is even considered as a real chance for countries to be out of Europe. Nabila (Anderlecht) uses the example of the United Kingdom through the discussion ['L'Angleterre est intelligente']. Free movement is a particular contested topic when it is related to East European member states.

> **(Quote 2, Anderlecht)**
> **Bilal** : Moi, je voudrais revenir en fait sur le... la crise économique. Et avoir votre avis (*en s'adressant aux autres participants*) par rapport à l'élargissement de l'Europe. **Est-ce que c'est pas plutôt ça qui enfonce les jeunes ici, à Bruxelles, qui ne trouvent plus de travail ?** On augmente les, les pays...
> **Waleed** : Ouverture du marché.
> **Bilal** : Ouais. Et il n'y a plus d'emplois pour ceux d'ici. Et ils préfèrent les étrangers.

In the previous quote (cf. quote 2), Bilal establishes a direct link between EU enlargement and youth unemployment. He wonders if EU enlargement is not one of the main reason to explain youth unemployment in Brussels ["Est-ce que c'est pas plutôt ça qui enfonce les jeunes ici, à Bruxelles, qui ne trouvent plus de travail ?"] We can see that those who directly refer to free movement in negative terms are those who experience more direct contacts with EU migrants, especially from lower economical classes. They clearly know this right but they are not able to concretely enjoy it. They also do make the link with the EU level. As previous research showed[28], stigmatisation of more recent migrants can be seen as an answer to their own situation. It is a strategy to express and in a way *justify* their situation[29]. Some of these participants referred directly to *discrimination problems* in the first question of the discussion "*What are the most important problems we have to address today?*".

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[27] The ellipsis in the quotes indicate an unfinished sentence in group discussions.
[28] KAYA (Ayhan) et KENTEL (Ferhat), *Belgo-Turc. Pont ou Brèche entre la Turquie et l'Union européenne,* Fondation Roi Baudoin Bruxelles, 2007; MAZZOCCHETTI (Jacinthe), « Sentiments d'injustice et théorie du complot. Représentations d'adolescents migrants et issus des migrations africaines (Maroc et Afrique subsaharienne) dans des quartiers précaires de Bruxelles », *Brussels Studies,* vol.63, (consulté le 20 novembre 2014), www.brusselstudies.be, 26 novembre 2012.
[29] JAMOULLE (Pascale) et MAZZOCCHETTI (Jacinthe), *Adolescences en exil*, Louvain-La-Neuve, Académia-Harmattan, 2011, p. 313-318.

In the following groups, participants use the frame of free movement as a way to express their *distance* towards politics. The term of *distance* refers here to the passages where participants explain that they feel remote from the *political world*. These participants are not directly exposed to economic competition with EU migrants. They do not however use this frame to express their support towards the EU.

> **(Quote 3, Uccle)**
> **Julie**: Après, je connais pas. **Je crois que cette notion-là [Union européenne] n'évoque pas grand-chose.** Elle revient un peu pour tout le monde, parce qu'on se sent loin. Tout ça. Et parce que… A part, à part les prog… On va dire les projets Erasmus / …
> **Sophie**:   / Oui, c'est ça qui nous touche
> **Julie**: Qui nous touchent directement. On, on est loin, puis voilà.

Julie and Sophie suggest that Erasmus programs are one of the few policies that have an impact on them. Julie especially mentions: "I think that this notion [European Union] doesn't mean anything" ["Je crois que cette notion-là [Union européenne] n'évoque pas grand-chose"]. While the Commission presents free movement as the most tangible aspect of the EU project that could help citizens to feel closer, Julie and Sophie rather use free movement to express the *distance* that exists between the EU and them (cf. quote 3). They recognize it as a benefice from EU integration. Still, it is enough to justify the EU project.

> **(Quote 4, Ixelles)**
> **Maël** : Moi, je trouve quand même que dans la zone où on est. C'est cool, parce qu'on peut voyager de l'un à l'autre très facilement. Et j'ai toujours de bons contacts avec tout le monde. Et je ne sens pas : « Ah il vient d'un autre pays, il faut faire attention quand je suis là ». 'Fin, je sais pas.
> **Inaya** : Alors, **il n'y avait pas besoin d'appeler ça l'Union européenne**, alors.
> **Maël** : Bin
> **Louis** : (*inaudible*) /…
> **Inaya** :   / J'ai l'impression qu'il n'y a que ça qui est bénéfique.
> **Maël** : J'aime bien ça.
> **Inaya** : Ah, mais non. C'est très bien, mais je veux dire. Il y a quoi d'autre, quoi ?

Maël reminds that being able to travel around Europe is a real advantage. In this context Inaya suggests that if free movement is the only benefice induced by the EU: "there was no need to call it the European Union" [il n'y avait pas besoin d'appeler ça l'Union européenne] (cf. quote 5).

Beyond being used as a criterion to evaluate (positively or negatively) the European project, free movement is also used to express *distance* towards the EU. Even when these young people recognize free movement as a real benefice and make use of it, it is not enough to justify the European integration project. Paradoxically (or not), the fact that *free movement* has become *common* nowadays implies that is not enough to make citizens feel closer to the EU project. It is even considered as a potential negative impact by some of them. The view expressed by the Commission: "Freedom of movement is virtually synonymous with Union citizenship, constituting the most tangible expression of the benefits related to Union citizenship"[30] needs to be moderated.

Finally*,* these visions on free movement should also to be analysed in relation to *the visions young people express on politics more generally*. This would need a deeper analysis of the material. But what can already be said is that they recognize the utility of the political organisation of the society and the role of politicians. But, again, they also feel *distant* from politics.

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[30] (p. 1, COM(2011)489 final)

> **(Quote 5, Anderlecht)**
> **Nabila** : En fait, /c'est la tête [les politiciens] de tout, ils peuvent…
> **Alexandre** :   /Le problème, c'est le comportement qu'ils [les politiciens] ont et la solution, c'est un autre comportement.
> **Animato** : Ok.
> **Waleed** : En fait, ça dépend d'eux, ils peuvent aussi…
> **Nabila** : Ils peuvent arranger, ils peuvent…
> **Waleed :** Arranger.
> **Nabila** : Ou nous mettre dans la merde.
> **Nisrine : La politique actuelle est un problème**. Après, ça, **ça peut être une solution**, mais ça dépend de comment on l'utilise quoi. Mais moi, je n'étais pas totalement d'accord avec ça. **C'est pas forcément les politiciens**.

At the end of this quote, Nisrine considers the actual functioning of politics as a problem ['La politique actuelle est un problème.']. However, she also mentions that political agency might be the solution to solve collective problems ['Après, ça, ça peut être une solution']. These views are widely shared among the participants, and they are present throughout all the discussions. It concerns mostly all political levels (regional, national and European). The disconnection between participants and political authorities is central. There is a gap between the satisfaction with current politics and the ideal of politics as expressed by the participants. Yet, this also means that participants consider that political agency is still necessary. Nisrine adds that individual agency is also needed ['C'est pas *forcément* les politiciens.']. Other participants are less convinced about the capacity to influence the system individually.

Even if participants consider Europe and other political levels as a way to represent citizens and to find collective solutions, they also consider them as *distant*. At this stage, it is possible to identify some of the strategies that participants devise to help themselves 'accepting this *distance'*.

The first relies on critical relations towards Europe. Participants explain that there is not enough proximity with politics. *Physical access to institutions* (visit of the EU quarter, work, etc.) is not sufficient to make sense of Europe. Proximity requires other *feelings*: *feeling to be involved* or *feeling to have the capacity to understand how politics works*. Expression of these *feelings* is particularly interesting to investigate. Participants also wonder the need to open debates on political level's foundations to make sense of a political level. This echoes current discourses in the media or expressed directly by politics. Most of the time only one vision is presented as possible.

> **(Quote 6, Anderlecht)**
> **Amina**: Non, j'avais même pas réfléchi. Je réfléchis même pas à ça. Parce que je ne comprends pas. Je ne comprends pas leur truc [aux gens qui gouvernent]. Je préfère, euh, rester dans mon monde.
> **Animator**: Pardon ?
> **Amina**: Je préfère, rester dans mon monde.
> **Ilias**: Mais il est là ton monde. Normalement, c'est, c'est censé être ton monde.

The second strategy builds on what can be identified through Amina's words: *politics is not my world*. Politics is a parallel sphere. Speaking about the photos in the third question, Amina who nearly does not speak in the discussion, declares that 'I never think about all of this' ['Je réfléchis même pas à ça.']. She explains that 'I prefer staying in my world' ['Je préfère, euh, rester dans mon monde.']. She frames her answer in terms of knowledge but interest can be also considered as a part of the explanation. Ilias has a very different rationale towards politics while he seems to have also little knowledge of politics. He comments Amina's position: 'But this is your world' ['Mais il est là ton monde.']. From the same perspective, others conceive politics as a *professional* area rather than a *public* sphere. It seems normal not to be always included when you do not have the required

political competences. Then, European institutions are imagined as private places where people do their job.

Conclusion: Free movement : a central *resource*?

The position of the Commission that focuses on free movement, presenting it primarily as a major benefice of European integration to foster the emergence of a sense of belonging, or at least a more tangible experience of the EU, has to be nuanced in line with what we said.

The Commission seems to consider free movement as a right able to provide *resources* to citizens. Free movement should improve citizens' well-being. If citizens know better this right and make use of it more often, they will feel closer to the EU. However, this vision does not take into account the complexity and diversity of circumstances involved by free movement. Free movement is presented, as it was *per se* something that citizens should *like*: as the most valuable right that European citizens should be capable to exercise. There is no real space for controversies about this topic at the EU institutional level. We observed in the citizens' discourses analysed that is more complicated than the Commission presents it. The methodology implemented in the focus groups allows for the emergence of different types of discourses, beyond traditional positive *versus* negative views.

Yet, free movement is concretely enjoyed by a limited number of Europeans (this number depends on the definition that is made of free movement). It also clearly evokes negative images. Moreover, as noted in the analysis of the focus groups, free movement *per se* is not sufficient to answer the questions of the participants on the justifications of the EU. Even when this right is recognized as an important benefice of the EU, participants use it as a *mean* to express their *distance* towards the EU. This study invites to re-evaluate the privileged position granted to free movement by researchers, and by the European institutions themselves, which consider it as a *mean* for bringing citizens closer to the European project.

First, presenting free movement as the main right of European citizens while some citizens are not able to enjoy it in practise could be considered as *limitative*. Considering their socio-economical situation, some citizens can only *enjoy* what they consider as the disadvantages of free movement: the venue of EU migrants. The discourse proposed does not recognize the complexity of the situation and what citizens can, concretely and not only theoretically, make of this right. Exercising free movement seems to be the *condition* to be a *European* citizen. For some academics, free movement of people is really the core of European citizenship. For Aradau and colleagues, "European citizenship is activated only through transnational mobility"[31]. In fact, the Commission also uses this highly narrow or highly simplistic view of citizenship that is restrictive for the majority of the citizens that does not really use this right. How could the Commission afford to imply "that all the stayers are not European citizens"?

Second, for participants who seem to enjoy in practise the advantages of free movement, e.g. mobility, free movement is rather seen as a *common* right. It is common in the sense of *normal*. They implicitly link it to globalization rather than to the EU. Young people may not even imagine that it was more complicated few decades ago. This opportunity is not enough to bring them closer to the EU. They express that if the EU is only free movement, it is not enough to *justify* its existence. Furthermore, it does not imply a strong sense of belonging to the EU. We could say again that it is necessary to distinguish "behaviour" and "attitudes". By

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[31] ARADAU, C., HUYSMANS, J, SQUIRE, V., "Acts of European citizenship : a political sociology of mobility", *Journal of Common Market Studies,* 48 (4), 2010, 945-965

focusing mainly on the *advantage* of the free movement, European Institutions "engaged in a dangerous game of rhetoric" [32] on the value of citizenship and on *the advantages of European citizenship* compare to *national citizenship*.

Thirdly, even when the Commission proposes to include citizens, as it was the case during Citizens' Dialogues, the implementation of these dialogues is still based on an *instrumental* vision of citizenship and participation. As Favell says, with the discourses of "democratic deficit" and of "emotional disconnection" between European Union and its citizens, "[t]he EU institutions began to vigorously promote publicity and policies design to build consciousness of Europe among its national citizens." [33] The Commission did not try to make citizen participate. It was not interested in what citizens think about policies or how Europe should evolve. Rather, dialogues became a promotional exercise. Again, this strategy might be dangerous if we take into account what young people feel about the political sphere.

The enquiry conducted with young people suggests that the relationship between *free movement* and *justifications* of the EU project has to be disaggregated. The relationship between free of movement and the EU has to be addressed through a more complex framework: benefice of EU integration for some participants, mean to express distance or fear towards the EU, but also mean to question the European Union itself. It has become necessary to grasp it as a set of elements and not limit the analysis to only one perspective. Focusing primarily on the beneficed of free movement, as the Commission does, is out of step with the political reflections identified within these groups of young people. They seem to propose a more appropriate understanding of the complexity of the situation than that expressed by the Commission's discourse itself.

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[32] *Ibid.,* p. 192
[33] FAVELL (Adrian), "European identity and european citizenship in three "eurocities": a sociological approach to the European Union", *Politique européenne,* 2010, vol. 1, n°30, p. 191.