

## **PREDICTING YOUTH APATHY AND EXCLUSION: MACEDONIAN HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS AND THEIR RELATIONS TO THEIR COMMUNITIES**

### **Predviđanje apatije i isključenosti mladih: makedonski srednjoškolci i njihov odnos prema zajednici**

**ABSTRACT** *In order to understand the youth's growing apathy and cynicism towards society, this paper examines the relationships between civic engagement, volunteerism, parental support, peer support, the support of the educational system, extra-curricular activities, religious affiliation, as well as attitudes among high-school students in the Republic of Macedonia. A representative sample of 3607 high-school students in thirteen towns across the country indicates that the support from the educational system, involvement in extra-curricular activities and trust in institutions, society and oneself are the strongest predictors of civic engagement and volunteerism. Parental support (whether respondents engaged in discussions about civic problems with their parents), while important in the past, loses its significance in the present. Discussions with peers seem to replace the role of the parents. Religious affiliation is not meaningfully related to civic engagement and volunteerism. Theoretical and practical implications in regard to social integration are discussed.*

**KEY WORDS** *social integration, civic engagement, volunteerism, high-school students, parental support, educational system, religion, attitudes, Republic of Macedonia*

**APSTRAKT** *U članku se ispituju odnosi između građanskog angažovanja, volontiranja, podrške roditelja, vršnjačke grupe i obrazovnog sistema, vanškolskih aktivnosti, religijske pripadnosti, kao i stavova srednjoškolaca u Republici Makedoniji, sa namerom da se razume rastuća apatija mladih i cinizam prema društvu. Reprezentativni uzorak 3607 srednjoškolaca u trinaest gradova iz cele zemlje ukazuje da su podrška obrazovnog sistema, uključenost u vanškolske aktivnosti i poverenje u institucije najjači prediktori građanskog angažmana i volontiranja. Podrška roditelja (da li je ispitanik raspravljao o društvenim problemima sa roditeljima), gubi na značaju u sadašnjem trenutku u odnosu na prethodni period, a diskusije sa vršnjacima zamenjuju diskusije sa roditeljima. Religijska pripadnost nije značajno povezana sa građanskim angažmanom i volontiranjem. U radu se raspravljaju teorijske i praktične implikacije opisane situacije u odnosu na socijalnu integraciju.*

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KLJUČNE REČI *socijalna integracija, građanski angažman, volontiranje, srednjoškolci, podrška roditelja, obrazovni sistem, religija, stavovi, Republika Makedonija*

## Introduction

There is a growing concern about the position and future of the youth in the political, mainstream, as well as scientific discourse. Today's youth deals with record unemployment all around the world, the grave consequences of which are yet to be revealed. However, they are already defined as apathetic, excluded and unengaged. A number of authors have expressed concern over what they consider to be a decrease in civic norms and behavior among adolescents and the youth because young people are less interested in political issues, rarely vote and are less likely to join political parties (Blais, et al 2004, Franlin, 2004, Kimberlee, 2002 and Norris, 1999). Harris, Wyn and Youness (2010) evaluate this apathy as a generally accepted fact, i.e. they report that the youth in a new globalized world do not understand the relevance of state policies and state activism and see no meaning in the traditional opportunities for affiliation and engagement. In sum, today's youth do not integrate into adult society as their predecessors did, while the number of disintegrated, disinterested and unemployed youth is rising with the end of every school year.

This growing apathy among the youth is meanwhile a potential threat both for them and the societies in which they live, considering that when they are actively engaged in improving their communities, they improve their own development and the development of a civil society (Lerner 2004, Levine and Youniss 2006 and Zaff and Michelsen 2001).

Not everybody is equally concerned with the youth issues though. There are optimistic studies that, despite the reduced political life of the youth, consider alternative behavior (volunteerism, organizing protests and street performances) as types of civic engagement. W. Lance Bennet (2003) for example, claims that young people today live in an unstable social context and as a result find greater pleasure in determining their own political way by volunteering locally, participating in consumer activism, supporting global causes (protecting the environment, human rights), participating in various transnational youth activities and creating a global civil society through global and local social networks and forums. These authors refuse to believe in the theories of the degradation of social capital and suggest that there is in fact a replacement, or a compensation, where young people are moving away from participation in the "unattractive" political parties to various volunteer activities (Cohen 2005, O'Toole, Lister, March, Johens, McDonald 2003; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins and Delli Carpini 2006). So apart from the "conventional citizenship" manifested in voting behavior (Dejaeghere and Hooghe 2009), we come across other proposed forms of civic engagement: activism, volunteerism and general activities aimed at improving the community (Zaff et al.,2010). These

activities, characterized as civic engagement and social inclusion is what DeJaeghere and Hooghe (2009) call „engaged citizenship“.

We focus on these different forms and complexity of civic engagement and social inclusion because we see it as a way out for the new generation. Numerous studies have reported the positive effect of civic engagement on the young person, i.e. civic participation is singled out as a key result in the theories on the positive development of the youth (Lerner et al 2009 and Lerner 2004). Understanding the complexity of civic engagement is also important for creating adequate and successful curricula, because criticism of the “limiting and conventional views on civic education” (Weber, 2008) is also part of the scientific discourse. A key aspect of the programs and policies for the development of democracy will therefore be to understand and encourage civic engagement of the youth in society (Sherrod and Lauckhardt 2009).

Emphasizing civic engagement and above all civic responsibility among the youth is also important for future civic behavior, as studies have shown that civic behavior is relatively stable and needs to be learned and practiced from an early age (Jois and Troppe 2005). This adds to the evidence that profound consideration of youth issues and urgent intervention in youth policy is more than needed.

The above presented findings, state of affairs and opinions are mostly derived from scientific literature and political discourse in the developed world. Meanwhile, there are only very few studies or official reports on the state of the youth in the transitional post communist countries, and almost none in the Republic of Macedonia (Markovska-Spasenovska and Nashkovska (2010). For example, there are no available statistics on the quota of young voters in any of the elections since Macedonia’s independence. At the same time, unemployment rates are around three times those of the EU member states (Eurostat 2011, SSO RM, 2011) and youth policies are low on the agenda<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, the present study attempts to put civic engagement and social integration of Macedonian youth high on the agenda by providing a report on the state of civic engagement and social integration among students and by providing evidence for the factors that are associated with it. More precisely, the present study aims to:

1. Examine the civic engagement levels of the Macedonian high-school students;
2. Examine their attitudes to these key topics;
3. Examine known predictors of civic engagement;

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<sup>4</sup> Note that there was an attempt to adopt a Law on Youth in November 2011, but the proposal was overturned. Even though this was a first sign of attention focused on youth issues on part of the authorities, it ended up serving as an example of non-participative policy-making, rather than a step in the right direction (the law was withdrawn from parliamentary procedure because a strong youth NGO coalition initiative challenged the Law)

4. Explore how they interact; and
5. Try to propose a model that best describes what drives civic engagement in Macedonia.

## Method

### *Data and instrument*

The data used in this study stem from YEF<sup>5</sup> and Reactor<sup>6</sup>'s survey of social capital among Macedonian high school students (Korunovska Srbijanko, Korunovska Avramovska, and Maleska, 2011). The data were obtained from two slightly different versions of a questionnaire that was based on a study of civic engagement by Zaff et al. (2010).

The proposed predictors of civic engagement that we examine in this study are the following:

### *Support from the education system*

The educational system and curricula are key in forming a sense of civic responsibility and building skills and knowledge for civic engagement (Stern, 2009), but studying itself is also closely related to engagement and active citizenship (Kovacheva, 2000). There is universal agreement in scientific literature that one of the most important goals of education is to prepare the student for becoming an informed and active citizen. That is why we hypothesize that a student curriculum successfully predicts civic engagement and volunteerism.

Support from the education system was measured with four questions pertaining to civic activities that were or were not provided for the students as part of the curriculum: writing a letter to an institution/a stranger; giving a speech or a presentation; participating in a debate/discussion and a visit to a state/municipal institution. We used the total number of activities that students reported to have participated in.

### *Parental support*

In addition to the schools, the educational role that parents play is also crucial. Parental influence on the attitudes and behavior of the youth has been proved in many studies, and their political behavior is one of the major factors that determine the political behavior of their children. Along with schools (and religious

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<sup>5</sup> Youth Educational Forum, Macedonia [www.mof.org.mk](http://www.mof.org.mk)

<sup>6</sup> Reactor – Research in action Macedonia [www.reactor.org.mk](http://www.reactor.org.mk)

associations), parents are one of the three key “institutions” that play an important role in developing attitudes towards civic engagement of the young person (Jois and Troppe 2005).

Parental Support was measured using the questions: „*How often did your parents vote in the past*” „*How often do you discuss daily political events with your parents*“ (today and while growing up) and „*If you think about activities you would like to take up in the future, do you think that your parents would support you in most of your decisions or be opposed to them*“. The last question attempts to measure perceived general support from parents.

### *Extra-curricular activities*

Young people spend almost half of their waking time in voluntary activities, such as sports or school clubs (Larson and Verma, 1999). Even though there is a large variation in the level and nature of these engagements, studies show that involvement in these organized activities benefit the youth, i.e. it is time well-spent outside the classroom (Feldman and Matjasko, 2005; Holland and Andre, 1987). More importantly, extra-curricular activities are predictors of civic engagement (as well as of school performance and mental well-being) (Barber, Eccles, and Stone, 2001; Fredricks and Eccles, 2006; Mahoney, Cairns and Farmer, 2003). The more activities the youth are involved in, the more they are tuned in to the community in which they live, as each organized activity can be seen as a specific learning environment, with unique opportunities for growth and development (Hansen et al, 2003; Larson, Hansen, and Moneta, 2006) leaving less time for unproductive and risky activities (Mahoney and Stattin, 2000; Osgood, Willson, O'Maley, Bachman, and Johnson, 1996).

All in all, it is reported that increased participation in organized extra-curricular activities successfully predicts a higher level of civic engagement among the youth (Fredrick and Eccles; 2006; McLellan, Su and Yates, 1999; Fredricks and Eccles, 2010), and it is a known predictor, if not an indicator itself, of social integration (Christie and Dinham, 1991, Kraemer, 1997, Settle et al., 2011).

We measured *extra-curricular activities* using an open list of 12 different activities, where the students were asked to check those in which they have participated and add any activity that was not part of the provided list. Similar to the question about the support from the educational system and in accordance with Fredricks and Eccles (2010), we used the total number of activities. In addition, membership in the Local Youth Initiative (LYI) clubs was used as a separate predictor because this extracurricular activity was specifically structured to increase civic engagement.

### *The role of religious associations*

Scientific literature states religious affiliation (mostly churches<sup>7</sup>) as an influential factor that contributes to increased civic engagement, volunteerism and sense of civic duty. There are numerous theoretical and empirical findings (Caputo 2008; Becker and Dhingra 2001, Iannacone 1990, Wilson and Musick 1997) that point to a positive correlation between religion as a form of cultural capital and civic engagement, especially when considering frequency of attendance<sup>8</sup> (Wuthnow, 1999).

Even though the Republic of Macedonia does not have a long history of religious groups working with children and youth, it is interesting to examine whether religiosity influences the attitudes of the youth and indirectly contributes to both their civic engagement and their sense of belonging to their communities.

The role of religious associations was measured through frequency of attendance (possible responses were: never, only on religious holidays, at least once a month, and at least once a week).

#### *Attitudes: Trust vs. cynicism*

The final predictor (correlate) of civic engagement that this study examines is the attitudes of the students. More precisely, we measured the trust, i.e. the cynicism that young people have towards institutions, their fellow citizens and their own abilities to act towards change. As mentioned earlier, some explanations for the decline in civic engagement among the youth is that they consider politics to be ineffective (Benjamin Quinto in Jois and Troppe, 2005), that the voting process does not bring specific results (Byrne Fields, 2001), that politicians do not represent their views (Bauman, 2001; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Giddens, 2002), that public institutions are impotent in the process of transforming private problems into public issues (Bauman, 2001), and that society is no longer a community in which they can have a sense of belonging (Harris, Wyn and Younes, 2010).

It is not strange then, that young people who are civically engaged have a more positive attitude towards government and society in general, are more likely to trust others, talk about politics with their parents, believe they can make a difference in their communities and believe that elected officials care about the youth (Jois and Troppe, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Due to the fact that most cited scientific articles are from the USA, Great Britain, EU and Australia.

<sup>8</sup> Some studies measure religiosity through additional dimensions. Lam (2002) uses 4 dimensions: affiliation, dedication, fundamentalism and participation (frequency of attendance), whereas Park and Smith (2000) add religious socialization. Our study used only attendance as a proven predictor of civic engagement.

In order to make the scales clearer and more reliable, we differentiated between *trust in society and institution (TSI)* and *trust in oneself*. TSI was measured on a scale created with the mean values on 13 questions, such as „*How much do the elected officials care about the youth*”, and how much they trust each of the ten institutions, including public media and international organizations. The reliability (inherent consistency) of this scale was good, with Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.814$ .

„*How much can you yourself change society* “ and “*How much can you influence how the government works*” are examples of the questions intended to measure the *trust in oneself* i.e. the conviction that civic action can actually bring about meaningful change. Because the reliability of the scale was unacceptable (Chronbach's  $\alpha=0.400$ ), we used each question as a separate predictor.

Attitude towards civic duty (CD) was measured using the question “*How important is voting to you personally*” on a 4 point Likert scale ranging from “*not at all*” to “*very much*”.

### *Controls*

We controlled for four demographics: age, gender, ethnicity and size of the place of residence.

### *Dependent variables*

Civic engagement i.e. activism was measured using the question *Have you ever worked with someone or within a group towards solving a problem in the city in which you live?* Unengaged students have never worked on a certain problem and were coded with 0; engaged students who have worked on a problem with 1.

Volunteerism was measured using the question *Have you ever participated in some form of volunteer work (defined as a choice to provide services, knowledge and skills and/or to perform other activities that would benefit other persons, organizations, institutions etc., without compensation)*. Students were divided into non-volunteers (0) and volunteers (1).

### *Hypothesis*

Civic engagement and volunteerism are predicted by a number of civic skills and activities learned at school, support of parents, a number of extra-curricular activities, frequency of attending religious objects, and attitudes of trust – when controlled for age, gender, size of the place of residence and ethnicity.

### *Participants and procedure*

The survey on which our study is based was carried out by the Youth Education Forum, Reactor Research in Action and local youth clubs, as part of the Local Youth Initiative (LYI) Project<sup>9</sup>. It was conducted in 13 towns across the country, covering 50 high schools, on two different occasions: May and September 2010.

The questionnaire was filled out by 3607 high-school students from 149 stratified, randomly selected high school classes. It was additionally filled out by 182 members (also high-school students) of the LYI centers. Most students (1178 or 33.4%) were 16 years old. 853 or 24.2% of them were 15, 873 or 24.8% were 17, 254 or 7.2% were 14, and 10.4% or 366 students were 18 years old. One boy and one girl reported to be 19 years old and 78 students (2.2%) did not reveal their age. The sample was diverse with regard to all relevant demographics (ethnicity, size and type of the place of residence (urban/rural), age and gender (for a detailed report on the sample see Korunovska Srbijanko, Korunovska Avramovska and Maleska, 2011).

For our analysis, we conducted 2 stepwise logistic regressions for each dependent variable, since the data originated from two different questionnaires and not all the questions determining the predictors were included in both. We used stepwise regressions to test for the unique explanatory power of the predictor variables over and above that of the controls by inserting the controls in the first step of the analysis and the predictors in the second. Significant change in  $R^2$  from step 1 to step 2 would indicate that the predictors (some or all of them) correlate with the dependent variables (independently of the controls).

Listwise deletion was used which resulted in slightly smaller sample size.

## **Results**

### *Descriptive analysis of the variables*

The mean, standard deviations and correlations between the dependent (civic engagement, volunteerism) and predictor variables are presented in Tables 1 and 2 below:

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.mof.org.mk/index.php?id=109andsodr=vest>

**TABLE 1**

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<b>Civic engagement</b>	.37	.48	.00	1.00
<b>Volunteerism</b>	.48	.49	.00	1.00
<b>Civic Duty</b>	1.49	1.13	.00	3.00
<b>You can bring change</b>	1.16	1.04	.00	3.00
<b>You can influence work of government</b>	.99	.99	.00	3.00
<b>Trust in institutions and society</b>	2.19	.60	.00	5.00
<b>Perceived general parent support</b>	2.47	.81	.00	3.00
<b>Discussed civic problems with parents while growing up</b>	1.98	.84	.00	3.00
<b>Member of Local Youth Initiative club (LYI)</b>	.05	.21	.00	1.00
<b>Discusses current civic issues at home</b>	1.91	.87	.00	3.00
<b>Discusses current civic issues with peers</b>	1.79	.90	.00	3.00
<b>Extracurricular activities</b>	2.71	1.82	.00	13.00
<b>Support from school system</b>	.52	.50	.00	2.50

TABLE 2

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. civic engagement	-												
2. volunteerism	.361**												
3 civic duty: importance of voting	.074**	.060**											
4. you can bring change	.162**	.082**	.083**	-									
5 you can influence government	.085**	.038*	.193**	.273**	-								
6. trust in society and institutions	.095**	.094**	.232**	.220**	.331**	-							
7. talked with parents about local problems while growing up	.092**	.104**	.063**	.119**	.091**	.071**	-						
8. talks with parents about local problems	.084**	.090**	.096**	.103**	.117**	.122**	.442**	-					
9. expected support from parents in future	.006	.028	.049**	.017	.008	.099**	.119**	.111**	-				
10. talks with peers about local problems	.122**	.156**	.096**	.095**	.069**	.075**	.339**	.617**	.079**	-			
11. extracurricular activities	.163**	.187**	.087**	.058*	.080**	.128**	.055*	.094**	.108**	.117**	-		
12. member of LYI club	.184**	.134**	.074**	.015	.031	.043*	-.023	.014	.018	.022	.173**	-	
13. support from Educational System	.265**	.200**	.109**	.133**	.073**	.058*	.129**	.03	.037	.03	.03	.285**	-
14. religious affiliation: frequency of attendance	.058*	.001	.007	.103**	.122**	.046	.087**	.119**	-.007	.075**	-.028	-.019	.03

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  
 \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### *Civic engagement*

The two regressions conducted for civic engagement are presented in Table 3. As we can see there are three predictors in the two samples that are repeatedly significant: the attitude “I can bring about change”; the discussions with parents about civic problems while growing up and membership in the LYI clubs. We see that the discussions with parents in the present lose their importance and are replaced by discussions with peers.

*Trust in society and institutions* was only significant in one of the samples (but it was close to significance in the other ( $p=.088$ ), while *religious affiliation* had significant but ambiguous impact on civic engagement: weekly goers as a base group were significantly more engaged than occasional goers, but not monthly goers or non-religious non-goers). We conclude that there are no indications that religious affiliation meaningfully relates to civic engagement. *Extra-curricular activities* and especially the *support of the schools* turned out to be strong and significant predictors. A good illustration of this is the fact that one additional skill learned in school made it 2.6 times more likely for a student to be engaged in solving a problem in her or his community. The attitudes “*I can influence the work of government*”, “*importance of voting*” and the “*perceived general support from parents*” had no influence on civic engagement.

**Table 3** Hierarchical logistic regression with the control variables entered in the first step and predictor variables entered in the second step of the analysis.

Variable	Civic Engagement N=1588 Questionnaire 1			Civic Engagement N=1527 Questionnaire 2		
	OR	95%CI		OR	95%CI	
Constant	.13			2.19		
Size of place of residence: larger town				*		
Village (rural area)	1.07	.77	1.48	.66*	.47	.94
Smaller town	.69**	.52	.91	.75	.56	1.00
Gender	1.15	.92	1.43	.93	.73	1.17
Age	.98	.89	1.08	.93	.83	1.04
Ethnicity (Macedonian)						
Albanian	.57**	.41	.79	.72	.52	1.01
You can bring change	1.37***	1.22	1.53	1.37***	1.22	1.54
You can influence government	1.03	.92	1.17	.99	.87	1.13
Importance of voting (CD)	1.09	.99	1.20	.98	.88	1.09
Trust in society and institutions	1.41**	1.13	1.76	1.22	.97	1.52
Step 2						
Talked with parents about local problems while growing up	1.18*	1.02	1.37	1.23**	1.07	1.43
Talks with parents about local problems	.99	.84	1.15			
Expected support from parents in future	.96	.84	1.10	.89	.773	1.03
Talks with peers about local problems	1.17*	1.01	1.35			
Extracurricular activities	1.17***	1.10	1.24			
Member of LYI club	.33***	.18	.58	.22***	.13	.37
Religious affiliation/frequency of visit						
Never	.84	.49	1.45			
Religious holidays	.63**	.44	.88			
Monthly	.74	.51	1.08			
Support from educational system				2.58***	2.02	3.30

**Note.** B=estimated coefficient; SE(B) = standard error; OR=odds ratio; CI=Confidence interval, \* $p<.05$ ; \*\* $p<.01$ ; \*\*\* $p<.001$

Questionnaire 1:  $R^2$ (Cox & SNELL) = .11;  $R^2$ (Nagelkerke) = .15 Hosmer and Lemeshow Goodness of fit Test: Chi-square = 6.153(8),  $p=.630$

Questionnaire 2:  $R^2$ (Cox & SNELL) = .15;  $R^2$ (Nagelkerke) = .20 Hosmer and Lemeshow Goodness of fit Test: Chi-square = 10.716 (8),  $p=.218$

The controls alone, even though significantly predicting civic engagement, were weak, improving the explanatory power of the initial model only by 2.8 to 4.0% (see table 3). We can see that only 2 out of 4 control variables play some role: *size of the place of residence* and *ethnicity*, but neither one does this convincingly: the civic engagement in rural places was different than in bigger towns only in one of the questionnaires. Similarly, the ethnicity of the students was only important in one of the samples (standard errors for ethnicity were largest). However unreliable

the statistics, the difference between Macedonian and Albanian students seems to be large: Macedonian students were between 1.4 to 1.8 times more likely to be civically engaged than Albanian students.

It should be noted that even though we controlled for all ethnicities, we reported only differences between Macedonian and Albanian students, because only these two groups were large enough to make the interpretation meaningful.

Gender and age did not make a significant contribution to the model.

The final models have good fit (Hosmer and Lemeshow tests are not significant) and explain from 15.2 to 20% of the variance in civic engagement (see Table 3). The models correctly predicted 66.8% and 69.5% of the cases respectively. That is, however, only a small improvement of 6.5% and 5.5% over the initial model.

### *Volunteerism*

Volunteerism shows similar but not identical pattern to civic engagement (table 4). Only the *discussions with parents in the past* and *membership in LYI clubs* successfully predict volunteerism in both samples. Again, the *discussions about civic problems in the present* are more important with *peers* than with *parents*. *Trust in oneself* and *trust in society* each play a role only in one of the samples, whereas *extra-curricular activities* and *support from school* also emerge as strong predictors of *volunteerism*. *Religion affiliation* plays no role.

The controls play a very similar role as in civic engagement: *place of residence* and *ethnicity* are related to *volunteerism*, but again not in an apparent fashion. The models explain between 11.2% and 13.4% of the variance in volunteerism, the controls alone only 3.5% and 4.5% respectively. They correctly predict 61.6% and 63.5% of the cases, an improvement of 11.0% and 12.2% over the initial model. Hosmer and Lemeshow was again not significant, implying good fit for the models.

It can also be seen from the models (Tables 3 and 4) that civic engagement and volunteerism are partly explained by similar predictors. Looking at the correlation between the two (Table 2) it seems evident that there is substantial overlapping and that the two constructs are not very different. There are also indications that the small number of activists (37.2% of the total sample) represents a telling share of the volunteers, which means that those students who have actively participated in their communities are more likely to have also been volunteers.

**Table 4** Hierarchical logistic regression with the control variables entered in the first step and predictor variables entered in the second step of the analysis

	Volunteerism N=1580 Questionnaire 1			Volunteerism N=1524 Questionnaire 2		
	OR	95%CI		OR	95%CI	
Variable						
Constant	.50			.97		
Size of place of residence: larger town						
Village (rural area)	<b>.63**</b>	.46	.86	.97	.71	1.33
Smaller town	<b>.59***</b>	.45	.76	<b>.74*</b>	.57	.97
Gender	1.23	.99	1.53	.97	.78	1.20
Age	.97	.89	1.07	.99	.89	1.10
Ethnicity (Macedonian)						
Albanian	.75	.55	1.03	<b>.59**</b>	.43	.80
You can bring change	1.07	.96	1.19	<b>1.21**</b>	1.08	1.35
You can influence government	.98	.87	1.10	1.00	.89	1.13
Importance of voting (CD)	.10	.91	1.10	1.01	.91	1.11
Trust in society and institutions	<b>1.47**</b>	1.18	1.83	1.17	.95	1.43
Step 2						
Talked with parents about local problems while growing up	<b>1.21*</b>	1.04	1.39	<b>1.19**</b>	1.05	1.36
Talks with parents about local problems	.94	.81	1.10			
Expected support from parents in future	.95	.84	1.09	1.029	.899	1.18
Talks with peers about local problems	<b>1.30***</b>	1.13	1.49			
Extracurricular activities	<b>1.19***</b>	1.12	1.27			
Member of LYI club	<b>.43**</b>	.24	.76	<b>.39***</b>	.23	.66
Religious affiliation/frequency of visit						
Never	1.17	.84	1.64			
Religious holidays	1.39	.97	2.01			
Monthly	1.30	1.13	1.49			
Support from educational system				<b>1.81***</b>	1.44	2.28

Note. B=estimated coefficient; SE(B) = standard error; OR=odds ratio; CI=Confidence interval. \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001  
 Questionnaire 1: R<sup>2</sup>(Cox & SNELL) = .10; R<sup>2</sup>(Nagelkerke) = .13 Hosmer and Lemeshow Goodness of fit Test: Chi-square = 5.377 (8), p=.717  
 Questionnaire 2: R<sup>2</sup>(Cox & SNELL) = .08; R<sup>2</sup>(Nagelkerke) = .11 Hosmer and Lemeshow Goodness of fit Test: Chi-square = 3.647 (8), p=.888

## Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the level of social inclusion of Macedonian high school students, their attitudes and levels of engagement in the community (activism and volunteerism), as well as to examine any factors that can predict increased participatory level of the youth.

Even though our sample represented the young high school generation of Macedonia, who by definition should beam with enthusiasm, the analysis of their attitudes did not fulfill these expectations. We argue that when it comes to conventional understanding of civic responsibility, there are signs of high apathy, early resignation and detachment from the community among Macedonian high school students. For example, as many as a quarter of the students explicitly state that there are few or no opportunities for them in their hometowns, which makes one in four students a self-declared socially excluded young person. Moreover, almost half of the students see themselves out of the country in ten years, and an additional 16% out of their hometown but still in the country, which supports the assumption that Macedonian high school students are disappointed with, and detached from, their communities (Korunovska Srbijanko, Korunovska Avramovska and Maleska, 2011).

When it comes to trust, more than two-thirds of the students believe they can do little or nothing to personally influence changes towards solving local problems and do not believe that the local elected officials care about the youth and their

needs. In addition, they do not believe that they can influence the work of the government and therefore indirectly contribute towards solving these problems.

As we have seen from our analysis, believing that you can bring about change was one of the strongest predictors of civic engagement, so the low levels of trust might be one of the reasons why the youth are not participating enough in their communities and, if nothing changes, are likely not to participate in the future as well.

As much as half of our sample did not learn or do any of the four skills and activities that should be part of the school curricula. When we say should, we do not mean that they are to be provided by the official school curricula. We say this with the confidence of our data that suggests that the more skills a student has learned in school, the more likely she or he is to have actively participated in her or his community. Because the support from the school was the strongest predictor of civic engagement and even volunteerism, we argue that in order to develop civically responsible and engaged students, an adaptation of the current curricula is urgently needed. Emphasis should also be placed on structured active participation in high schools, especially on those activities that are service-oriented, as they increase civic engagement, teach leadership skills, civic duty values, and expose the youth to collective action (Glanville, 1999; Youniss and Yates, 1997; Fredricks and Eccles 2010).

Extra-curricular activities were also a strong predictor of civic activism and volunteerism, especially if the extra-curricular activity was membership in a LYI club. Students from the clubs were between 2.5 to 4.5 times more likely to be activists and volunteers, respectively. It is interesting that the trust levels of these students were as low as those of their peers and that they were just as “willing” to leave the country. This is a dangerous sign of the state of mind of young people in the country, when even the most engaged are cynical before they even have the right to vote.

All in all, our study gives more support to the pessimistic than to the optimistic views on today’s youth because they display a high level of exclusion from the daily political events, are disinterested, distrustful and cynical about the public institutions. In addition, we believe that 63% of high school students who have never participated in solving any problem in their community and 52% that have never volunteered are worryingly large numbers. This reconfirms the conclusion that Macedonians are generally disintegrated from their communities, and do not engage in voluntary activities in their communities. As reported by the Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation, only a “small number of citizens (21.9%) engage in activities and services in the community”. The majority of engaged citizens (63.3%) spend on average of less than 10 hours per year, which is a decrease from 2009 (MCIC: 2009 and 2011).

Furthermore, the problem seems to be system-based, as well as dependent on how the students were raised in their families. We demonstrated that students who talked about the issues in the community with their parents while growing up are more likely to be civically engaged. But we also showed that regardless of how much support they got from their parents in developing interest in the local issues, ethnic Macedonian students and students from the larger cities were more engaged than the ethnic Albanian minority and students from the rural areas. This implies that integration is easier or more appealing for some groups, which is indicative of the existence of some more advantaged groups. A closer look is required in future research.

However, in order to better understand the reasons behind this suggested youth apathy, a closer investigation into the concept of civic engagement is needed. Zaff et al. (2010) propose that active and engaged citizenship is a second degree construct that contains four basic constructs: 1) civic responsibility, 2) civic capabilities, 3) neighborhood and social contacts and 4) civic participation. While the study covered high school attitudes and behaviour concerning three of the proposed constructs: civic responsibility (importance of voting), civic capabilities (skills learned in school) and civic participation (activism and volunteerism), it only partially covered neighborhood and social contacts. This is a construct that measures the sense of belonging of the youth in the community in which they live and their perception of the closeness with their neighbors and of their own importance in the community, and it is closely related to social inclusion. Zaff et al. (2010) propose that the school (an institution where young people spend a large proportion of their time) and especially teachers play an important role in developing strong neighborhood and social contacts, which in turn increases social engagement. Whether students believe they are important to the people in their neighborhoods or that their teachers care about them, are the examples of questions that operationalize this construct and give us a clue to the level of social inclusion of the youth. Since the students in the present study mostly reported to be having a good time in high school, it seems that “the students live under a bell jar, displaying little concern about, and being detached from the problems that surround them” (Korunovska Sribjanko, Korunovska Avramovska and Maleska, 2011). Further indications of this conclusion is the role of peers which emerged as an important factor influencing attitudes and behaviors, even more important than the present influence of parents.

It seems that even though they are disillusioned with society in general, the students might not be too worried about the current state of affairs because they feel integrated into their peer groups and schools. With the vast majority of them also reporting that they expect to graduate from university, it might be the case that they are unconcerned about youth problems because they expect to face them in the distant future. In addition, there are some suggestions that the state institutions do not communicate with the youth in a meaningful way and in a manner close to the

youth (mainly online), but further research is needed in order to explore this issue.<sup>10</sup> Their disinterest might also originate from their belief that they are more likely to be out of the country than they are able to change anything in their own communities. Whether this generation of young Macedonians has the capacity and conviction to bring about social change and fight for the improvement of the position of youth in the country is yet to be seen. However, the implications of the present study are a cause for concern: it seems that the attitude of the generation that is headed for record unemployment is that of unawareness, premature cynicism and detachment from the mainstream problems in their communities. Nevertheless, if the authorities committ to gaining the youth's trust, adjust the school curricula, and make an effort to connect the communities with their young members, then perhaps we will be looking at a different kind of future.

### **Limitations and concluding remarks**

One of the main limitations of our study is that two of our most important predictors could not be entered in the same regressions (support from school and extracurricular activities), so we do not know how much predictive power each of them would have lost or gained by the presence of the other. However, since we expect that the two concepts are not related (content of school curricula should not relate to how many extra-curricular activities a student participates in), we believe it is only the predictive power of our models that is lost because of this limitation. Another weakness is the *trust in oneself* scale that could not be used, so we ended up with single attitudes as predictors (this did not cause multicollinearity of the predictors). Lastly, our design was cross-sectional and the dependent variables were dichotomous, a yes-no one-time-only events that did not discriminate between truly active volunteers and engaged students and those who maybe volunteered and participated in solving a problem only once. A more precise investigation into engagement and volunteerism as well as social networks is required in order to better explain the drivers of youth engagement and participation and to explain more variance in civic engagement and participation. What we need is a longitudinal or even an experimental design.

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<sup>10</sup> Reactor Focus group conclusions, January 2012 (Youth in Macedonia: profile, challenges and priorities).

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