

RELUCTANT CONSENTERS

Exploring the effects of online citizen education on Croatian youths' perception of the EU and EC's legitimacy

A master thesis in European Governance

by

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Abstract

This is a professional master thesis written in collaboration with the University of Masaryk, Brno, the University of Utrecht, Utrecht, and for the Croatian NGO Gong, Zagreb. The starting point of this thesis is identifying the perceived legitimacy deficit in the EU. As shown by the thesis' literature review, a lack of legitimacy leads to destabilization, lacking regime compliance, potentially political and institutional collapse. Therefore, it is in the interest of both polities and citizens to understand by what means they can influence the perceived legitimacy of the current regime. Citizens grant legitimacy to a polity through consent. However, only empowered citizens can grant consent. Since NGOs cannot directly transform institutions and create new channels of participation, NGOs should explore how they might empower citizens through bottom up action without reliance on the polity and its institutions. NGOs often implement non-formal education programs aimed at increasing the civic and political competence of citizens, leading ostensibly to their empowerment as citizens in the political sense. Since citizen needs to be adequately informed so that consent can be granted, this thesis decided to focus on CE a form of empowerment, as only informed individuals can consent. In order to measure the effectiveness of CE on the perception of legitimacy among the focus group, the legitimacy of the EU and EC were conceptualized so that it could be empirically measured as *trust*. The student then conducted an experiment: the student created an online survey that consisted of three modules. The first module was a standardized series of questions measuring the general level of trust among the respondents. The second module was an online CE session meant to instruct the participants on the ordinary legislative process of the EU and EC. Finally, the third module was a second standardized trust survey. The thesis compared the quantitative change in the respondents' trust ratings of the various modalities of legitimacy procurement utilized by the EU and the EC, and thematic analysis of the qualitative data gathered from the open-ended survey questions. The results showed that general trust increased in both the EU, the EC, and the EU's ability to listen to the respondents' concerns, the online CE module also led to decreasing trust in the EU and EC's adherence to the rule of law, their protection of the respondents' values, and support for the EU's policies. The thematic analysis revealed that the permissive consensus that legitimizes the EC is dubious at best. All positive remarks were contrasted by several themes that significantly enhance the constrained dissensus among

the respondents about the EC's legitimacy. The EU and EC are viewed as necessary but deeply flawed by the respondents.

Abstract in Norwegian

Dette er en profesjonell masteroppgave skrevet i samarbeid med Masaryk Universitet i Brno og Utrecht Universitet i Utrecht for den kroatisk sivilrettighetsorganisasjonen Gong i Zagreb. Utgangspunktet for denne oppgaven er det opplevde legitimitetsunderskuddet i EU. Som vist i oppgavens litteraturgjennomgang, fører mangel på legitimitet til de-stabilisering, manglende samarbeidsvilje med regimer, potensielt politisk og institusjonell kollaps. Derfor er det i både regimer og borgernes interesse å forstå med hvilke midler de kan påvirke den oppfattede legitimiteten til det nåværende regimet. Innbyggere gir legitimitet til et regime gjennom samtykke. Imidlertid er det bare "empowered" borgere som kan gi samtykke. Siden frivillige organisasjoner ikke direkte kan transformere institusjoner, bør frivillige organisasjoner undersøke hvordan de kan styrke borgere gjennom grasrot-organisering uten å stole på politikken og dens institusjoner. Siden innbyggere trenger å bli informert tilstrekkelig slik at samtykke kan gis, bestemte denne oppgaven seg for å fokusere på innbyggerutdanning som en form for myndiggjøring, da bare informerte individer kan samtykke. For å måle effektiviteten av innbyggerutdanning på oppfatningen av legitimitet blant fokusgruppen, ble legitimiteten til EU og den Europeiske Kommisjonen definert slik at den kunne måles empirisk som *tillit*. Denne oppgaven gjennomførte deretter et eksperiment: studenten opprettet en online undersøkelse som besto av tre moduler. Den første modulen var en serie standardisert spørsmål som målte det generelle tillitsnivået blant respondentene til EU og Kommisjonen. Den andre modulen var en nettbasert utdanningssamling for borgere som skulle instruere deltakerne i den ordinære lovgivningsprosessen for EU og Kommisjonen. Til slutt var den tredje modulen enda en standardisert tillitsundersøkelse. Avhandlingen sammenlignet så den kvantitative endringen i respondentenes tillitsvurderinger av de forskjellige modalitetene for legitimitet som brukes av EU og Kommisjonen, og tematisk analyse av de kvalitative dataene som ble samlet inn fra spørsmålene om åpen undersøkelse. Resultatene viste at generell tillit til EU, den Europeiske Kommisjonen og i EUs evne til å lytte til respondentenes bekymringer økte. Men utdanningsmodulen førte også til redusert tillit til EUs tilslutning til rettsstaten, deres beskyttelse av respondentenes verdier og støtte til Kommisjonens politikk. Den tematiske

analysen avslørte at den konsensus som legitimerer Kommisjonen er i beste fall usikker. Alle positive opplevelser ble påvirket av de temaene som forsterket usikkerheten blant respondentene om Kommisjonens legitimitet. EU og Kommisjonen blir sett på som nødvendige, men dypt mangelfull av respondentene.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

NGA – Non-Governmental Actor

CE – Citizen Education / Citizenship Education

OCE – Online Citizen Education

EC – European Commission

EU – European Union

EP – European Parliament

GONG / Gong - GraĐani Organizirano Nadgledaju Glasanje (Citizens organize to oversee voting)

OECD - Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

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Chapter 1: Introduction

*“In this possibly terminal phase of human existence, **democracy and freedom are more than values to be treasured, they may well be essential to survival.**”*

- *Noam Chomsky, from "Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media" (1995)*

Up until 1992, the European integration process had been, by and large, legitimized by the notion of a neo-liberal “permissive consensus” among the public that sanctioned the workings and strategies employed by the EC (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). However, a steadily intensifying debate concerning the legitimacy of the European project and integration has embedded itself in both academic and public discourse. More than half of all EU citizens believe in the collapse of the EU within two decades (Crisp, 2019), and three quarters of eligible voters perceive their political system to be dysfunctional either at EU or national level, or both (Boffey, 2019).

The student does not claim for a moment that institutional analysis and in-depth research to the functioning of the EU’s actors aren’t important. Rather, this thesis highlights an often-neglected aspect of EU research: *whether or not the public perceives the EU and EC to be legitimate, and why they think the way they do*. The public opinion is a fairly neglected area of research with relation to its impact on the EC and EU’s agenda setting process (Princen, 2011) Often, the legitimacy deficit discourse has often seen the problem as *institutional* (Severs & Mattelaer, 2014). However, without a clear understanding of how legitimacy is perceived by its citizens the European Union will remain unable to counter the adverse legitimacy claims of growing anti-democratic forces, such as totalitarianism, ultra-nationalism, and populism (Moghaddam, 2019). The rise of these regressive tendencies in the European integration process derives from EU citizens’ skepticism towards the current governance regime of the EU and the problem of legitimate decision-making in a post-national context (Bosco & Verney, 2012). Euro-skepticism is both a symptom of a problem and a problem itself: Euro-skepticism is a creation of a prevailing sense of alienation by many of the EU’s citizens due to the EU’s “technocratic” regime, and it is the cause of further alienation by increasing populism and skepticism towards further integration (Bickerton &

Accetti, 2015). Furthermore, the notion of an ever-closer EU seems less realistic when Europeanization no longer remains the preferred institutional model. Some are describing the current state of the European project as an increasingly *differentiated* EU (Leruth & Lord, 2015). This prospect is further worsened by the consistent attacks of populist and even fascist movements on European democracy. The rise of illiberal democracies in Poland and Hungary calls into question the degree to which ideas of pluralism, post-nationalism, and cosmopolitan pro-European attitudes are secure in the current day and age (Rupnik, 2016). The stability of EU institutional design appears increasingly fragile as the last remnants of the post-communist wave of democratization disappears in a significant backlash of authoritarianism and nationalism (Cianetti, et al, 2018).

Regardless of how exaggerated the notion of a legitimacy crisis is or how fueled the discourse may be by views on either end of the debate; it is worth investigating these claims and explore how legitimacy of the EU is procured and accepted by the various actors on the European stage. Even more importantly, we need to ask the question: what can we do to better the situation? What can we, as non-state actors or members of non-governmental organizations, do to prevent the destruction of a 70 yearlong political project? Why do people feel uneasiness towards the EU and EC? What are their stories, their narratives, and their understandings, and how can one influence it? These are important questions to ask if we wish to understand how the EU's legitimacy is *perceived*¹.

The first issue is *how one could counter this perceived deficit from the perspective of an NGO such as the student's receiving institution Gong*². Firstly, non-government actors want inclusion of citizens in a more direct and deliberative manner due to the last two decades' power imbalance between the various actors in the EU (Franck, 2019; Börzel & Risse, 2002). Changing this imbalance could require institutional reform, an *infeasible* prospect for NGOs such as Gong. However, this paradigm opens up for a serious inquiry into *alternative*

¹ Authorities can most effectively execute their power and facilitate successful cooperation between the various actors in its system as long as their claim to power is *perceived* to be legitimate. This is because perception of authority as illegitimate decreases reason-based trust, enforced compliance and voluntary cooperation (Hofmann, et al, 2017).

² This is a professional master thesis written in collaboration with the University of Masaryk, Brno, the University of Utrecht, Utrecht, and for the Croatian NGO Gong from Zagreb.

decentralized democratic devices, which could contribute to a deconstruction of a centralized power and influence the legitimacy of the EU outside an institutional setting

The literature review in chapter 2 covers a wide selection of sources, such as articles concerning the legitimacy crisis of European democracy (Rensmann, 2019), books on the democratic empowerment of European Citizens (Levi-Faur & Van Waarden, 2018), discussion papers on how one should measure legitimacy in research (von Haldenwang, 2016), working papers concerned with legitimacy theories of the EU (Føllesdal, 2015), polls on citizen perceptions of the EU over time (European Parliament, 2019), and research and citizen education (CE) projects conducted by the student's receiving institution Gong (Gong, 2020). The conclusion drawn is that there's a *perceived legitimacy deficit in the EU*, and that said legitimacy can best be empirically measured as *trust*³. Then, *citizen empowerment* is discussed as the best possible way to *increase* a polity's legitimacy, and *citizen education* is presented as non-institutional form of empowerment available to NGOs and NGAs seeking to influence the legitimacy of a polity.

1.1 Research question

By exploring the *perception of EU legitimacy* and the possible influence non-institutional citizen education facilitated by NGOs and NGAs can have on this perception, this master thesis can further the debate on what non-state actors and non-institutional actions can do to influence the EU's legitimacy and the future of EU democracy. The research question for this master's thesis is then presented as:

What is the impact of European Online Citizen Education on Croatian youth's perception of the EU and EC's legitimacy?

The dependent variable of this thesis then becomes legitimacy, empirically conceptualized as **trust**, and the independent variable as **Citizen Education**.

1.1.1 Why the target group is Croatia's Youth

The target group of this thesis will be *youths in Croatia*. Youths are defined as people between the age of 15 to 30, per the definition provided by Gong, with a focus on those youths above the age of 18 who could personally consent to participating in the research project without relying on their parents' consent. Although any study of legitimacy would be

³ See Chapter 2 on the review of literature on how to best conceptualize legitimacy as an empirical variable.

optimal if it included a large pool of respondents from many different age groups of various backgrounds, the student decided to focus his research on this particular group to accommodate Gong's areas of interest.

Firstly, Gong is a Croatian NGO, and thus has a keen interest in EU politics seen from the perspective of Croatian citizens. Furthermore, Gong is in collaboration with the informal civil society network Forum 2020 and encouraged the Croatian EU Presidency of Spring 2020 to focus on various means to increase *youth participation* in local and EU politics (CROSOL & Gong, 2019). This thesis research on the legitimacy of the EC and EU as perceived by youths and the influence of CE could be indicative of what means are available to NGOs such as Gong and their partners in Forum 2020 to increase youth participation. Secondly, Forum 2020's focus on youths concerns youth participation and inclusion in the decision-making processes of the EU is reminiscent of this thesis' conceptualization of *citizen education as citizen empowerment*.

1.2 Thesis structure & central findings

This is a professional master thesis written in collaboration with the University of Masaryk, Brno, the University of Utrecht, Utrecht, and for the Croatian NGO Gong, Zagreb. Chapter 1 has presented the thesis' topic and provided a general overview of the findings.

Chapter 2 presents the findings from the literature review, starting by identifying the perceived legitimacy deficit in the EU. As shown by the review, a lack of legitimacy leads to destabilization, lacking regime compliance, and potentially political and institutional collapse. Therefore, it is in the interest of both polities and citizens to understand by what means they can influence the perceived legitimacy of the current regime. Citizens grant legitimacy to a polity through consent. However, only empowered citizens can grant consent. Since NGOs cannot directly transform institutions and create new channels of participation, NGOs should explore how they might empower citizens through bottom up action without reliance on the polity and its institutions. NGOs often implement non-formal education programs aimed at increasing the civic and political competence of citizens, leading ostensibly to their empowerment as citizens in the political sense. Since citizen needs to be adequately informed so that consent can be granted, this thesis decided to focus on CE as a form of empowerment, as only informed individuals can consent.

Chapter 3 presents the research design's theoretical framework. Here it is explained how the legitimacy of the EU and EC were best conceptualized empirically as *trust*. Chapter four presents the methodology and methods used to collect data: an online survey that incorporated citizen education, open-ended research questions, and quantitative data collection. The online survey consists of three modules. The first module was a standardized series of questions measuring the general level of trust among the respondents. The second module was an online CE session meant to instruct the participants on the ordinary legislative process of the EU and EC. Finally, the third module was a second standardized trust survey. The thesis compared the quantitative change in the respondents' trust ratings of the various modalities of legitimacy procurement utilized by the EU and the EC, and thematic analysis of the qualitative data gathered from the open-ended survey questions. In chapter 5, the findings are presented. The results showed that although general trust increased in both the EU, the EC, and the EU's ability to listen to the respondents' concerns, the online CE module also led to decreasing trust in the EU and EC's adherence to the rule of law, their protection of the respondents' values, and support for the EU's policies.

In chapter 6, the findings are discussed and explored through thematic analysis, and a conclusion is presented as well as some recommendations for NGOs and Gong. The findings and subsequent analysis of results showed that the OCE increased general trust in the EU, the EC, and the EU's ability to listen to the respondents' concerns. However, the OCE module also led to decreasing trust in the EU and EC's adherence to the rule of law, their protection of the respondents' values, and support for the EU's policies. Furthermore, thematic analysis of the respondents' answers to the open-ended survey questions revealed that the permissive consensus that legitimizes the EC & EU's regime is heavily influenced by a constrained dissensus and greatly shaped by the economic conditions underlying the respondents' collective consciousness. The consent that the respondents granted to the EC and EU should be understood as coming from a place of reluctance. All positive remarks were contrasted by several themes that significantly enhance the constrained dissensus among the respondents about the EC's legitimacy. To summarize: the EU and EC are viewed as necessary but deeply flawed by the respondents.

“Ljudi su ljudi i sve je ljudsko samo ljudsko, nažalost! /

Humans are humans and everything is human only human, unfortunately!”

— Miroslav Krleža, from *“The Return of Philip Latinowicz”* (1959)

In order to frame this research and limit a very broad^{4 5} topic to one thesis, and accommodate Gong’s research⁶, the student conducted a systematic review of two concepts of importance to the research question: the concept of **legitimacy** and **citizenship empowerment**.

If one seeks to understand the legitimacy of a political system, a good starting point seemed to be discerning the legitimacy of the body responsible for the polity’s agenda setting. Agenda setting is understood in relation to *agenda setting theory* as developed by Max McCombs and Donald Shaw, referring to the degree to which a body, institution or actor has the ability or influence to decree importance on select issues on behalf of the general public (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). Issue salience and the awareness of certain issue are molded to accommodate a preconceived ideal hierarchy of importance within a polity.

2.1 Historical legitimacy of the EU and the EC

The historical development of the European integration project led to the EC ending up with a special privilege of having control over the EU’s agenda setting (Haverland, et al, 2016; Haverland, et al., 2014). Instead of having directly elected officials, the EC is depoliticized institution that relies on insight and expertise from members of interest group, academic institutions and members of governments, as opposed to direct democratic input (Princen & Rhinard 2006; Pollack 1994; Wallace & Smith 1995). The justification for this design has been the notion that there’s a widespread public support for European integration in areas

⁴ EU legitimacy is far from being a settled issue or an area of research. See chapter 6 on the potential further research on the topic, where several possible expansions are presented and discussed.

⁵ Any definition of legitimacy must decide what normative and empirical factors determine it with regards to how it can be operationalized (Stillman, 1974). This is problematic, as the concept is inherently normative and open to interpretation.

⁶ My receiving institution is Gong, a Croatian NGO started in 1997 to oversee voting, but has in recent years expand its focus (UNDEF, 2013). It’s now regarded as amongst the good governance organizations in Croatia (European Commission, 2012). See Gong (2020) for more information on the specific focus of the NGO.

deemed unfit for direct democratic control, which legitimizes elite actors to act on the behalf of citizens in areas that are argued to require heightened expertise and competences. This zeitgeist is often described in the literature as the “permissive consensus” among EU citizens to allow technocratic decisions to be taken on their behalf (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). Through expert groups and depoliticized policy engineering, the EC has earned a reputation as a “purposeful opportunists” (Cram, 1993) in its pursuit of objectives and the fairly flexible activities through which it realizes its aims, and has throughout the years established itself as the preferred actor to solve certain EU issues declared to require expert governance, facilitated by its heightened credibility granted by reliance on specialists, civil servants and technocratic committees (Gornitzka, et al., 2010; Haverland, et al., 2012; Kohler-Koch et al. 2013; Wille 2013). However, the notion of public support for the Commission has moved away from a permissive consensus to understanding public support as being plagued by a constraining dissensus⁷.

The argument for the EC’s privileged positions draws upon the understanding of it having widespread public support, and if said support for this design falters, the legitimacy of the polity will naturally be called into question. In the past decades, despite the increase of electoral participation in the Parliamentary elections of spring of 2019, there has been a steadily decreasing trust in EU and its institutions (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). In particular, the EC’s supremacy devalues the other institutions’ power. For instance, a parliament is supposed to act as the direct representation of a citizenry, standing in opposition to the judicial and executive branch of a liberal democracy. But the European Parliament is not as representative as it could be due to the absence of an informed pan-European demos (Innerarity, 2014), and the inability of the European Parliament to introduce new legislations (Kreppel & Webb, 2019). Despite the arguments for the creation of a second chamber in the European Parliament to balance the powers between the EP and the EC (Young European Federalists, 2016), which would include representation of regions, cities, NGOs and other associations, the *practicality* of such propositions seems limited, especially seeing as the expansion of the Parliaments power remains uncertain (Dinan, 2018). The accountability and legitimacy of the EC is subject to suffer if the people *feel* as if there is no democratic

⁷ See the aforementioned Hooghe & Marks' article „A Post-functional Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus “(2009) for further exploration of this term.

cohesion or equal representation across the EU. A contemporary example of this would be the surprising election of Ursula von der Leyen as the President of the EC in 2019. Her election effectively undermined and scrapped the *spitzenkandidat* process (Gray, et al, 2019), a choice that further criticized the EP elections for not accommodating the EU's democratic values, but rather showed preferences for politics "behind closed doors" (Stone, 2019), a skepticism growing out of the dissatisfaction with the *spitzenkandidats* not being voted on through universal suffrage in the first place (Macshane, 2018).

2.1.1 First school of thought: the democratic deficit theory

The first question then becomes: can this decreasing consensus be attributed to poor institutional design? Certain decisions in the EU's development generated widespread concern for the creation of a possible *democratic deficit* (Schmidt, 2015). By merging the various pillars of the EU, critics feared that erosion of national sovereignty would lead to a declining legitimacy of EU bodies and democratic elements (Follesdal & Hix, 2006). Firstly, the continued integration of national and international institutions has led to the EU being a far greater executive power than the nation state. The Court of Justice of the EU has in the last decades developed legal principles and case laws that influence social, political, and civil rights, to such a degree that it has determined the course of European integration more than democratic decisions made by the citizens of the member states (Follesdal & Hix, 2006, p. 540). Secondly, this aforementioned development has shifted the balance of power between the EU and its member states' parliaments. For instance, one of the measures of the EU to deal effectively with the Euro-crisis was to undermine the national autonomy of member state parliaments with weaker economies. This imbalance favors the EP, effectively causing an imbalance between MS and the EU in terms of democratic control (Follesdal & Hix, 2006, p. 534). And even though the EP has increased its powers, the agenda-setting ability of the EC stands paramount without directly elected officials. This means that national parliaments are weaker, and that the EP is too weak to justify this imbalance. Thirdly, citizens have shown a preference for national political issues in favor over EU wide concerns (Follesdal & Hix, 2006, p. 540). The representatives elected to the EU bodies are chosen by their respective constituencies based on national concerns, leading to low trust in the EU parliament and to national preferences still remaining the most important issue for citizens. Fourthly, the EU's institutions were originally designed to serve as technocratic bodies

focusing on issue related to trade and the integrated market, a structural tradition that has yet to be fully democratized (Follesdal & Hix, 2006, p. 545). Fifthly, the issues voted on and the preferences of EU citizens are rarely translated into actual policies, another indication of the lacking empowerment of EU citizens (Follesdal & Hix, 2006, p. 553).

This perspective favors policy reform proposals that encourage direct democracy, deliberation, and reform of the EU institutions and criticism of representative democracy. Essentially, the conception of the EU as institutionally flawed can be explained if one defines legitimacy as granted by *direct* democratic participation. Claims to ethical authority must include some levels of citizen engagement throughout democratic procedures if said authority is to be perceived as legitimate. However, some argue in favor of another perspective that rejects the need for democratic legitimacy entirely.

2.1.2 Second school of thought: the regulatory state theory

Some scholars, in particular those inspired by the theories of Giandomenico Majone (Lodge, 2008), argue that the democratic theory criticism predicated itself on a misunderstanding of the regulatory function and purpose of the EU and the EC (Richardson, et al, 2015). These scholars argue that the EU & EC should not be measured against the standards we apply to national democracies, as it is not a traditional polity (Majone, 1997). Rather, the EU & EC is meant to be technocratic in design to serve the function of a transnational political body primarily concerned with the improvement and integration of the single market, and should therefore not be thought of as a system requiring democratic input to be legitimate, but as a system conducting regulatory actions in areas not concerned with democratic legitimacy (Majone, 2019, Moran, 2002; Braithwaite, 2013). Scharpf (2002) argue that European integration and globalization had decreased the problem-solving capacity of the process' traditional actors. But instead of criticizing the non-democratic feature of the process, new actors and institutions such as the EC and European Court of Justice are commended for their ability to create consensus in the EU on transnational issues and break deadlocks in the integration process (Héritier, 1999). A body focusing on primarily technocratic issues, such as the EC, requires a technocratic design structure in order to function properly. The EU & EC generates legitimacy precisely because its functions require primarily nondemocratic inputs. The EU's features are similar to those of a traditional democracy; however, the areas where

it has the most influence and developed its most efficient instruments of governance are non-majoritarian by default, such as social and economic regulation.

However, these critics are in no way rejecting the discourse entirely and do acknowledge that there is a *perception* of a democratic deficit, and that this sentiment has been around for a while. Rather than agreeing that there are institutional flaws, this perspective shifts the focus from being concerned with institutional criticism to the issues of convergence, congruence, and perception of *legitimacy as faith in authority*. The problem is not that the EU is inherently illegitimate because its institutional design fails to live up to the standards set by traditional democratic nations; the issues facing the EU is a lack of legitimacy resulting from poor representation and education of its citizens on what the regulatory state is and what it is supposed to do (Moran, 2002). A contemporary example of the lacking comprehension of the EU's governance regime amongst ordinary citizens can be found in the United Kingdom. The day after the UK voted in the Brexit-referendum, the number one thing searched for on Google was "what is the EU?" (Cooney, 2016). If citizens are not able to understand the benefits and their own rights in a system, they will be inclined to be distrustful of said system's development which might manifest a preference for other alternatives.

2.1.3 A possible synthesis: the theory of perceived legitimacy

The synthesis of these two perspectives reveals that the core issue at hand seems to be a steadily prevailing consensus that the EU is suffering from, first and foremost, a *perceived legitimacy deficit*. This conclusion is drawn from the preceding literature review where one observes that there is, regardless of reason, disconnect between the citizens of the EU and those that govern. The student coins this as the *theory of perceived legitimacy*, by which it is meant that *a polity succeeds in justifying its power structures as long as they are perceived to be legitimate*, regardless of whether or not they are truthful towards their citizens or whether or not the polity's institutional structure can be deemed ethical; *as long as a polity is perceived to be legitimate, actors in the polity will act accordingly regardless of whether or not the polity is legitimate*. By identifying the overarching problem in the literature reviewed as a problem of perceived legitimacy, the thesis can draw upon literature from both theories, and may therefore be applied as a convergence to the two, without excluding

either contribution from either theory. However, the literature is plagued by significant shortcomings.

Legitimacy research has failed to counter the normative issues and the difficulties associated with operationalization of legitimacy as an empirical unit. There are two major shortcomings in the current attempts to empirically measure legitimacy (Von Haldenwang, 2016): the first is the limitation of research by focusing exclusively on a specific form of legitimacy in a specific context, such as the legitimacy of liberal, Western democratic polities with a rule of law. The second shortcoming is that other studies only measure *regime support* as opposed to the *actual legitimacy of the regime*, equating two concepts that aren't the same. Furthermore, one also needs to understand how legitimacy can be *influenced* in developing policy proposals to improve upon it.

2.2 European Citizenship & Citizen Empowerment: a possible remedy?

So, how does one counter this adverse development? Proponents of increased legitimacy of the EU sometimes argue in favor of increased deliberation and *citizen empowerment* (Suiter, et al, 2017).

Citizenship empowerment will be defined here by explaining what is understood by citizenship empowerment in non-formal and informal settings by a civil society. Firstly, one should define the concept of a *citizen*. Citizenship in the EU has developed and changed vastly over the years and remains an ambiguous and even contentious abstraction of member states' definition of citizenship. Therefore, this thesis bases its theoretical framework on one type of citizenship: the European Citizenship.

Initially, the included values and norms, as well as legal and political annotations of European Citizenship were added on top of the already existing national variation, mixing in human right frameworks and bordering on a truly global conceptualization of human rights (Seubert & Granger, 2017). Although ambiguous, the official definition stems from the recognition of the European Community as its own legal entity in the Maastricht Treaty. The treaty established a legal relation between the Community, the newly created European Parliament with directly elected representatives, and granted access to all citizens of the Community to bring cases directly the Court of Justice of the EU. Seeing as this thesis is primarily concerned with the relationship between European Citizens and the EU, national

citizenship, subject to the contextual limits and criteria of the respective member states (Koska, 2011), will not be discussed or explored.

If NGOs seek to restructure the balance of power between European citizens and the EU & EC, they could opt for increasing the empowerment of EU citizens by non-formal means as an alternative to direct political revolt and dismantling of institutions. NGAs and NGOs like Gong might, therefore, explore various non-institutional projects that would *empower* European citizens.

In order to avoid abstract notions of empowerment, the definition utilized in this thesis is borrowed from David Levi-Faur and Frans van Waarden's book *Democratic Empowerment in the EU* (2016). Citizen Empowerment is here a subdivision of democratic empowerment, a concept that covers the political participation, democratic development and citizenship. In particular, citizen empowerment refers to any act that seeks to provide new opportunities of citizen participation in a policy-making procedure. Democratic empowerment is measured by the degree of expansion of citizen rights to participate in a policy making process.

Empowerment is of key importance to determining the quality of a democratic system's institutional design, and the degree to which citizens are adequately emancipated. Since Gong is unable to create new formal avenues for participation in the EU, like the creation of direct democratic processes or reshape the institutional balance of power between the MS and the EU, they could empower citizens in an alternative manner.

Firstly, the notion of legitimacy utilized in this paper has a basis in the conceptualization as legitimacy being conferred by citizens and eligible voters granting *consent* to representatives to govern them (Beetham & Lord 1998), which is a bottom-up approach with an emphasis on citizens, and not a top-down view that positions the EU institutions as the most important actors. The student also assumes *consent only to be possible if the person is adequately informed on the choice they're making*. An approach that focus on the conditions of consent into being ruled benefits organizations such as Gong and NGOs that are unable to implement democratic reform directly and have to rely on their own projects in order to stimulate political engagement. Furthermore, citizen consent does not have to be granted exclusively through referendums and elections but could also be secured by reaching consensus through a deliberative process including the relevant actors, such as *empowering or informing citizens* (Wiklund, 2005). Thus, the focus should be on how to increase inclusion of

citizens in the agenda setting and decisions making process; *consent*, in particular, is viewed as an extension of democracy and therefore as an extension of the democratic legitimacy of a political system (Andersen & Burns 1996). Increased compliance with a regime follows from enhanced participation by the public, particularly in situations where network governance is utilized as a means to create binding resolutions for its members and relevant actors (Eising & Kohler-Koch, 1999). Due to the multi-level governance structure of the EU, there are multiple points during the decision making and agenda setting process that citizens could potentially participate, like through referendums but also through democratic culture (Abromeit, 1998). For instance, participation is a form of consent performance that indicates democratic legitimacy in a political system (Andersen & Burns 1996). Non-government actors and NGOs should seek to facilitate *citizen empowerment as a means to ensure consent from citizens and counter the perceived democracy deficit of the EU & EC*.

2.3 Citizen education is Citizen Empowerment

NGOs should focus on *non-institutional projects seeking to improve legitimacy*. Throughout this master thesis, a *project to improve legitimacy*, i.e. the trust in the EU and EC, will be understood as a collection of predetermined goals with organized activities aiming to legitimize the rule of the EU and EC. The literature reviewed, especially the comprehensive review of nine democratic nations in Europe by Andrea Raiker, Blerim Saqipi and Matti Rautiainen (Raiker, et al., 2020), indicated that *education of citizen from a young age can develop democratic citizenship and increase support for democracies*. Departing from this point, we look at how citizen education (CE) is defined, per the definition provided by the Council of Europe, is the

“education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behavior, to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law” (Council of Europe, 2020; Committee of Ministers, 2010).

This definition is deemed to summarize the major consensus prevalent in the academic literature reviewed on the topic, and what units of measurements one applies when

conducting research in the field (Raiker, et al., 2020; Eurydice & European Commission, 2017; Naval, et al., 2002). CE facilitates the construction of a *democratic culture*⁸. Modern CE isn't just political, and includes climate issues, focus on sustainable industrial development, LGBT+ rights, refugee and asylum policies, data protection and economic issues (Bonjean, 2019; FRA, 2019; Belaud, 2018; Council of Europe, 2018; Council of Europe, 2010). But most importantly, the literature review found that *citizens that are educated on their duties and rights are may be more likely to consent to participation in civic and civil society networks*. Citizen education is a plausible, practical and available tool for NGAs and NGOs to secure consent for polities (World Forum for Democracy & Council of Europe, 2020).

Firstly, CE plays a significant role in the creation of a civil society that is empowered enough to conduct efficient activism (Susanto & Saylendra, 2018). Civic education that puts an emphasis on creating citizens that are able to interact with society and assimilate into their environment, where the best results are derived from CE that combines theory with practical learning experiences (Susanto & Saylendra, 2018, p. 16). Secondly, CE seeks to secure stability within a political system by cultivating civic virtues, civic knowledge, and civic culture, which combined leads to increased participation (Cogan, 1999). Thirdly, citizens are empowered through CE by learning not only the theory of but also how to act and perform democracy through activism and engagement with the system (Winataputra, 2001). Gong has a history of utilizing CE as a means to improve civil society⁹. Furthermore, their recent participation on the informal network Forum 2020 which specifically seeks to enhance youth participation in particular (Gong, 2019) makes them well suited to use their expertise as a means to attempt to influence the legitimacy deficit of the EU through empowerment of citizens by CE or online citizen education (OCE). Fourthly, CE facilitated by NGOs position them as the ideal mediator between community and educational institutions (Park, et al., 2007). Therefore, *citizen education can be defined as a form of citizen empowerment*. NGOs,

⁸ A democratic culture is one in which one promotes democratic learning through participatory and active approaches (Gollob, et al., 2007). This also often includes human rights education (Committee of Minister, 2010)

⁹ See Gong's [own website](#) on CE and active citizens, which continuously updates with new and relevant project they either support or are actively participating in that fall into this category.

like Gong, can empower citizens outside an institutional setting through informal¹⁰ citizen education projects.

2.4 Understanding Croatian youth's reality

A final literature review was conducted on the contemporary challenges facing the target group. Since this thesis will use thematic analysis to study the findings, it is fruitful to present the conditions in which the target group is living as it frames their reality. *The respondents' answers aren't given in a vacuum, but shaped by the various constructs and forces they engage with on daily basis.* Section 2.4's data is derived from the *FES Youth Studies Southeast Europe 2018 Croatia report*, a comprehensive study done on the perceptions, socioeconomic situation, values and perception of political institutions amongst the age group 18 to 30 (Gvozdanović, et al., 2019).

The youth of Croatia face a series of structural challenges in their country and rely heavily on the support of their families rather than on their social environment, meaning that economic resources at disposal is a determinant of their later chances of social mobility (Gvozdanović, et al., 2019, p. 69). Only 1 in four 4 polled reported to have finished a lower-secondary-level education, and just 1 in 5 youths had graduated with a degree from a higher education institution. 3/5 lived in urban districts, whereas 2/5 was from more rural parts of Croatia. The study indicated that the household situation had change dramatically, as in 2012 the respondents reported that 9 out of 10 had their own room, whereas in 2018 this number had sunk to 6 out of 10. Coupled with the reporting that most households cannot afford household appliances, the study indicated a lack of economic and financial resources and widespread economic insecurity among the target group of this thesis. Socioeconomic independence appears difficult to achieve for the target group, as half of the respondents in the study 25 years or older reported living in their maternal homes, and the majority respondents, around $\frac{3}{4}$, reported the same.

The education system in Croatia is deemed to be unfit for the current labor market by the study (Gvozdanović, et al., 2019, p. 21). Socioeconomic conditions are highly indicative of

¹⁰ Following the definition above, a clarification has to be made between the various *forms of delivery* of said education. There's a distinction between *formal* education (where one receives CE as part of official curriculum), *non-formal* (which is planned education outside official curriculum) and *informal* (organized by civic communities, actors and organizations). The student facilitated informal OCE in collaboration with Gong.

what sort of education will be pursued by the respondents, with the upper percentiles of wealth and income being drawn towards university educations and those from lower income households drawn towards tertiary specializations. Less than half of Croatian youth worked in the profession for which they had specialization (Gvozdanić, et al., 2019, p. 29), and half of the respondents did not even have a secure source of income, even though they worked, on average, more hours per week than the legal standard allowed. Their salaries are also lower than the country average. The preferred quality of their employment situation that ranked the highest amongst the respondents was simply job security. This, in turn, is related to the high unemployment in Croatia, which in turn furthers the dependence on the family unit and external forces, indicative of the lacking emancipatory practices at their disposal to achieve independence and freedom. Unemployment is the biggest fear among the respondents, and the most important value for them was freedom, which they were unable to achieve due to the aforementioned problems (Gvozdanić, et al., 2019, p. 50). This might explain why the respondents were so inclined to value social capital such as networking and influential friends as the preferred method of obtaining jobs, and excuse certain forms of behavior that might be deemed opportunistic. The value of opportunism and celebration of “social shortcuts” indicate that the social institutions and educational structures are weak, and that the socioeconomic conditions of the country are highly influential on the social behavior and values of Croatian youths.

Croatian youths have experienced an increase in religiosity and show a clear tendency of nationalistic and even authoritarianism (Gvozdanić, et al., 2019, p. 70). There is also widespread reporting of discriminatory notions towards other groups, and especially towards the idea of Croatia as a multicultural and multi-ethnic nation. Following this aversion for other cultures, they also seem opposed to immigration and assimilation of new cultures in their country. There also low interest in politics and little knowledge of what political procedures are in place. The respondents are on average reported to have a low level of involvement in civic and civil society, either through demonstrations or other initiatives. There’s also a reported opposition to values associated with liberal democracies. They reported to be distancing themselves from political activities altogether, not trusting those in power that their opinions were overlooked or neglected, and that civic culture amongst youth in Croatia is significantly underdeveloped.

Chapter 3: Research design's theoretical framework

This chapter outlines the theories found to be most appropriate for the construction of a research design that fits the literature review and research question. First, we'll explore how the normative notion of legitimacy can be operationalized, and the problems associated with making such an abstract concept into an empirical unit. Then follows an identification of the various modalities of legitimacy procurement available to a polity, listed as procedural, normative, charismatic, role-based, content-based and value-based legitimation. The student then identifies how these modalities manifest for the EC, before the student conceptualizes legitimacy as *trust, and makes it the dependent variable of the thesis*. Secondly, this chapter identifies *the independent variable as citizen education*.

3.1 Operationalization of Legitimacy

When evaluating the performance, stability and in particular the transformation of political systems, legitimacy is frequently used by political theorists as an explanatory concept and a measuring stick. Due to the extremely wide application, legitimacy most commonly refers to *the degree to which a political system remains credible and sustains support for their activities*. The problem, for the most part, erupts as legitimacy changes from a normative notion to a unit of *empirical* measurement. When conducting scientific inquiries into how legitimacy is to be measured, the discourse is often dominated by analysis of non-governmental actors (Beisheim & Dingwerth, 2008), and the institutional legitimacy of large-scale international regimes (Bolleyer & Reh, 2012; Eriksen & Fossum, 2004). Polities are units *desiring* legitimacy, meaning that the current discourse on the legitimacy crisis focus on *institutions'* response to the apparent decline in support (Offe, 2020, Booth & Seligson, 2009). Another well-developed part of contemporary research on the topic also deals with the legitimization of ill-liberal and non-democratic rule (Schlumberger, 2010). Despite the increased focus on the issue, the concept of legitimacy remains abstract and difficult to operationalize for scientific measuring. This is especially true in situations where a society is undergoing dramatic social and political change in a short period of time, such as the Yugoslavian Wars of Independences and the fall of the Soviet EU and eastern communism. The reason legitimacy is a hard concept to study is that it is a fundamentally normative term, infused with convictions by those that utilize the term in research. Even though some

scholars try to distinguish between various forms of legitimacy, such as non-democratic and democratic forms (Easton, 1965; Schlumberger, 2010), it is still an abstract concept.

Furthermore, while it is feasible to say that there are commonalities between the mechanisms underlying various forms of legitimacy, the literature cited above shows that there exists little agreement between scholars on how these various forms of legitimacy are to be categorized. This academic confusion as to how legitimacy is to be measured, coupled with limited access to comprehensive and malleable data in periods of extreme political unrest, undermines the efficiency of legitimacy research in precisely those contexts where the issues seems to be of utmost importance.

Therefore, this thesis offers a look on how legitimacy research might be *generalized*.

3.1.1 Starting to identify empirical legitimacy and legitimation

Naturally, since all collectives and communities are different, we evaluate polities differently and therefore have different perspectives on whether or not a system is fair or, rather, *legitimate*. Since the EU is based upon Enlightenment values and Kant's morals (Brown, 2014), the road towards legitimacy as an empirical unit takes the classic *Enlightenment-era definition of political legitimacy* as its point of departure. Per John Locke's political philosophy, political legitimacy is broadly understood as the *consent* granted by a population to be governed (Ashcraft, 1991). Articulated differently, this means that *a political regime procures legitimacy as long as the justification given for its rules are consented to and endorsed by the other actors within the system, particularly those that are governed*. This does not by any means exclude the aforementioned reasoning of how legitimacy changes from context to context, and that the consent granted by a populace might be given either in an uninformed manner or not at all. For instance, some polities may even exist without legitimacy (Easton, 1965), although most polities aim at securing it, as it is highly effective in establishing long term stability (Weber, 2013). Even in authoritarian regimes support is vital for the longevity of oppressive structures (Schlumberger, 2010).

To avoid an inherently normative discussion, the student opted for an approach that looked at *whether or not the EU is successful in procuring its legitimacy*. This means three things for this thesis' research design: firstly, the student felt that the most important issue at hand was the *citizens' perception of legitimacy*. Public opinion is a neglected area of research in European governance studies, and this thesis wish to close a knowledge gap in the field by

putting the emphasis on how citizen *perceive the EC*, not *if the EC as an institution is legitimate*. Secondly, the literature review indicates that there is a *strategic* element in the EC that seeks to procure legitimacy by some means of planning. In short, it means that there are active choices and decisions made by actors in the EC to procure some form of legitimacy from its citizens. Thirdly, this strategy is necessarily *dialogical* as it requires a form of communication between those that make a claim to legitimacy, in this case the EC, and those that demand legitimacy from the rulers, in this case the EU citizens. In the pursuit of a functional empirical operationalization of legitimacy and in order to measure it, the student therefore utilized a system that captured what actors *think* of the governing institutions based on what the institutions *do* to procure the legitimacy they claim. Furthermore, there is an interest in establishing *the EC's cyclical construction of legitimacy*. This cycle of supply and demand for legitimacy is illustrated in figure 1, with the EC utilizing the "Supply Cycle" of legitimation the most.

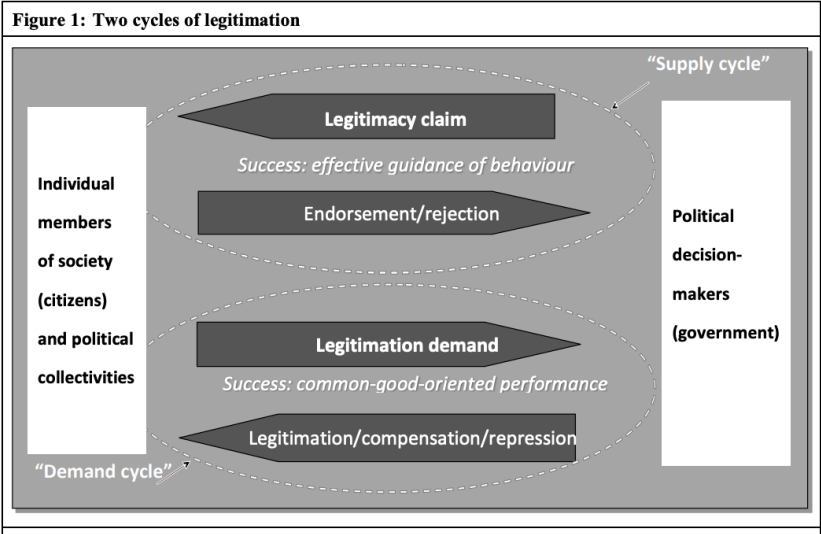


Figure 1: two cycles of legitimation (von Haldenwang, 2016)

However, it must be noted that there are some significant limits to participatory power and influence in this cyclical system. Not all actors within the cycle have the same amount of direct political influence on the process. For instance, an international organ such as the EU directly impacts the dialogical relationship between member states' citizens and their elected representatives.

Because of the various influence on what constitutes support for a regime, such as economic or material conditions, one cannot equate *support for a regime* with legitimacy alone,

although the two concepts are closely related. Therefore, any measurement of legitimacy that starts with *support* as its starting point must also account for the underlying currents in the legitimacy cycle that influences the *consent* of the citizenry.

3.1.2 How does the EC’s legitimacy procure legitimacy?

Then comes the question: “how does the EU and EC claim legitimacy from its citizens?” To answer this, the student draws upon the theory of *modalities of legitimation* (von Haldenwang, 2016), which is a combination of various other studies conducted on the sources and conceptualization of legitimacy (Easton, 1965; Norris, 2011; Dalton, 1999; Gunitskiy, 2010). The model, as illustrated in Figure 2, shows that legitimacy is only an issue when it’s concerned with regulative decisions, which couples well with the extensive research and classification of the EU as a primarily regulatory body or state¹¹.

Figure 2: Modalities of legitimation

Norms	Normative legitimation refers to the basic ideas or principles incorporated by a political order in order to qualify as ‘good’
Procedures	Procedural legitimation is based on institutionalised patterns of decision-making and implementation
Roles	Role-based legitimation is based on trust in specific institutions (for instance, central banks)
Persons	Charismatic legitimation is based on trust in the superior quality of a political leader
Preferences	Value-based legitimation refers to specific preference orders (for instance, security)
Contents	Content-based legitimation is based on material policies and performance levels

Figure 2: Modalities of legitimation (von Haldenwang, 1999)

The importance of each modality differs according to what strategy the ruling body employs to procure legitimacy from those it governs. However, the student has limited this thesis to the EC’s legitimacy and has identified the modalities of legitimacy for the respective institutions below. These modalities will be used as a foundation for the trust modules in the survey as part of the research experiment described in chapter 4 and illustrates the various ways through which the EC procures legitimacy from the citizen of the EU. The various

¹¹ See 2.1.2

legitimacy procurements for each modality were identified following the literature review in chapter 1.

- **Normative legitimation:** Sustaining the permissive consensus
- **Procedural legitimation:** Abiding the Rule of Law
- **Role-based legitimation:** Trust in the EC and EU (which is the main focus of this thesis)
- **Charismatic legitimation:** Trust in the various Commissioners
- **Value-based legitimation:** The EC's ability to protect the Rule of Law and individual values
- **Content-based legitimation:** Support for EU and EC policies

The normative legitimation of the EC comes from the aforementioned¹² *permissive consensus*. The procedural legitimation of the EC can roughly be summarized by the supremacy of rule of law, which the EC itself states to be its basis (European Commission, 2019). The EC base every decision on the treaties, which all has to be voluntarily approved and democratically decided on by the members states. This procedural legitimacy makes it possible for other institutions, member states and citizens to evaluate the procedural performance of the various EU institutions according to a clearly defined set of rules and frameworks. The role-based legitimation and charismatic legitimation here refers to trust in specific actors, like the EC, the EU and the EC. The fourth modality, the charismatic legitimation, is here defined as the Commissioners' ability to procure legitimacy by means of their charisma. Therefore, the fourth modality refers to the degree to which people like EC President Ursula von der Leyen and the Croatian Commissioner Dubravka Šuica procures trust from the citizen they govern. The fifth modality is value-based legitimation, or rather, which values the EC prefers and in what order the institution promotes them. In this case, the Rule of Law is deemed to be the most important value for the EU, per the second modality. However, by giving preference to the rule of law ahead of other values, the EC procures legitimacy through this modality by acting accordingly to the rule of law, while also protecting the *individual values* of its multi-cultural citizenry. The sixth and final modality refers to the specific policies, decisions and agenda-settings of the EC, or rather the output

¹²See 2.1.1

of the institution. The legitimacy this procures is shown by the degree to which citizens of the EU *endorses* these decisions and policies.

3.1.3 Attitudes and opinions

Even though we might identify the various modalities of legitimacy and how the EC procures it we still lack an efficient unit of measurement that can support empirical research.

Table 1: Dimensions of measurement		
Focus on...	Successful legitimation as ...	
	Common-interest orientation of rulers	Guidance of behaviour of ruled
Individual and collective actors (ruled)	<i>Attitudes/opinions</i> (e.g., confidence in leaders, satisfaction with regime)	<i>Behaviour</i> (e.g., electoral behaviour, protest activities, mobilisations)
Government (rulers)	<i>Performance</i> (e.g., public service delivery, effective regulation)	<i>Claim</i> (e.g., access to law, political procedures, civil rights, social services, symbols)
Source: Author		

Table 1 (von Haldenwang, 2016)

Von Haldenwang (2016) offers four dimensions of measurement based on the legitimacy cycle in Figure 1. The table allows for a distinguished separation between polities that seek legitimacy through different means, mainly either through *common-interest orientation* or through the *guidance of behavior*. Depending on which methodological choice and conceptual trajectory one chooses, this table helps to distinguish what forms of operationalized legitimacy are best suited for certain empirical studies. The primary dimension of legitimacy studied in this thesis is that of the *attitudes and opinions*. Narrowing the focus to one of the various dimensions makes the research more focused on the particular topic of concern, which is to better understand the ways in which the EU *procures* legitimacy through its actions¹³.

3.2 Arriving at the Dependent variable: Trust

Following the review of literature concerned with how one should best operationalize legitimacy (Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Severs & Mattelaer, 2014), while taking regard of the

¹³ The decision is also made with consideration to time constraints and the limits imposed by the changes to the research internship following the coronavirus pandemic while writing this thesis. Ideally, this research would include data collected according to all dimensions at a national scale, similar to studies like European Value Survey or the Gallup World Poll. Reflections on possible further research will be expanded upon in Chapter 6.

dimensions and modalities, the student decided to empirically measure legitimacy as *trust*. Trust differs from *support* for political activities, as trust reflects more so endorsement of a system and that the actions and balances of power within said system are proportional and ethically defensible. *One can trust a system without supporting the specific political decisions and policies*. If one trusts a system, one consents to that system even when its output conflict with one's own wishes and desires. For instance, would one trusting a parliamentary democracy be less willing to act against it when a political majority promotes an ideology than one support is in power, because one trust that they will be held accountable by the checks and balances within the polity. Trust is therefore thought to lead to stability, support, and willingness to follow rules. Legitimacy is measured by means of public trust in the EU governance system and understood as the best practical representation of the perception citizens has on how the EU procures trust in itself through institutional claims to legitimacy. Public trust can be measured in polls, surveys and interviews about the degree to which the *legitimacy procurement* of the polity is successful or not. By studying the public trust in the EU, we evaluate the degree to which the legitimacy procurement of the EU is successful, without relying on the institutional analysis to make an assessment.

3.3 Independent variable: CE

The student argues that increasing *trust* can be achieved by increasing consent for the EU to govern. This consent can be increased through informing the citizens and then potentially increasing their participation in already existing democratic procedures. Creating informed consent amongst the citizens to be governed by the various institutions is a possible for NGAs and NGOs to do if they utilize *citizen education*. The student argues that CE is a form of *citizen empowerment*, and that NGOs such as Gong are ideally suited to use informal CE to influence trust in the EU and possibly countering the legitimacy deficit of the EU.

Underneath follows an explanation for why CE should be considered as the preferred form of citizen empowerment, and a means to improve upon the legitimacy of the EU without resorting to institutional and economic reform. Especially, Digital CE is suggested here due to the constraints imposed upon the research for this thesis by the global coronavirus pandemic. The independent variable of the thesis is therefore online citizen education (OCE) and the student seeks to research its possible effects on the dependent variable, trust in the EU.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Five assumptions are made based on the literature review. The first is that reality is *knowable*. Our reality is shaped by the collective consciousness created by economic, political, cultural and social relations (Wren, 2012; Schlitz, et al., 2010; Filippini, 2017), and, therefore, we must be willing to criticize those structures which are taken for granted or assumed to be the actual reality instead of what they really are, which are social constructs. The second assumption is that we are currently unable to separate ourselves entirely from these social structures; we are inevitably unable to prevent our pre-established assumptions about reality to influence our inquiry of it. Thirdly, *language* defines and creates the conceptual systems that make it possible for us to have a society, which means that reality is interactively created through language. This assumption is especially important, seeing as the data collection depends on properly formulated questions and text. Fourthly, the *relationship* between the subject and the object is problematic, meaning that any research conducted will necessarily be influenced by the socially constructed facts surrounding the context and participants in the study. Fifthly, by criticizing the subject-object relationship, one finds that research objects in both quantitative and qualitative research are socially shared and therefore prone to *historical constructivism*. These are all assumptions that impact the choice of method and research design.

The research design draws on *international studies on trust in various political systems* (OECD, 2017), combined with a *thematic analysis of the qualitative data* (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This choice was taken as the OECD and Braun & Clarke were viewed as authorities on the subject and offered a methodological design that took due regard of the aforementioned assumptions. OECD research is concerned with cross-country and international comparison, meaning that they've constructed a dialogical approach that eliminates, as best as possible, the various influences on the respondents and to create survey modules that could be easily translated to another language without losing the integrity of the original. This thesis' research would then be possible to use in other projects by Gong or similar NGAs/NGOs seeking to study the legitimacy of various political or social institutions.

4.1 Thematic analysis

Since this thesis wish to understand the respondents' individual experiences and the meanings they attach to the thesis' topic, thematic analysis became the preferred methodological approach to the qualitative data gathered from the survey with a relatively small sample. This thesis' thematic analysis follows the outlined phases of Braun and Clarke (2006)¹⁴. Thematic analysis is a highly functional approach, as it understands the respondents' meanings to be part of a larger social context, meaning that the student could present a narrative, a story, about the perceptions of youths in Croatia of the EU and EC's legitimacy, and provide deeper insight into these personal experiences than if he just focused on the results from the generalized trust modules. This approach aims to deconstruct the collective consciousness of a target group and the socially constructed hierarchies of dominance they live within. Like Willig (2008, page 13) says:

While experience is always the product of interpretation and, therefore, constructed (and flexible) ... it is nevertheless 'real' to the person who is having the experience.

This thesis wishes to understand the perception of legitimacy as experienced by a select group of respondents, through an analysis of their opinions, which can then be positioned within a much broader scope of superstructures and elements of the collective consciousness of Croatia youth. However, this approach isn't without flaws: Thematic analysis has been criticized for omitting the precise analysis of the findings (Attridte-Stirling, 2001), for being "naïve" and "radically relativistic" (Madill, et al., 2000). Because of this criticism, this thesis sought to be as clear and open about the analytical process to avoid bias and create transparency for further research.

4.1 Mode of data collection

This thesis used an online survey composed of two identical modules measuring trust in the EU & EC and one separate OCE module for data collection. The trust modules were positioned before and after the OCE module in the online survey¹⁵. Structuring the survey so

¹⁴ The student highly recommends NGOs like Gong to follow their outline in case they wish to use a similar research design in further studies

¹⁵ The student wasn't present when the survey was answered. This was unfortunate, as it could have created a feeling of rapport between the respondents and the student. However, the confidentiality ensured the respondents answering an online survey in privacy could potentially inspire more honest answers, as there are no social sanctions imposed on them by their peers in a classroom

that there were two identical trust modules at the end and at the beginning of the OCE module made it possible for the student to *measure the immediate impact of the online citizen education module on the respondents' perception of the EC and EU's legitimacy*. The survey was made with an online survey maker tool called [SurveyPlanet](#). The research design did not use a control group.

4.1.1 The survey

The survey explored how the respondents understood complex but relevant issues and how they were dealt with through EU institutions. For the sake of relevancy, the student picked *climate change* as the topic of discussion. If this survey is to be used by Gong in the future, it is recommended that it be utilized in its complete and full form, as to avoid distorting the attempt of the student to create a standardized survey for the collection of data on legitimacy as trust. Since it's not possible to create a single questionnaire that covers something as elusive as trust, there will naturally be trade-offs in the design. Successful approaches have been practiced like those described in OECD's guidelines on measuring trust and will be integrated in the methodology.

4.1.1.1 Three challenges of designing the surveys and questions

The first challenge of survey design is *question placement*. The most important questions will often be placed in the center of the survey to limit the bias effect of contextual effects can be decreased if the questions are fixed in place (OECD, 2017, p. 21). However, the student placed the questions on trust at the beginning of the module to avoid putting questions on trust after questions that the respondents might heuristically use biasedly against the trust question, like questions about insecurity or risks¹⁶. The student also used a short text to introduce each question to distinguish their topics.

The second challenge is the *order of trust questions* (OECD, 2017, p. 22). Questions that are centered on trust can have also have an adverse effect on other trust questions' results. The student countered this problem by having questions about general trust issues be followed by questions about specifics. Questions on general trust in the EU and EC are asked before questions about specific institutional trust.

¹⁶ This has been shown to be highly successful in the Gallup Heathway Well-being survey where this practice eliminated over 80% of the influence a preceding question had on the survey's life evaluation measures (Deaton, 2011).

Thirdly, *choosing question* can be an issue. Various questions collected data on various dimensions of trust and wording alone can determine the results. There will always be trade-offs between the sequence of questions, the topics, and the time taken to answer each, as well as making new questions or opt for those already existing in the literature that make for better comparative data collections. Picking a question set that allows for international usage after the completion of this thesis is also a consideration, as the research conducted is meant to benefit the receiving institution Gong. Any changes for further use must then ensure that the impacts of changing the question are measured by using parallel samples.

4.1.1.2 Survey part 1: The trust modules

The first part of the survey are the modules that measure the generalized level of trust in the EU and EC. The trust modules were based on the EC's modalities of legitimacy¹⁷; the modules uncovered the perceived legitimacy among the respondents through their perception the EC's norms, procedures, roles, persons, preferences, and content. Following the modalities of legitimacy, the questions are sorted according to the differences in importance of each respective modality of legitimation.

The modules¹⁸ were composed of eight questions sorted respectively into three groupings. The first, and most important questions (Q1 and Q2)¹⁹ seek to measure the primary concern, which is the generalized trust in the EU and EC. The following questions, concerning the other institutional issues and personal perceptions regarding the EC (Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7 and Q8), together cover the main dimensions of trust and offers insight into the various modalities of legitimacy. The questions about trust can be completed in around 3 minutes, whereas the primary questions of the survey (Q1 & Q2) can be completed in 15 seconds. Answers to the questions was collected in the format of number values on a 0 to 10 scale. This scaling is preferred to other scaling systems, such as dichotomous ones, as it offers a number of available options to the respondents that can capture the variation between them and their experienced level of trust (OECD, 2017, p. 139).

¹⁷ See "Figure 2: Modalities of legitimation (von Haldenwang, 1999)" in 3.3.2.

¹⁸ See Appendix for an example of the standardized modules

¹⁹ The primary concern question must be included in any similar research conducted on the legitimacy of the EC. This is important to ensure harmonization with further researches, but also to ensure that the complimentary questions add to the analysis of the results from the primary concern question, and to determine the overall stability and legitimacy of the polity (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005)

The first two questions are similar to many other national surveys aimed at establishing a general understanding of the populace trust in the governing institutions²⁰.

4.1.2 Survey part 2: Online Citizen Education module

The second part of the survey is the OCE module. The module is based on “*Teaching Package: Clean air for all of us*”, part five of a series of online and downloadable CE lessons made by BEUCITIZEN, Utrecht University and Public Cinema (BEUCITIZEN, et al., 2019).

Originally, this teaching package was designed for teaching in a classroom, with the teacher providing guidance and instructions throughout the project, guiding the discourse and asking questions. However, due to the pandemic, the CE project had to be redesign so that it could be completed remotely.

4.1.2.1 Challenges of redesigning the CE Project

The first major challenge of redesigning the CE lessons was to overcome the hurdles associated with the social distancing policies and closing of schools during the pandemic²¹.. The student solved this predicament by reaching out directly to Croatian youths themselves through social media and email (with the assistance of Gong’s employees), detailing the research project, and asking for their consent and interest in participating in the thesis’ research. Then, upon agreement with the respondents, a link to the survey could be handed out. Secondly, the OCE module covered all the modalities of legitimation and, to the best of its ability, provide educational information to the respondents about the actual workings of the EC without being biased. The redesign took inspiration from part 1 and 2 from Version A of the chosen teaching package, as it dealt with the issue of the EC and its exclusive role as the agenda setter. The third challenge then became redesigning the lesson to suit individual self-learning. The original teaching packages relied heavily on in-class discussion, so the redesigned OCE module had to ensure a participatory element in the new module.

4.1.2.2 Design of the online CE project

The instructions for in-class teaching provided by BEUCITIZEN was possible to modify from an in-class teaching session to a module in the online survey without too many trade-offs when translated to such a format:

²⁰ The Canadian General Social Survey, the Australian General Social Survey, and the New Zealand General Social survey all share the same methodological survey design.

²¹ See separate document that describes the challenges the student faced under the pandemic.

- the survey format accommodated the need for the questions to be addressed in an open-ended manner so to benefit the respondents and make it easier for them to share their personal views;
- the standardized session could be conducted on a tablet, smartphone or computer, which meant that the respondents had significant flexibility in terms of how to access the survey;
- the survey format made it possible for the student to collect data from the respondents without ever having to speak with them directly or rely on them sending their answers back through their respective teachers.
- each question of the session included the same information as originally in the teaching instructions, such as the learning objectives and transcripts of the animated videos²² included in the original CE project.
- The survey format also ensured that all participants in the research project would provide personal views, which might not have been the case if the research was conducted in a classroom. Some people might have spoken more than others, and some might have felt pressured into either responding dishonestly due to social status or not respond at all out of fear from speaking in public about their personal views.

When, in the original teaching package, the respondents were asked to engage in in-class discussions, the student modified these periods into open-ended questions in the survey where the respondents could write whatever they felt like, without any “right” or “wrong” alternatives. For instance, in the Assignment-portion of the teaching package where there’s a question about how Nicolas, a hypothetical person serving as a self-insert for the respondents in the various scenarios presented, could spread his message about the importance of climate change. Originally, the question compiled answers from the pupils in a classroom to a listing of the various respondents’ ideas. This question was then redesigned so that it instead asked the respondent to first write down what they think, and then follow up that question with another one asking them “Why?” and “Are there any opinions on the subject you disagree with?” Choices such as these ensured that the redesigned project

²² See the attached link <https://vimeo.com/224068552/ddb41ac6ff>

would keep the integrity of the initial and provide the student with data for the thematic analysis.

4.2 Target group & sample size

The target group was Croatian youths above the age of 18 to the age of 30. The modules that were used in the final research design are recommended for this specific group. Creating a standardized survey module for such a broad group of possible respondents posed no significant challenge, as trust-focused questions are comparatively not problematic to answer (OECD, 2017, p. 20). The sample size was a total of 14 respondents, all Croatian youths between the age of 22 and 29. Although a smaller sample size means that the results are by no means definite, they can still reveal significant findings (OECD, 2017, p. 89-90).

4.4 Sampling

Respondents' answers to the surveys were anonymous and personal, and as a consequence of that the unit of measurement has to be the *individual* (OECD, 2017, p. 125). The frequency of the data collection was not following any specific guidelines and was instead decided according to the practical limitations imposed by online communication and whatever suited the respondents that volunteered in the research. Due to this, the data collection started in April and concluded in early June, with an interval of some days to some weeks before the respondents completed both trust modules and the OCE. It should be noted that the duration of enumeration is usually quite important for measures of trust, as the timing of the collection of data can greatly implicate the answers provided by the respondents (OECD, 2017, p. 127)²³.

4.5 Data access

Data was gathered continuously after the links to the online surveys were distributed. Due to the design of the online survey, the data was available for the student immediately after any of the respondents completed the survey. Access to the data was, however, first secured by ensuring all participants volunteered and gave explicit consent to have their answers processed and analyzed. All participants were informed of the contents and purpose of this

²³ To give an example, if one were to measure the trust in governmental institutions during a referendum, like Brexit, the answers might be vastly different depending on when the respondent is asked. Measuring trust in Croatian these months of 2020 were particular, seeing as the member state held the Presidency of the European Council, which heightened the focus on EU affairs in the country during the duration of enumeration. Furthermore, the pandemic and the earthquake are thought to have impacted the enumeration.

master thesis’ research before links to any survey was handed out and once more before the survey could be started. If the respondents didn’t grant consent to have their data process at the beginning of the survey, the survey would automatically end, and their data would not be used. Information about the survey was provided both through email and social media correspondence, informing the respondents that the student, the university as part of the thesis evaluation, and Gong would only use the data without reference to names, emails, and so forth to best protect the respondents.

4.7 Analysis of the data

The quantitative data from the trust modules was put into a formula the student used to measure the percentage change in the trust reported by the respondents after completing the OCE module. An example is shown below, where the change in the average ratings to the question about trust in a Prime Minister is measured. The formula used to measure the change in percentage is $(V2 - V1) / V1 \times 100 = X$.

Question in trust modules	Average ratings module 1	Average ratings module 2	Change as measured in percentage
Do you trust the Prime Minister?	6,36	6,43	+1,1%

The student then coded, labeled and organized the qualitative data from the survey, in line with thematic analysis (Caulfield, 2020; Given, 2008). Sentences were highlighted and the student came up with codes serving as labels to describe the sentences’ contents. Each code refers to an idea or sentiment expressed by the respondent in a given text. Every written response was thoroughly highlighted, analyzed and then continuously updated as codes were invented, renamed and scrapped. An example of how a sentence was coded would be the following table:

<p>I like the idea of united Europe, designed to maintain peace and values of liberal democracy. But I see it as an economic alliance of its member states as well. In general, I have positive attitude towards it, but fully support critics on lack of citizen involvement in decision-making process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - → Support for European integration - → Support for democratic values - → Awareness of neoliberalism - → Support for the EU - → Weariness of democratic and political deficits - → Support for centralization of power
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The codes are to the right, highlighted in the same color as their respective area in the text response that was given to a question. The codes were then sorted according to their themes, as shown in the graph underneath. Code A only corresponds to Theme 1, whereas Code B & C fall into Theme 2. Both themes are part of a super-theme, namely super-theme 1.

Codes	Themes	Super-themes
1. Code A	Theme 1	Super-theme 1
2. Code B	Theme 2	
3. Code C		

4.8 Data preparation

The data derived from the OCE module is primarily qualitative, since the questions extracted written responses. However, some of the questions also sought to map the general level of understanding among the respondents about the legislative procedure of the EC, since it was also meant to be a learning experience. Some of the respondents' answers had to be slightly grammatically corrected, like capital letters and incorrectly spelled words. This was a decision made by the student to provide a better reading experience for the reader. All responses were anonymous, and each of the respondents has been given a pseudonym (OECD, 2017, p. 210). Their pseudonym is PX, with the number following the P indicating in what order they chronologically responded to the survey.

The total length used by each of the participants to complete both of the trust modules and the CE module varied from 20 to 35 minutes each. All data were taken directly from the SurveyPlanet website. The total amount of questions in the final survey was 30, which meant a total of 30 unique sets of data in the form of charts, scales, and matrixes.

First, the data was categorized according to the three different modules. The first module was the initial trust module at the start of the survey. The second was the OCE module, and the third was the final trust module at towards the end of the survey. The numerical data responses were categorized according to their respective questions whereas the written responses had to be structured in a different manner. The student categorized the various written responses by coding the qualitative data to identify themes and super-themes through the coding process. All data provided by the respondents, sans the question on the date²⁴ they were polled, was included in the final data set. All of the remaining questions asked were directly linked to the performance and perception of the EU and the EC's actors and legislative procedure. The student prefaced all questions by asking the respondents to answer to the best of their ability.

Then, after the initial process, the quantitative data from the trust modules was put into the aforementioned matrix that measured the percentage change in each of the different modalities of legitimation of the EU & EC. This made gave the student an easy and accessible overview of the direct impact of the online citizen education module. Then, the thematic analysis was reviewed and structured under the 8 themes, whereas the super-themes were more discussed in Chapter 6 in the analysis of the data, as they were more important to the overall narrative of the thesis.

²⁴ This question was excluded from the final data set as it was only included in the survey because each slide on SurveyPlanet require a question. Asking the date was the simplest and most neutral question possible so that the student could have an extra slide with important information about the research in the survey.

Chapter 5: Findings

“Education is the art of making man ethical”

— Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, from *“Elements of the Philosophy of Right”* (1820)

This chapter presents the findings from the research experiment. The chapter is structured so that first the demographics of the sample group is presented, before we’ll look at the average change to the average level of trust among the respondents as a result of the OCE: Then, the thematic analysis findings of the qualitative data from the OCE module is presented in great detail.

5.1 Demographics

This data was gathered at from Question 2 in the online survey. The respondents were asked about their age, their affiliation with a political group, youth party or activist movement, what region of Croatia they were from, and their occupation. All participants in the survey were between the ages of 18-30, thus fitting in the desired “youth” group of interest to Gong. The average age of the respondents was 25.85. Of the 14 respondents, 4 reported that they weren’t students or currently affiliated with academic research. The remaining 10 respondents all reported to be in higher education or recent graduates from a university, meaning that the vast majority of the respondents held collegiate education degrees. Furthermore, only 2 respondents reported to be affiliated with a political activist group. Finally, the respondents reported to be from 7 unique regions of Croatia, which provides the student with a somewhat diverse pool of respondents.

5.2 Data Set Part 1: First and Second Trust Module

The survey’s first and third modules measured the trust experienced by the respondents in the EU, the EC, and the various modalities of legitimacy identified in previous chapter. This section contains information about Question 2 through Question 10, and 26 through Question 30, and are summarized in the following graph.

Question in trust modules	Average ratings module 1	Average ratings module 2	Change as measured in percentage
Trust in EU	6,36	6,43	+1,1%
Trust in EC	5,64	5,79	+2,65%
Listen to your Concern	4,71	5,36	+13,8%
Rule of Law	6,5	6,29	-3,23%
Values	6,21	6,14	-1.127%
Policy	6,07	5,86	-3.45%

Summary of percentage changes in average ratings in generalized level of trust

The trust experienced by the respondents saw some impact as a result of the European CE module. The biggest change was the average rating among the respondents' trust in the EU to listen to their concern, which increased by 13,8%. The second largest change was a drop in trust in the EU's policies, a decrease of 3,45%. The smallest changes were the impact on the trust in the EU and the EU's ability to protect the respondents' values, which increased by 1,1% and decreased by 1,127%, respectively. Trust in the EC increased by 2,65%, whereas trust in EU's adherence to the Rule of Law and support for the EU's policies decreased by -3,23% and 3,45%, respectively. None of the six ratings were unaffected, which indicates that the education module does have some influence on trust in a polity.

5.4 Results from the thematic analysis

The thematic analysis of the qualitative data and written responses uncovered in all 38 unique codes. These codes were then categorized into 8 themes:

Support for the European project, Faith in the legislative process, Support for CE, Support for EU's economic policies, Dissatisfaction with the European project, Distrust in European project, Dissatisfaction with CE, Concern for the EU's economy.

Finally, these themes were categorized into three super-themes, which are the overarching structures of the respondents' perceptions. These super-themes were:

Permissive consensus, constrained dissensus, and awareness of realities.

These super-themes show conflicting ideas among respondents that either supports or rejects the *permissive consensus* for the EC's rule. However, as this thesis' findings indicate, this consensus is significantly impeded by a variety of other themes that adds to the other super-theme, namely the *constrained dissensus*. Identifying the qualitative data as having two conflicting super-themes and another super-theme that underlies all of the respondents' answers, the story of the respondents' perception of the EC's legitimacy becomes easier to tell. The third super-theme, Awareness of Realities, refers to the taken-for-granted truths about their reality, so-called unquestionable notions, that the serves as the foundation for the respondent's reasoning. The respondents' answers are simultaneously incorporating themes supporting and rejecting the current legitimacy of the EC since there are, naturally, overlapping understandings among the respondents and their own situation. However, the following themes should be interpreted as a satisfactory understanding of their general attitudes, which should never be reduced to isolated codes but rather a wide array of concepts that are all related and relative to one another.

5.5.1 Theme 1 & Theme 2: Support & Dissatisfaction with the European project

In this theme we find the codes for that indicates the respondents' evaluation of the political process and development of the EU and EC as positive. Different levels of endorsement among the respondents are expressed here. However, their support for European integration, democratic values, centralization of power and support for the EU will be made clear through the transcripts from the survey.

All respondents, sans P11, P8, and P4, expressed explicitly positive views of the EU. P11 and P8 were more hesitant, and only P4 was explicitly negative. This indicates that despite the somewhat low ratings and somewhat critical perspectives among the respondents, the overall majority still seems supportive for the EU, European integration and the European project.

These themes were most prevalent in Question 11. The first open-ended question asked the respondents what they thought about the EU One respondent, P4, was carefree, and stated that he didn't think of the EU at all, because they had "a lot of other important life things to do." Three of the respondents reported that they held very positive views on the EU. One respondent simply wrote:

“I hold strongly positive views of the EU,” – P6

Another wrote:

“I support the EU and think it is a good post WWII agreement in Europe. It unifies and strengthens Europe as a continent.” – P1

The third provided longer and more detailed explanations for their positive attitude.

“I feel like it's a good democratic organization that especially has good influence on less politically, democratically, socially and economically developed countries like Croatia. It's a great means of securing higher level and smoother cooperation of European countries.” – P5

The majority of the respondents supported European integration and viewed the EU to be one of the key actors in the protection of democratic values. However, as mentioned earlier, already here we can start to see that among the respondents there's certain reluctance and lacking willingness to accept the EU as it is uncritically:

“It's a great concept that needs an upgrade in terms of democratic values and democracy in general.” – P9

“Don't like it but we need it.” – P10

This view was echoed as the EU was described as “complex” by P11 and expanding its powers to that it “more political and cultural rather than being just an organization for economic cooperation.” Some respondents, like P8, were hesitant towards the EU, stating “mixed feelings” and that although there were “beneficiary aspects for member states,” one should approach the EU with “a dose of carefulness.” P3 thought that the EU had “some good initiatives” that were simply presented in the “wrong period.” The democratic deficit problem was even explicitly mentioned by P2, when they stated that the EU, who thought the EU was “a good project with some flaws.” Among the flaws mentioned, P2 pointed to the conflicting policies in Poland and Hungary with the EU's core values, and the lacking powers of the European Parliament. Other respondents reported the same duality, being at the same time critical and supportive, almost reluctantly:

I think EU has some good initiatives but right now is in some wrong period. – P3

One respondent gave quite a detailed response that summarized the overall attitude reported by the respondents:

“The EU is, primarily, an economic and market community - its economic and trade dimension is absolutely its priority and other political concerns are secondary, at best. Although the proclaimed values of the EU are rather universalistic and humanistic, they are only second to the trade base, and it shows in the practices. The EU is an "exclusionist" economic-political community and is very obviously turning against migration in order to preserve its order, but EU political elites are denying this. also, the EC is absolutely the most powerful EU body and is a completely technocratic, non-elected body and has very dubious political legitimacy.” – P7

To illustrate further how these codes and themes overlapped, here’s an example of P14’s response and the associated codes to the question “What do you think about the EU?”

<p>I like the idea of united Europe, designed to maintain peace and values of liberal democracy. But I see it as a economic alliance of its member states as well. In general, I have positive attitude towards it, but fully support critics on lack of citizen involvement in decision-making process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - → Support for European integration - → Support for democratic values - → Awareness of neoliberalism - → Support for the EU - → Weariness of democratic and political deficits - → Support for centralization of power
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Table 5.2: Illustration of the duality of themes within the respondents perspective on the EU

In this table, one can clearly see that although respondent P14 hold several explicitly positive views on the EU, but that these views are also contrasted with a just as critical perspective.

The general observation is that although the majority of respondents held positive views of the EU and the EC, those positive remarks were contrasted with disagreeing opinions, often with much more detailed explanations for their views, and repeated many of the observations made in the literature review regarding the problems with the EU’s neoliberal economic model and democratic legitimacy.

5.5.2 Theme 3 & 4: Trust and Distrust in traditional structures

The respondents’ expressed various degrees of trust and distrust in traditional institutions or means of political influence outside of the already established political system. These

themes tell us how the respondents are able to combine trust in both their own capabilities to influence the political procedure, but also in the integrity and foundational purpose of the EU and EC. This trust plays a vital role in the various responses to the survey, for example, the degree to which they're inclined to favor bottom up action, direct action and social media activism as opposed to seek change through traditional institutions. Examples of such sentiments can be found in question 13, 14, and 20. Question 13 asked the respondents two things: what the fictional youth Nikolas could do to reach his goal of changing the EU to be more climate friendly, and what the respondents know about climate change in general. Question 14 was also a set of open-ended questions that asked the respondents three things: 1) how can Nikolas spread his message about climate change? 2) Why do you think that is the best way? 3) Who do you think disagrees with you? Question 20 sought to inspire further critical thinking among the participants with regards to more complex systems of governance, and to highlight that sometimes even good ideas require trade-offs and can inspire various reactions from the public. Question 20 asked three sub-questions. The first sought to inspire a personal interpretation by the respondents of Nikolas' situation. The second asked the respondents directly what they perceived to be the biggest issue facing the EU. The third sub-question asked the respondents what they thought of the critical emails Nikolas received for his policy proposal.

When they were asked, "what can Nikolas do to change the EU?" the respondents revealed the overlapping and interacting of the two themes. P1 suggested that Nikolas "joined youth groups supporting his ideals and causes," which is a form of bottom up action and activism that are neither associated with a political institution or a pre-established party. P2, on the other hand, suggested that Nikolas used the European Citizens' Initiative, an explicitly institutional approach. P11, however, suggested the same as P1, namely that Nikolas "become a part of a social movement with the same goal," but also showed sympathy for traditional structures when he suggested that Nikolas could influence politics at a "European level by gathering signatures for an initiative." Support for traditional institutions was most apparent for P9, P2, P11 and P12. However, this support was never expressed without a certain sense of reluctance.

Let's look at P9's answer to Question 13:

Unfortunately, Nikolas as an individual can't do much. It's up to governments in Europe (and the whole world) to adopt clean air and green policies but Nikolas and other can vote for parties that represent those values. He can also get politically involved and try to change the system from within. – P9

P9 implies that there are some fundamental flaws within the current system, and that in a desired alternative system people like Nikolas could potentially influence change directly. This is a clear example of how the themes overlap and interact consistently throughout the survey. Some respondents didn't think that there were much Nikolas could do, or that climate change was such a huge problem that "change would be needed on a global level," as said by P8. This remark suggests that the respondent wanted centralization of power and increased regulation through supra-national institutions. P12 further supported traditional structures when they said Nikolas "can go on relevant EU sites, contact Europe Direct or EU parliament offices in his country to see how he can support the scope." But then again, P12 in question 14 also supported the activities of NGOs and organize from the bottom up "lectures etc. in order to reach higher audiences." This duality was seen through all the qualitative data sets. P8, who favored global regulation, also argued in favor of using "internet, friend groups, school, movement" to "disrupt day to day life" in order to "make decision makers take them seriously." The enforcement of the needed global regulations should come about as a result of not just bottom up action, but also direct action that purposely disrupts and destroys traditional systems to facilitate the desired change. P5 stated that:

"Although actions of individuals do help, it's not going to be enough and we have to make sure that big companies and other big players in today's world take this issue seriously as soon as possible." -P5

Although some of the respondents seemed to think that Nikolas had a real chance of influencing the legislative procedures of the EU, most of the respondents held rather negative views and deemed climate change to be a challenge too big for any one individual to overcome. For instance, in Question 20, several respondents continued to, reluctantly, support reform through traditional structures. P8 wrote that Nikolas' best advice to the EU Commissioner was to protect those on "the losing side" of the transition, in order to protect, through regulation of "both sides," the standard of "and standard of life on one side, and

those in the industry of the other side.” The perspective of respondent P8 is that some of these issues are too big for one single person to deal effectively with. P7 seconded this sentiment when asked what the most important issue for the EU to take care of:

“Social security and a strong EU-wide "welfare state" or "safety net" for jobs that are going to be lost due to crises and transitions to more sustainability” – P7

The majority of the respondents’ answers are EU and EC-centric. They cannot picture a future or a solution to trans-national issues except through a transnational system. And even though this is the case, dissatisfaction with political inaction and weariness of democratic and political deficits were mentioned frequently. P13 complained that there was “no orchestrated action” on climate change which “continues to get worse.” P3 complained that the Commissioners weren’t doing “their jobs” while P4 expressed issues with the Commissioners’ “salary.” These notions also support the notion that there’s widespread dissatisfaction with the EU’s current status quo among the respondents, as shown throughout the survey:

“EC is absolutely the most powerful EU body and is a completely technocratic, non-elected body and has very dubious political legitimacy.” –P7

“EU lacks democratic deficit and it has to work on it.” – P2

“I think EU has some good initiatives but right now is in some wrong period.” – P3

“I still know that there is a lot of disinformation on how much the EU influences our national politics” – P13

“In general, I have positive attitude towards it, but fully support critics on lack of citizen involvement in decision -making process.” – P14

P14 perfectly captures the combined and overlapping sentiments expressed by the respondents. Their views on the EU seems to imply that it’s perceived to be a necessary tool, however, with major flaws which legitimacy is explicitly called into question. The only respondents that didn’t picture a future through the EU were those that didn’t foresee a future at all. This depressive sentiment among some of the respondents were obvious, with the most negative perspective being voice by P10, who said that “nobody cares,” and P4,

who said that “people destroyed everything” and referred to the EU as “bastards” and exclaimed that “people destroyed everything.”

5.5.3 Themes 5 & 6: Support & Concern the EU’s economy

The respondents, as will be explored further in theme 9, all have a keen understanding of the problems associated with the current economic regime. Some, although they do not mention it by name explicitly, supports neoliberalism. P5 says that the EU is a “good democratic organization” that has “good influence” on the less “developed countries like Croatia.” He goes on further and writes:

“It’s a great means of securing higher level and smoother cooperation of European countries.” – P5

P8 wanted in the advent of a transition to a more sustainable economy for regulation to protect “those in the industry (as they are not the bad guys).” This idea shows sympathy for industry and business owners, as well as sympathy for workers who “are afraid that their financial existence will be destroyed.” However, this embrace of centralized and orchestrated competition across border wasn’t the most prevalent sentiment. More apparent was the themes of concern for the EU’s economy, despite the support for some of the economies actors and elements. For instance, P6 said something similar to P8 when asked what the most important issue in the EU to take care of is:

“How not to ruin thousands small and big corporations” – P6

However, this formulation implies an awareness of neoliberalism and the fragility of the economic system in the EU was quite apparent for most of the respondents. The sympathy P6 expresses for workers and big corporations views the EU as in apposition to show great incompetence in an eventual transition to a greener economy, and a notion that the current economic system is so unfit for sustainable and greener modes of production that it would literally run thousands of enterprises and workers livelihood. This frustration over the possible outcomes of the economic developments of the EU is repeated throughout the survey. When asked what advice Nicolas should give the Commissioner in Question 20, P11 said, “to take into the consideration (of) all the workers.” When asked what the most important issue in the EU is, the respondents said:

“To explore pros and cons about this environmental topic. How to save the environment while saving working places while doing so.” – P14

“Right now, climate change would be crucial, but saving jobs and industries after the coronavirus pandemic is going to be a bigger priority, but only temporarily,” –P13

“For EU to set up a program that would offer help and assure smooth and secure transitions to other sources of energy and/or cleaner and safer way to continue activities for companies both small and big” – P5

It should now become apparent that economic and material conditions greatly impact the perspectives of the respondents and shape their understanding of why the EU is necessary and needed. The economic conditions are viewed as more urgent than the coming climate change crisis that has already started to collapse ecosystems worldwide, because the respondent is aware of the fragility and insecurity of the EU's current economic system. Because the current economy is so dependent on unsustainable energy sources, the respondents seem unable to picture a future that doesn't require supra-national regulatory bodies to enforce strict reforms. This is made further apparent when exploring the respondents' weariness of the modern economy. Most of the respondents were either directly aware of the climate sciences consensus or weary of how the modern economic system brings about climate change due to their reliance of fossil fuels. Let's look at what the respondents answered when asked in question 13 what they know about climate change:

“The term refers to rise of temperature on earth; (global warming) caused primarily to the human use of fossil fuels. The effect of those fuels has great impact on ecosystem, such as extreme weather conditions, rising sea levels, etc.” – P14

“Climate change is a problem that is occurring because of the modern way of living and producing that is producing a huge amount of gases which damage our ozone layer that protects the Earth from Sun's heat.” – P11

“Climate change is probably going to be one of the biggest issues our generation will have to deal with. As stated previously, because the pollution doesn't know state boundaries, the change is going to be needed on global level.” – P8

“Climate change is definitely happening, and it is definitely the result of human action. It was initiated by industrial revolutions, made worse by global traffic and is still happening due to the imperative of growth in all sectors of production - primarily by greenhouse gas emissions.” – P7

“Climate change is very serious Problem. Human activities have increased carbon dioxide emissions, driving up temperatures. Extreme weather and melting polar ice are among the possible effects” – P6

When these responses are unpacked and contrasted with previous answers by the same respondents, one can one again find the dueling themes of both trust and distrust in a concept, this time the modern economy. P14 positively views the EU as an “economic alliance” in question 11, but now openly criticizes the same economic alliance for fostering human activities which endanger the ecosystems and weather conditions of the entire world. P11 was dissatisfied with the fact that the EU “expanded” and became “more political and cultural” instead of just “an organization for economic cooperation,” before he then criticizes “the modern way of living and producing” in Question 13. P8, who sympathized with the business and said that they “weren’t the bad guys,” now expresses awareness of the dangers of pollution and that climate change might be “the biggest issue our generation would have to deal with.” Seen in this light, his earlier comments on the importance of protecting workers might then not be interpreted as supportive of neoliberalism, but as a reluctant admittance that neoliberalism has not only endangered the planet, but also the livelihood of thousands of laborers. This “awareness” of neoliberalism flaws and limits is further developed by P7, who openly criticized the EU for being “technocratic” with “very dubious political legitimacy” in question 11. Let’s look at their response from Question 11 a little more:

“The EU is, primarily, an economic and market community - its economic and trade dimension is absolutely its priority and other political concerns are secondary, at best. (...) The EU is an "exclusionist" economic-political community and is very obviously turning against migration in order to preserve its order, but EU political elites are denying this.” – P7

Here we find overlaps with the themes in 5.5.2. P7 seem to view the current status quo and “the elites” in a negative light, as they put the economic prosperity of neoliberalism above as “absolute priority.” However, the dueling themes appear when we contrast P7’s view on climate change with their answers in question 20. Remember, previously P7 said that “economic policies and environment protection do not always go hand in hand,” and while he expressed support for workers and their livelihoods, he also admitted that a vast majority of political decisions already “take that into account.” P7’s skepticism of “the elites” seems even less consistent when we look at their preferences for what is most important in the EU:

“Social security and a strong EU-wide “welfare state” or “safety net” for jobs that are going to be lost due to crises and transitions to more sustainability” – P7

Although skeptical of elites, P7 still favors a strong and centralized EU with enough political power to implement widespread social policies and as a necessary actor in order to reach sustainable economic alternatives. The biggest contrast might be with P6, who called climate change “a very serious problem,” which came as a result of “human activities,” but also said, as previously mentioned, that the most important issue for the EU was to avoid ruining “thousands (of) small and big corporations.” Despite the awareness of climate sciences’ consensus on the cause, effects and severity of climate change, the respondents’ views are still greatly influenced by their economic conditions. Economic security is argued to be more important than saving the earth’s climate, and protecting large corporations, the very actors responsible for the destruction of the world’s climate, is more important to P6 than saving the climate.

5.5.4 Themes 7 & 8: Support & Dissatisfaction with CE

More than half of the respondents reported learning benefits in all categories of the OCE. P2, P6, P7, P10, and P12 all saw a learning benefit for understanding the EU’s and EC’s influence, legislative process, and complexity as well as how different issues are dealt with. Although they didn’t learn as much as these first respondents, P1, P3, P8, and P13 reported learning benefits in some of the categories: P1 didn’t learn more about the legislative or complexity of the EU and EC, but did learn more about the institutions’ influence and the how one should deal with different interests; P3 and P8 learned more about everything except how different interests should be dealt with; and P13 only found learning benefits for their understanding of the legislative process of the EU. Furthermore, P13 expressed support

for the Council as an important actor in how to navigate complex issues in the EU, and also used the opportunity to criticize the module for not disclosing, “how much the EU influences our national policies.” P14, P11, P9, P5 and P4 saw no learning benefit from the CE module. P14 also said that the EU is “very complex” and that the student’s CE module wouldn’t be “enough to understand the complexity of (the EU).”

However, critical remarks do not equate dismissal or endorsement. The respondents that didn’t experience any learning benefits might still express support for CE as a viable means to influence the legitimacy debate or as a means of empowerment. When asked if they had any feedback to the student, some of the respondents refrained from giving any. P12, P10, P6, P4, P3 and P1 all wrote simple responses in the variations of “No” or “Nope.” However, the remainder of respondents did have comments, some of which can be used to determine their experiences. P14, although dissatisfied with the length of the survey, still expressed support for CE:

I think this lesson is too short to understand the complexity of how EU works. But the idea of similar educational lessons (with more information about the EU) is cool. – P14

P13 used this opportunity to express support for European integration, centralization of power within the EU, and skepticism towards “how a lot of young people would react to this overview because they have very limited background knowledge.” However, he also expressed that “it was good to think about this.” This indicates that the respondent appreciated a critical evaluation of the EU. P11 response is particularly interesting, which alone could be deconstructed significantly:

The question indicates that the respondent is confused with the hypothetical scenario, in a manner that seems to reject the EU and EC-centric position held by the majority of respondents throughout the survey. Furthermore, he seems to be unsure why Nikolas

<p>Why should't Nicolas demand fresh air only on the national level?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confusion - Faith in bottom up action - Awareness of climate sciences consensus - Support for national values
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should have to compromise his activism for the sake of convenience. Finally, the

combination of climate issues with a focus on national scale might imply that respondents would have answered differently than they did if the focus was put more on the national versus supra-national element of the EU, and the degree to which, as P13 touched upon, the degree to which the EU steers its member states' policy development.

One respondent was explicitly dissatisfied with the survey. P4 wrote:

Too much to read and this is just a waste of time. – P4

In contrast, P9, P8, P7, P5 and P2 all explicitly endorsed the CE module. P9 called it a “great initiative” and encouraged the student to “continue with similar things.” P8 called the module “All good,” and P5 wrote the following positive feedback:

I think this was a great questionnaire that can show the levels of understanding of EU and democratic participation among Croatian youth but you can also learn a lot if you were not previously informed about this topic. – P5

P7 thanked the student while praising the module, but not without a slight critical perspective:

Thank you for the interesting example - it's actually much better than just another diagram of the EU institutions! It's maybe not the most realistic - or is it, since Nikolas might just be the equivalent of the actual Greta Thunberg? Still, I don't think many young people would actually contact the EC (or start a European Civic Initiative).

Furthermore, among the five respondents that saw no learning benefit from the CE module, only P11 refrained from expressing positive sentiments and either support, endorsement or praise for the survey and student's project. Based upon this evaluation, one can say that the respondents received the CE module very well, and that even if they received no learning benefit from it, the respondents still saw CE as a viable means to educate people about the EU and the EC.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis highlighted a couple of issues with the contemporary understanding of the legitimacy discourse surrounding the EU and EC. In particular, the findings of this thesis indicate that increased education about the workings of the EC and the EU does not lead to increased trust, but rather a complex and differentiated legitimation of those institutions. The respondents, although just a sample of Croatian and EU youth, were mostly highly educated and displayed a clear skepticism and reluctance towards the EU and EC. Superstructures like the EU, the EC, and neoliberalism are so embedded in the mindset of the respondents that they're unable to imagine a future without these structures present. The thesis also highlighted the lacking knowledge among many of the respondents, and the benefits they experienced from participating in citizen education. This chapter will present an examination of these results so that we can better explore the benefits of CE on the legitimacy of the EU and EC and find a potential explanation for the various and somewhat contradictory results of this thesis' research. This thesis draws three conclusions.

6.1 Conclusions

Firstly, the assumption that there's a permissive consensus for the EC's rule and role as agenda setter is dubious, and far more complex than a simple "Euro-skepticism versus European integration" dichotomy. Support for the EU & EC is complex, and greatly shaped by the economic and material conditions serving as a foundation for the respondents' perspectives. Support for the EU and EC is given, but it's given reluctantly. The support the respondents express is drenched in awareness of great challenges and assumed deficits in the system.

Secondly, the respondents are seemingly unable to picture actual political reform or alternatives to the current superstructures. Their responses all take certain truths for granted, like the permanence of neoliberalism and climate change issues, and rarely argue in favor for direct democracy, economic control or other reforms that would provide them with the necessary freedom, emancipation and empowerment that they desire.

Thirdly, the thesis highlights the value of citizen education, and that even OCE can be used in times of great change and unrest by NGOs like Gong to empower the citizen of the EU. Despite the decrease in trust in adherence to rule of law, protection of values, and support

for policies, the OCE module did lead to increased trust in the EU and EC and faith among the respondents that these institutions would listen to their concerns. In short, the experiment does prove the validity of CE and OCE as a means to influence the legitimacy debate and empower citizens outside the realm of institutional reform. NGOs are very much in a position of influence, and citizen education modules can be easily translated to online settings without losing any of its benefits. NGOs, like Gong, should therefore expand their perspectives on what citizen education is and can be, and consider the political activism potential embedded in the concept. For instance, online citizen education tools could be distributed much easier if, for instance, Gong's employees or Gong itself utilized social media platforms to distribute the links or to inform their network. Even though lengthy exercises, like the module the student made for this thesis, may be unappealing, short and more condensed citizen education modules could easily be distributed. NGOs like Gong can, therefore, empower citizens and contribute to the development of a new collective consciousness that base its world view on a democratic culture fostered by communicative action through modern technology.

The results outlined in the previous chapter reveals the internal conflict experienced by youths in Croatia and helps us create a narrative about their perception of the EU and the EC's legitimacy. It was apparent that knowledge of the institutional structure, legislative process, and perception of the EU and EC's adherence to certain values was somewhat lacking among the respondents, as indicated by their answers to the OCE module. Furthermore, the thematic analysis of the qualitative data revealed multiple factors that indicate a conflict between a constrained dissensus and a permissive consensus for the EC. Of equal importance is the observation that although the respondents' trust in the EU and EC's adherence to rule of law and their protection of values decreased, as well as a decrease in satisfactions with their policies, the respondents' saw a 13,8% increase in their trust in the EU to listen to their concerns, as well as an overall increase in average trust in the EC and the EU following the CE module.

6.2: Perception of EU and EC legitimacy among Croatian youth

Polities, by their nature, seek to procure legitimacy from their subjects through various means (Weber, et al., 2013). As detailed in this thesis, the EU and EC do so through a wide array of what can be defined as *modalities of legitimation* (von Haldenwang, 2016).

However, as the findings revealed, there were only some of the modalities that increased their legitimacy as a result of the OCE. The super-themes of this thesis showed that despite the overall support for the EU and overall sentiments that support the EC's permissive consensus, there were multiple instances where the needs of individuals or dissatisfaction with certain institutional aspects of the EU and EC were questioned or outright criticized. These concerns were best exemplified by those responses coded in the themes "Dissatisfaction with the European project," "Distrust in traditional structures," and "Dissatisfaction with CE," and in the significant dissatisfaction with the charismatic modality of legitimation. It appears that the widespread appearances of concerns among all the respondents' answers supports the notion that although the support for the European project is prevalent among the respondents, so too is various concerns for the current policies of the EU and the political leadership of the EU and EC. What seems especially vital in terms of legitimacy procurement from youths in Croatia, is the that almost all respondents seem to harbor some concern for the political climate of the EU and take for granted that neoliberalism is a part of their contemporary life and their future. Here again we see the prevalence of the third super-theme, the notion that certain realities are simply here to stay and deny the respondents the means to vision a viable alternative. The superstructure of the EU is then integral to the respondents' worldview, and their social consciousness is explicitly linked to their economic and material conditions.

What is particularly interesting, however, is that these sentiments were highlighted as a result of the OCE module. The respondents' opinions did change as a result of the survey but changed in manners that support the notion that regardless of the support for the EU and EC, there are significant strains put on the institutions' legitimacy. One can clearly observe that there was a change in the respondents' answers as a result of the OCE module, but that this was not exclusively positive or negative. The most obvious example of this is the quantitative data gathered from the trust modules at the start and end of the survey. Three of the modalities of legitimation saw increased perception of legitimacy among the respondents, whereas three others saw a drop in perceived legitimacy. Although there were almost no explicit examples of respondents describing the legislative process as wholly negative, the example of Nikolas still managed to draw personalized opinions and viewpoints from the respondents that indirectly criticized the actions of the EC. The key difference

between those themes that supported the permissive consensus and those that counteracted appears to come from whether or not the respondents placed their focus on the necessity of the EU and EC and the actual performance and design of the institutions. The example of climate change made the respondents personally engage with a complex issue and how it might potentially be solved. Their response to this scenario highlighted multiple issues they saw with the political process of the EU and EC, indicating that a focus on larger issues can make potential youths critically evaluate both the pros and cons of possible solutions outside and within established institutions and hierarchies. When the focus of discussion was on what can be done to counter the issues at hand, the respondents demonstrated that they were able to view the actions of the institutions critically while at the same time acknowledging the need for bottom up action, civil disobedience and individual activism to ensure the desired outcome. To give an example, when the respondents were asked how one should, as the hypothetical Nikolas, proceed to influence the climate debate, a total of five themes overlapped: Dissatisfaction with the European project and Distrust in traditional structures intertwine with Support for the EU and EC current political regime, Trust in the legislative process, and Support for EU’s economic policies. In a self-critical manner, these themes crashed into one another when even the same respondents argued in favor of bottom up organizing outside traditional political parties, direct action that through civil disobedience like the Friday for Future strikes, and social media activism while simultaneously supporting contacting representatives and starting initiatives and referendums:

P7	<p>How can Nikolas spread his message about climate change?: start a petition (offline or online), write letters to his government, gather young people for a climate change protest like Fridays for Future</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Faith in social media activism - Faith in traditional institutions - Faith in bottom up action - Faith in direct action - Awareness of youth disconnect
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In P7’s answer we find consistent contradictions and ideas about political engagement that are both indicative of the respondents want for change and disbelief in their representatives, but also a reluctant admittance that contacting the government is necessary. The permissive consensus for the EC’s design is simultaneously sustained and decreased.

A note of interest: the OCE module revealed that while the respondents expressed a somewhat developed understanding of the legislative procedure of the EU and EC and was able to identify multiple aspect of the EU they viewed as positives, such as European integration leading to benefits of neoliberal trade policies that develop regions in the EU, the focus of their criticism was usually on the representatives of the EC, corrupt businesses, the actual process of European integration and various political and democratic deficits. It is apparent that this indicates that the EC and EU are failing to fulfill all modalities of legitimation and, therefore, one cannot say that the permissive consensus of the EC is sustained or granted in full. The respondents were able to interact with practical examples of how someone like them or younger might face challenges with initiating change in the EU through the EC but were not so supportive of doing the same thing as the fictional Nikolas or use the same channels of influence as he did. It can then be suggested that by focusing on real examples related to collectively accepted challenges, such as climate change, one can inspire the respondents to be more critical of the channels of influence at their disposal and draw more attention to the deficits associated with the current system. This corresponds well with the changing results in the trust modules: even though there's been an increase among the respondents in the overall trust in the institutions, the decreasing trust in those institutions' procedures is due to the heightened awareness among the respondents of the deficits associated with the legislative procedure of the EU.

6.3 The overlapping duality of legitimacy

The key finding of this thesis is that the respondents express contradictory attitudes towards the EU and EC, and that this contradiction supports the earlier identified perception of a legitimacy deficit in the EU. This thesis research highlights that the respondents' understanding of the EU and EC's legislative procedure is somewhat lacking, and that they are able to formulate some of the causes for these institutions' issues and some of the problems associated with solving them. However, it is of equal importance that this dual perception of the EU and EC as simultaneously beneficial and flawed comes as a result of a single CE module, and it is uncertain how it might impact the respondents' *behavior towards and engagement with the EU and the EC*. Whilst the EU and EC's modalities of legitimation has been identified, the legitimacy procured by these institutions is, at best, lacking. Undoubtedly, this observation is greatly influenced by the specific selection of respondents

that participated in this thesis' research. Their high education played a role and affiliation with Gong's network indicates an already heightened knowledge among the respondents of the EU and the EC, especially since the majority of these respondents are associated with Zagreb university's Faculty of Social Sciences. Their perception of the EU and EC's legitimacy is naturally influenced by other sources and factors, however, their understanding and receptiveness to the EU and EC's legitimacy procurement can be *assumed* to be significantly higher than many less privileged and educated members of Croatian youth (Gvozdanović, et al., 2019). Support for the EU and EC, European integration, and the European project is linked to higher education (Taylor, 2019), so the fact that there's still significant skepticism and critical views on the institutional process and practices of the EU and EC among the respondents is indicative of a flawed understanding of what constitutes EU support. A positive perception of the EU is competing against a variety of concerns among the respondents, some of which add significant reduction to the notion of a widespread permissive consensus among Croatian youth. For instance, although many of the respondents praised neoliberalism, they still voiced concern for workers, for business owners, and for the divide between climate action and securing the livelihood of many workers throughout the EU. The concerns for political inaction, distrust in the various ideas of other European citizens, rejection of political pluralism and despair for the future greatly impedes the legitimacy secured through the respondents support for further integration and centralization of power. The widespread perception among many respondents was that some of the most effective means available if one is interested in starting a movement and influencing politics is *outside* the institutions claiming to be facilitators of such change. This too conflicts with other comments that support reform and a gradual transition to alternative economic models, which further indicates dissatisfaction with the current system and a reluctant acceptance that the system is *necessary* if the wanted change is to be implemented. The EC and the EU needs to increase their legitimacy procurement in a manner that makes the respondents, and likely other members of Croatia's youth, feel as if they can use the institutional means available to them and that they can help protect their values. Despite the increasing and decreasing percentage values, the answers given to the OCE module supports the data from the trust module: the EC and the EU are not perceived to be more than average or slightly above averagely trustworthy.

Although there's been research conducted earlier on the opinions and views of Croatian youth, little research has been done on the impact of CE on the perception of the EU and EC's legitimacy in the past. Thematic analysis proved to be useful in creating deepened understanding of Croatian youth's experiences.

The theme of Dissatisfaction with the European project corresponds with previous research in terms of the awareness and dissatisfaction experienced among Croatian youth of the country's economy, the previously mentioned rising euro-skepticism among the respondents' age group and pertains to the general history of constrained dissensus in Croatia for European integration.

This thesis identifies the conflicting views experienced by the respondents as part of the legitimacy deficit discourse that's prevailing throughout the EU. It also identifies the majority of problems to be associated with lacking trust in politicians, lacking preferences for using the institutional means available to youths, and a clear tendency to favor bottom up action in combination with traditional structures to implement change. None of the respondents favored voting or argued that voting for better candidates could solve the issue at hand. Previous literature identifies a legitimacy deficit as a situation in which citizens no longer trusts or consents to the polity's rule. The EU and EC's attempts at procuring the desired level of legitimacy have been moderate to averagely successful at best. Recommendations to improve this would first have to emphasize the presences of charismatic politicians, as this was shown to be the significantly lowest rated modality of the EC's modalities of legitimation. However, all modalities of legitimation would require improvement if they were to reach the highest levels of support among the EU's member states. There was evidence among the respondents that supported this diagnosis: despite their trust in the EU, their responses and the ratings given to the trust modules indicates significant room for improvement for all modalities.

The findings in this thesis suggests that the respondents had a developed understanding of the various issues facing the EU, such as lacking actions to deal with climate change and the presences of a democratic deficit; however, the respondents also demonstrated a high level of understanding for the various benefits of EU membership, which they argued in favor off or simply acknowledged as truths about the EU's institutional design. Although there was limited understanding among them of how the ordinary legislative procedure worked, they

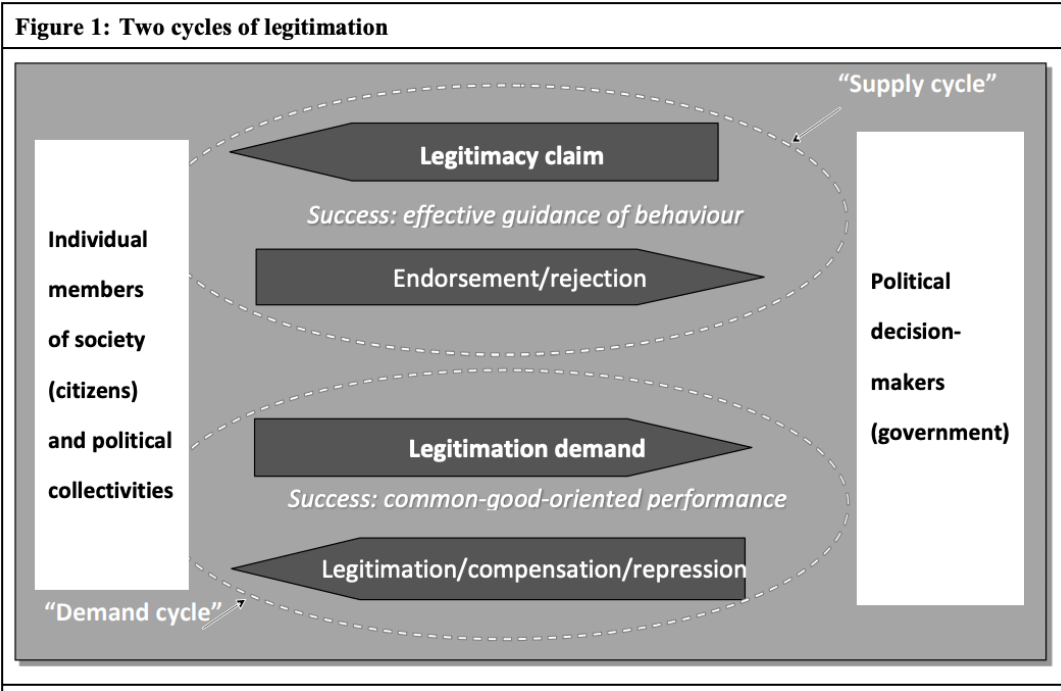
still demonstrated comprehension for how one might influence political decision making outside the realms of ordinary institutional practice. Many of the respondents favored bottom up action and even civil disobedience as means to influence the agenda of the EU and the EC, like the school-strikes as part of Fridays for Future. This corresponds with research, which indicates that Croatian youth have a lacking understanding of the political procedures and adds to the idea that Croatian youth might have latent preferences for increased representation and agenda setting powers in the EU, although this wasn't mentioned explicitly. The most critical individuals demonstrated a clear disdain for OCE, and voiced mainly the themes of despair and disappointment in political inaction; however, the majority of respondents were still mostly positive towards OCE, the EU and EC, although they were able to formulate criticisms and apply a skeptical perspective on the institutions' ability to deal with complex issues.

The influence of oppressive structure on the individuals' worldview is fairly well discussed in critical literature. When considering the authoritarian aspects of the EC's sole power as an agenda setter and the neoliberal exclusive preferences for the EU's policies (Wigger, 2018; Tansel, 2018), one can better understand the hesitant compliance demonstrated by the respondents. While it is apparent that the respondents acknowledge the EU's and EC's positive impact on the development of economies, they still feel as if there should be increased precautions taken by the EC to protect workers and businesses during a possible transitional period. These concerns highlight that although there is support for the institutional design of the EU, this support hinges on future achievements and satisfactory mediation between those that will be adversely affected by both climate change and the transition to a greener and more sustainable economic system.

6.4 Further research

Further research on what constitutes a moral and functioning legitimacy cycle must continuously be modified and updated, as the conditions for legitimacy will be prone to significant changes as society and civilization develops. Regardless of this, extensive research on the contemporary legitimacy cycle of the EU would prove fruitful for further legitimacy research, and also for policy proposal development for improvement on the current regime. Therefore, new research on the legitimacy issues of the EU should aim at exploring the not

just the supply cycle of legitimation, which has been the focus of this thesis, but also look at the demand cycle, as shown in the model below.



Research would probe into the various legitimation demands made by the public of the EU, and then look at the performance of the government when evaluating the degree to which the demand has been met. This would be an institutional analysis, best suited for cases studies of various departments of the EC and the EU, where one would first evaluate what demands of legitimation the public has, and then follow that up by studying how these demands are met in the specific institutions of the EU. These case studies should be long field studies where the researcher engage in institutional and organizational analysis, combined with in-depth interviews to map the structure and then evaluate the performance of the various bodies of concern. Also, using surveys that could be distributed easily online, with open ended questions asking the respondents to evaluate the degree to which their institutions fulfil their functions. These answers could then serve as a baseline for identifying the various themes of legitimacy among the public, which then could be translated into *public modalities of legitimation demands*. However, if Gong were to use such a survey for international comparisons, the surveys would ideally be translated into each respective language; the NGO would have to ensure an effective and adequate translation process. Eurostat recommends two translators who both have the desired destination language as mother tongue and full fluency in English to conduct the translation, by being fully informed

by the purpose and background of the original survey as well as the targeted group of respondents. Having two translators cooperate would provide insight and comparative interpretations. Furthermore, field-testing should be done of the translated survey before it is used.

6.5 Recommendation for Gong: Rational (not permissive) consensus

Finally, some comments on this thesis importance for Gong and other NGOs. This research makes two contributions to Gong and their work. Firstly, it provides a clear diagnosis of the European Commission and European Union's legitimacy and how one ought to understand the legitimacy discourse as a discourse about public perception of legitimacy. Secondly, this research has standardized an approach to online citizen education that adequately translate current citizen education projects previously used by Gong to an online format, as well as standardized legitimacy research for future use. If Gong organizes other activities and wish to measure the impact of their work on the legitimacy of the EU or other polities, they can apply the same approach as this thesis.

But most importantly, this thesis shows that NGOs are in a unique position to provide citizen education outside the ramifications of institutions, particularly in the role as a mediator between communities and schools. This position grants them great influence on youths' development and of their understanding of what it entails to be a citizen. Gong should, therefore, facilitate even more non-formal and informal citizen education targeting youths in Croatia, in particular with a focus on those areas of concern to the Croatian youths.

Educating citizens leads to a *nuanced* understanding of the EU, instead of a clear-cut support or rejection.

The student suggests that NGOs like Gong further explores the *emancipatory* qualities of citizen education. Citizen education is as an expansion of communicative practice that develops our collective consciousness and drives the citizenry towards mutual understandings (Habermas, 1971). Through consistent citizen education one can facilitate, develop, through trial and error, means of communication and political channels that create not a permissive, but rather a *rational consensus for the EU's and EC's rule*. A rational consensus is different from the permissive consensus from the literature, as it does not suppose that one is either contributing to a widespread census or a dissensus through evaluating the EU and EC's legitimacy. Rather, the citizens need to be adequately informed

and capable of discerning on their own whether or not they think the EU & EC are legitimate before they can consent to be governed. In short, *citizens must be made able to rationally consent to the rule of a complex polity*. This perspective on citizenship states that in order to be a full citizen of a polity, one needs the means to claim one's rights. This formulation is important, as it keeps the most important unit of measurement in focus: the individual. Since this thesis identified the issue of legitimacy to be in practicality an issue of perception, *Gong should keep focusing on the ways in which they might inspire individuals to rationally engage with the political structures around them*. NGOs can only hope to change the landscape of a vast polity by starting to foster a *democratic culture* at the bottom of the hierarchy, where they can inspire rational consensus from citizens by informing them of their rights, the means available to them, and the actual workings of their political system.

This rational consensus can be achieved if Gong applies the following recommendations to their future citizen education projects. Firstly, Gong must be aware of the current standard of civic education given to Croatian youths in school and the policies of the current ruling regime. Regime shifts and changes in the political climate might impact the overall quality of civic and citizen education in schools and the educational system of a member state. Awareness of the current state of citizen education in educational institutions makes it possible for them to fill the gaps or provide an otherwise neutral educational platform outside the realms of government influence.

Secondly, Gong's citizen education should take due regard of the social issues and challenges facing Croatian youths. Literacy of their own system, be it either the ramifications of global economic forces on job opportunities in Croatia or the issues related to ethnic diversity and cultural differences, should take preference for general political education.

Thirdly, Gong must continue to provide apolitical and nonideological citizen education that, as much as possible, engages the participants in decision-making based on already existing institutions. This ensures minimal bias and facilitates democratic culture instead of indoctrination.

Fourthly, Gong must ensure that their staff is adequately skilled and trained to secure high quality citizen education projects. As mentioned before, regime shifts might greatly impede the development of citizen education skills in schools, which can reduce the level of skill

among teachers to provide education of high quality. NGOs are particularly useful here, as they can not only teach pupils, but motivate the staff and teachers of the schools they collaborate with to improve their knowledge and invest more resources in democratic development. Gong's staff can even encourage teachers at the schools they visit to the point that they find motivation to improve their own civic education courses by introducing some of Gong's projects in their curriculum.

Finally, and maybe most ambitious, is to expand the pan-European network of NGOs using citizen education. BEUCITIZEN could serve as a model for how such international networks might be developed and end up looking like, and Gong should explore the means available to them to collaborate with NGOs from other member states in the EU that might share their vision of developing a proper democratic culture in the EU.

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Codes, themes and super-themes from the thematic analysis

Codes	Themes	Superthemes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support for European integration 2. Support for democratic values 3. Support for the EU 4. Support for centralization of power 5. Support for classic liberal values 	Support for the EU and EC current political regime	Sustaining the permissive consensus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Faith in traditional institutions as a means to create political change 7. Support for reform through traditional structures 	Trust in traditional structures	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Influence learning benefit 9. Legislative learning benefit 10. Complexity learning benefit 11. Pluralism learning benefit 12. Support for citizen education 	Support for citizen education	
13. Support of neoliberalism	Support for the EU's current economic policies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Disappointment in political inaction 15. Dissatisfaction with EU's complexity 16. Rejection of political pluralism 17. Confusion 18. Weariness of democratic and political deficits 19. Weariness of European integration 20. Despair 21. Awareness of youths' disconnect 	Dissatisfaction with the European project	Decreasing the permissive consensus

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 22. Faith in bottom up action 23. Faith in direct action 24. Faith in social media activism 25. Weariness of libertarian thoughts 26. Weariness of extreme political opinions 27. Support for conservative values 	<p>Distrust in traditional structures</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 28. Dissatisfaction with citizen education 29. No influence learning benefit 30. No legislative learning benefit 31. No complexity learning benefit 32. No pluralism learning benefit 	<p>Dissatisfaction with citizen education</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 33. Concern for workers 34. Concern for business owners 35. Weariness of modern economy 	<p>Concern for the EU's economy</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 36. Awareness of neoliberalism 37. Awareness of climate sciences consensus 38. Awareness of political pluralism 	<p>Awareness of societal realities</p>	

Example of trust module used in the survey

Core questions

These first questions are meant to map the general level of trust you have in the EC and the EU. Even if you have had very little or no contact with these institutions, please base your answer on your general impression of these institutions.

Q1: This is a general question about trust. On a scale from zero to ten, where zero is not at all and ten is completely, in general, much do you trust the EU in general?

Not at all Completely

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Q2: On a scale from zero to ten, where zero is not at all and ten is completely, in general, how much do you trust the EC?

Not at all Completely

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Supplementary questions

The next five questions are about whether you have trust in various other institutions in the EU and Croatia. Even if you have had very little or no contact with these institutions, please base your answer on your general impression of these institutions. Each question will also be clarified by a short explanation.

The EU can make laws for every member state. Let's say that there's an issue you're very passionate about, and you wish to create a political or legal change in the EU.

Q3: On a scale from zero to ten, where zero is not at all and ten is completely, in general, how much do you trust the EC to listen to your concerns?

The rule of law means that all of the EU's institutions, like the EC, have to follow the same laws and follow by the same rules. All member states also have to do this.

Q4: On a scale from zero to ten, where zero is not at all and ten is completely, in general, how much do you trust the EC to follow the rule of law?

Not at all Completely

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Now for a couple of questions about EU politicians²⁵. Try to answer to the best of your ability.

The current President of the EC is Ursula von der Leyen.

Q5: On a scale from zero to ten, where zero is not at all and ten is completely, in general, how much do you trust the current president of the EC?

Not at all Completely Uncertain

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 I don't know who this person is/I don't know enough about them to give an answer

The current Commissioner from Croatia sitting in the EC is Dubravka Šuica.

Q6: On a scale from zero to ten, where zero is not at all and ten is completely, in general, how much do you trust the current representative of Croatia to the EC?

Not at all Completely Uncertain

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 I don't know who this person is/I don't know enough about them to give an answer

Since the EU is a very large and very diverse political EU, there are many views and opinions about what values are most important. People have different religions and political belief, and sometimes even no religion or political belief at all. Let's say that you're a minority and that there's a movement in your country that promoted discrimination towards your personal beliefs.

Q7: On a scale from zero to ten, where zero is not at all and ten is completely, in general, how much do you trust the EC to defend your personal values?

Not at all Completely

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

²⁵ These questions also included a box titled "I don't know who this person is." This was done for two reasons. The first was to put the student at ease, as it is not unlikely that that they might feel uncomfortable if they're asked about whether or not they trust a person they might not know. Secondly, if the EC hasn't been able to manifest themselves in the lives of ordinary teenagers, this might be an indication of how the EC has failed to perform this particular modality of legitimation altogether.

And now for a final question about the EU and what it does. A policy is a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organization or individual. For instance, "the government's controversial economic policies."

Q8: On a scale from zero to ten, where zero is not at all and ten is completely, in general, how much do you support the current policies of the EU?

Not at all Completely

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10