

## Why We Need to Question the Democratic Engagement of Adolescents in Europe

Since the beginning of the 21st century, academics in various disciplines have stressed the need to address democratic deficits in Europe as well as lacunae in the citizenship development of European youth. In this article we explore the value of various types of democratic engagement for strengthening the democratic character of local and international communities throughout Europe. To this end, we present our democratic engagement typology and its derivation from empirical and conceptual research, and discuss several strengths and limitations of each type of engagement. We also explain the additive value of our typology in relation to existing engagement typologies, and conclude that in order to vitalize democratic communities, local and (inter)national communities and institutions also need to cultivate a thick type of democratic engagement among European youth.

### Keywords:

Democratic engagement, thick democracy, adolescents, citizenship education

### 1 Introduction

In the last decade, academics in various disciplines have stressed the need to address democratic deficits in Western democracies as well as lacunae in the democratic citizenship development of their citizens. In the Netherlands for example, De Winter (2004, p. 61) identified three types of attitudes towards democracy that might pose a threat to the continuity and vitality of democracy: when people do not develop a democratic commitment; when they consider democracy as self-evident; or when they want to fight against it. In Canada, Tully (2010) criticized the (intended) democratic participation of citizens and their sense of civic and political efficacy. He argued that, since modern citizens in Canada have been raised with the idea that one should participate in the political domain in order to address issues or claim one's rights, they feel unable to address issues that are not put on the agenda by current political parties. Moreover, they have not learned how to address issues outside the political domain. As a consequence, those who refrain from politics tend to withdraw from the civic domain as well. The critiques posed by these and other researchers on the democratic attitudes of citizens, and their limited sense of civic and political efficacy and participation, led us to question further the democratic engagement of adolescents in Western democracies. In this study, we focus on the citizenship development of adolescents in Western Europe. Previous studies, like the International Civic and Citizenship Studies (Kerr, Sturman, Schulz, Burge & IEA, 2010) and the Participatory Citizenship Research Project (Hoskins, Abs, Han, Kerr & Veugelers, 2012) have already provided

insights into patterns and discrepancies among countries and among student groups in Europe. Slightly earlier research by Grever and Ribbens (2007), Lister, Smith, Middleton and Cox (2003) and Osler and Starkey (2005) has generated knowledge about adolescents' identification with the local, national and European community. Until today however, few studies have scrutinized adolescents' perceptions of what good, or democratic, citizenship entails, and their understandings of the ways in which they already (can) contribute to democracy as young citizens. A second omission in existing research concerns inquiries into components of democratic citizenship that resonate with a thicker conception of democracy which envisions democracy as a political system and a way of living (Dewey, 1916). Apart from Haste and Hogan (2006), few researchers have investigated European adolescents' perceptions of the moral and political components of political and civic participation, and their perceptions of democratic deficits. Our research is directed towards addressing these knowledge gaps.

In this article, we theorize about the types of democratic engagement that European youth can currently develop, and the types that they would need to develop in order for democratic communities to thrive. In this context, we first present our democratic engagement typology, and explain how this typology was constructed based on the findings of a narrative inquiry into Dutch adolescents' democratic engagement and related conceptual inquiries into thick democracy and thick citizenship efficacy. We then discuss several strengths and limitations of the thick, thin and passive types of democratic engagement in relation to the vitality of democratic communities. To conclude, we explain the additive value of our typology in relation to existing typologies, and argue that in order to support the vitality of democratic communities on a local, national and international level, European communities also need to cultivate a thick type of democratic engagement.

### 2 The political and civic context

Before we can present our typology and explain the steps that were taken in its construction, we need to further contextualize our research. To this end, the present section sketches some of the concerns that social and political scholars have expressed regarding the quality of current democratic practices and procedures,

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educational scholars' critiques of current (citizenship) education policies and practices in Western Europe, the Netherlands in particular, and their possible impact on adolescents' democratic citizenship development.

### 2.1 Lacunae as identified by scholars in social and political sciences

With regard to the quality of political debate in Europe, Mouffe (2005) has critiqued the tendency of representatives in European democracies to depolarize politics which, according to her, has led to the emergence of fascist movements throughout Europe. She mentions that in order to address this deficit, democracies need to instil an appreciation of agonist positions among their citizens. In line with Mouffe's critique, Schuyt (2009) warns against the tendency of the Dutch society to build a national community without appreciating and acknowledging the necessity of discussions about different value systems within nation states and the communities involved.

With regard to the quality of the representative system, empirical studies (e.g. Bovens, 2006) have revealed that the role and power of traditional political parties and labour unions in the Netherlands has declined with the rise of professional lobbyists, the decline of civic institutions, and the fragmentation of civic initiatives. To address some of the issues on democratic representation, Bovens (2006) has stressed the need to reaffirm the principles of representative democracy in new arenas of decision-making: in the deliberative field in professional arenas and in international organizations. Interesting in this regard is that an inquiry into interactive government and deliberative platforms and forums in the Netherlands (Michels, 2011) has revealed how different types of participation promote different types of democratic principles, and how government officials and policy makers, through choosing certain kinds of participation over other, let certain democratic principles prevail over others.

A third critique concerns the role of the media and politicians in guarding the quality of the election system and political debate. In his book *The dramatized democracy*, Elchardus (2004) has argued that Belgium and other countries alike have become 'symbolic societies' in which the media negatively affect the quality of the political system: in order to be elected, candidates now need to be good media performers rather than good politicians; the media make and break politicians; and campaigning processes never stop. Furthermore, he has argued that in a dramatized democracy, it's not the public but the faces of a party that shape the message of political parties. As a result, the 'dramatic democracy' risks 'crises' that are generated by the media, and that strongly play at feelings of distrust and discontent. According to Elchardus, such mechanisms endanger the quality and stability of Western democracies.

### 2.2 Lacunae as identified by educational scholars

In the education system in the Netherlands, adolescents are required to attend one year of Social Studies. In current Social Studies textbooks, democracy is presented

as a neutral political and legal system (Nieuwelink, 2008). Building on a thicker conception of democracy, Veugelers (2011) has expressed several critiques on Dutch (citizenship) education policies and practices, and the dominant, technical-instrumental education discourse. One critique concerns the decline of explicit attention to value and moral development in Dutch education, which, in his view, can be traced back to the declining influence of religious organisations on the content of education over the last sixty years, and to "the rejection of a more political content oriented to collective emancipation and the dominance of a technical-instrumental rationality" (Veugelers, 2011, p. 30). A second critique concerns the student-centred learning concept ("het Studiehuis"): a new structure for the upper grades in secondary education in the Netherlands that was launched by the Ministry of Education in the last decade of the 20th century. According to Leenders and Veugelers (2004), this concept stimulated individualist rather than cooperative learning strategies, and, as such, constrained possibilities to "learn to engage in joint critical examination and participation in social contexts" (p. 372). Similar to Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) typology of three types of citizens in the US, Veugelers (2007) also came to distinguish three types of citizens in the Netherlands: the adaptive, the individualist, and the critical democratic type. A representative survey by Leenders, Veugelers, & De Kat (2008) among secondary schoolteachers revealed that about 30 % of the teachers preferred the adaptive type of citizen, 20 % an individualist type and 50 % a critical democratic type. Despite teacher sympathy for a critical democratic type of citizenship, Veugelers (2011) found that this type receives little attention in educational practice. As a result, he concluded that Dutch schools in general cultivate a-political citizens: citizens who have not studied power inequalities and who have not been introduced to a school culture that teaches students how they can address social justice issues. In the same vein, and in sync with a broader understanding of the pedagogical task of teachers, Dutch scholars have critiqued the lack of positive attention to ideals at different education levels (Sieckelinck & De Ruyter, 2009), and the lack in guidance for young people for the development of values and civic ideals that resonate with a thicker conception of democracy (De Winter, 2012; Miedema, Veugelers & Bertram-Troost, 2013).

With the introduction of a legal obligation for schools to foster "active participation and social integration" (Ministerie van OC&W, 2006) the Dutch government does acknowledge its role as well as the role of formal education, in preparing young people in a pluralist democratic society to engage with different cultures and religions. Nevertheless, till today, students receive little guidance in their value orientation and identity development in classroom settings. The designated courses for discussing religious and cultural frameworks, dominant and alternative narratives, and practices of citizenship and democracy are worldview education courses and (facultative) citizenship projects. Interestingly, for various reasons, worldview education is rarely offered in secular



public schools in the Netherlands, which make up one-third of the public schools. This means that, despite the recommendations of the Council of Europe with regard to “fostering adolescents’ understanding of religious and non-religious convictions”, (Council of Europe 2008, 2014), about one-third of the Dutch adolescents do not receive education in religious and non-religious convictions. Moreover, when projects are offered in secular public schools, they often seem to be developed and taught by teachers who have not been trained to guide adolescents’ religious, identity and citizenship development in an ethical manner. Future evaluations of teacher training programmes in the Netherlands will have to reveal the extent to which teacher-students are trained to facilitate classroom discussions on controversial issues (Hess, 2009) and foster intercultural and interreligious understanding (Council of Europe, 2014). Furthermore, on the meso-level, school boards themselves do not seem to be stimulated to engage with different cultures and religions. Cooperation amongst schools with different (denominational) backgrounds, for instance, is not stimulated. Further, even though the Dutch government has been encouraging projects in which students from different schools engage with each other, policies and practices that maintain segregation in education are not addressed in a structural way (Veugelers, 2008).

Together, these concerns of social, political and educational scholars give an impression of the democratic deficits that adolescents might worry about, and that they might seek to address. Furthermore, they help to envision how certain democratic deficits and educational policies and practices might restrain the development of adolescents’ democratic engagement in the Netherlands and in Western Europe. Against this backdrop, we will now introduce the main conceptions in our study.

### 3 Conceptualising democratic engagement and democracy

Our theoretical framework draws from research in critical pedagogy and educational and political philosophy. The rationale for focusing on democratic engagement is that it enables us to examine and further theorize about participatory *and* subjective elements of democratic citizenship, like one’s appreciation of democracy, one’s sense of commitment to democracy and to people who suffer from practices of exclusion, and one’s willingness to further develop one’s participatory competences. As such, our conception of democratic engagement resembles Biesta’s concept of “engagement to the experiment of democracy” (2011), which distinguishes between a participatory component, supported by a certain set of skills and competences, and a motivational component: “a desire for the particular mode of political existence called democracy” (Biesta, 2011, p. 9). In our research we focus on the motivational component of engagement. In the theoretical framework that follows, we refer to this second component as “commitment”, covering various psychological and subjective elements like one’s motivation, one’s

commitment to democracy and various communities, and one’s sense of citizenship efficacy.

Democracy in Biesta’s (2011) concept of “engagement to the experiment of democracy” is presented as an ongoing process in which different stakeholders contribute to the development of public spaces where people can engage in political participation. In our research (De Groot, 2013) we have further theorized about key components of democratic engagement in the context of various conceptions of democracy. In particular, we sought to define key components of democratic engagement when perceived from a thick democracy framework: a type where the citizen, besides engaging in political participation, is also willing to and capable of strengthening the democratic character of local and (inter)national communities and organizations.

Thicker conceptions of democracy typically envision democracy as a political system and a way of life (Dewey, 1916). Our conception of thick democracy was constructed based on a comparative study on thin and thick democracy as identified by four scholars who have conducted empirical and conceptual studies on democratic citizenship education in Western democracies (Carr, 2010; Parker, 2003; Thayer-Bacon, 2008; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Building on their conceptions of thick democracy, which in turn build on pluralist, deliberative and radical democracy theory, we came to envision democracy as a political system that is always under construction, as a culture that seeks to enhance respectful relations and social justice, and as an ethos that implies examining and co-constructing hegemonies and underlying normative frameworks in a multipolar society (De Groot, 2013). A thin conception of democracy on the other hand, typically envisions democracy as an accomplishment and as a neutral political system: a system that treats all adult citizens with legal status as equal before the law and that highlights the value and need for protecting both itself and individual citizens from the threats that certain religious or cultural traditions and frameworks might offer to their (negative) freedom. Such an understanding of democracy, which resonates in several notions of classical liberal theory that have been criticized by pluralist liberal scholars (Mouffe, 2005; Thayer-Bacon, 2008), is widespread among citizens.

In the previous paragraphs, we introduced the concepts of “normative framework” and “democratic ethos”. Since these concepts are central to our discussion of the strengths and limitations of the three democratic engagement types delineated in this study, we will elaborate here on our understanding of these concepts and their interrelatedness. Our *normative framework* concept draws on Taylor’s (1989) work on “moral horizons”. Whereas Taylor has discussed the religious frameworks that influence civic and political developments in each society, the term “normative framework” in our research also refers to political and/or scientific normative frameworks immanent in corporate, financial cultures, institutions and movements, and it encompasses both ideological and more implicit frameworks. In our view, each society hosts various normative frame-

works, all of which are embedded, accepted and appreciated in the society in different ways, depending on numerous factors. Some normative frameworks, in particular the “exclusive” branches of these frameworks are designed to serve the interest of a specific group, like the “Dutch value-system” (Schuyt, 2009). A limitation of these frameworks is that they do not provide a normative framework and language through which members of a political community, together with those affected by the practices of this community, can discuss the possible value of elements from alternative frameworks for the further development of local and (inter)national democratic communities. Of course a *democratic ethos* is also limited and contingent, and might be judged as incompatible with a number of principles and norms that are key to other frameworks. Yet, we argue that, compared to community-specific cultural and religious frameworks, a democratic ethos offers a more inclusive language to deliberate about how to enhance democratic practices and procedures.

A last key concept in our research that needs clarification is that of *democratic deficits*. Referring to Peonidis (2013), for instance, one might define a democratic deficit as the discrepancy between the democratic ideal and the democratic reality. Our conception of democratic deficits, however, is inspired by the work of scholars who envision democracy as an outlook (Parker, 2003) and a never-ending process (Thayer-Bacon, 2008), and who claim that a “radical and plural democracy [...] will always be a democracy ‘to come’, as conflict and antagonism are at the same time its condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility of its full realization” (Mouffe, 2005, p.8). In line with this understanding of democracy, we argue that democratic deficits cannot be overcome: power inequalities cannot be ruled out in any society, and even when democracies are “functioning well”, there will always be people whose voices are less represented and who are prohibited from participating in the political and civil domain. This does not mean however, that we recommend taking existing democratic deficits for granted. In our view, detecting, challenging and mini-mizing deficits, as well as the continuous development of and reflection on multiple existing democratic ideals and theories, lies at the heart of democratic life.

#### 4 Constructing our democratic engagement typology

Since our typology was constructed based on the findings of an explorative narrative inquiry and related conceptual inquiries, we will first briefly summarise the design of the empirical study and the research process here. In this inquiry, which aimed to gain an insight into the democratic engagement of Dutch adolescents, we collected the narratives of 27 adolescents on five dimensions that influence their willingness to develop their democratic citizenship: an elaborate understanding of democracy and diversity; a sense of efficacy; an active commitment to groups of people whose voice is less represented in political procedures; active relations; and dialogical competences (De Groot, 2011). Due to our interest in the democratic engagement that adolescents

develop near the end of their socialisation through formal education, students from eleventh grade pre-university education and secondary vocational education were recruited for this study. Selection amongst the students who applied was based on creating a sample with an adequate mix of ethnic, gender, and professional backgrounds. 27 students were selected in total, all from the age group 16-20. 14 of these were students following vocational education and 13 were pre-university students. This proportion is also representative of the Dutch student population in general, where both types of schools attract about the same number of students. The respondents participated in an interview research cycle that comprised four focus groups and two individual interviews, all semi-structured. On average, four adolescents participated in each focus group. The interviews were conducted in school during or after school hours. Data were analysed in Atlas-ti using a combination of inductive and deductive analyses (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and tools from narrative and thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008).

After a primary analysis of the adolescents’ narratives, four themes were selected for further analysis: their perceptions and appreciation of democracy, of diversity, their sense of citizenship efficacy, and their sense of their citizenship responsibilities. Detailed reports of the separate studies on each of these themes can be found in our previous publications (De Groot, 2013; De Groot, Goodson & Veugelers, 2014a; De Groot, Goodson & Veugelers, 2014b). The analytic frameworks and findings from these narratives on the four themes were then merged into one overall framework which distinguishes between a thick, a thin, and a passive democratic engagement (see Table 1 in the attachment). The distinction of a thinner and thicker engagement type in this framework stems from our theoretical analysis of thinner and thicker conceptions of democracy and our empirical analysis of students’ narratives about democracy. The third, passive type of democratic engagement was added because several students in our study appeared to have few narratives about democracy and could be categorized as the passive-efficacy type.

#### 5 Three types of democratic engagement

In this section, we present the main characteristics of each type of engagement: thick, thin and passive, and describe its prevalence among the students in our research. We then point to several strengths and limitations of each type in terms of its contribution to the vitality of (inter)national and local democratic communities.

##### 5.1 Thick democratic engagement

Characteristic of this type of engagement is that the associated perception and appreciation of democracy and sense of citizenship efficacy and responsibility resonate a thicker conception of democracy. Our narrative inquiry revealed that relatively few students developed a predominantly thick type of democratic engagement. As our analysis of their narratives about democracy revealed, only a limited number of students

had developed predominantly thick conceptions of democracy. Students only incidentally referred to democracy as a normative framework (ethos) and their narratives on democracy as a way of life were often fragmented. Most students took democracy for granted and had limited perceptions about how a democracy might be threatened or how it could be vitalised. Also, students only occasionally referred to the merits of democracy in terms of its impact on how civic issues are addressed and its impact on the quality of international relations. While students did identify various democratic deficits that resonate with our thick conception of democracy, only few thick concerns were expressed frequently. Likewise, the fragmented nature of most students' narratives on diversity issues and their nebulous understanding of policy measures in this regard indicate that few students had the aspiration to contribute to the democratic process in this context. Our analysis of students' sense of their citizenship efficacy revealed that only few students could be categorized as this type, i.e. the type who feels inclined and confident that they can invoke change in the civic domain. This means that only few of the students aspired to contribute to equity and to respectful relations beyond their personal environment.

There are three benefits of a thick engagement type that can be explained in terms of their contribution to the vitality of democratic communities, each relating to one of the three key aspects of our thick conception of democracy: democracy as a continuously evolving political system, as a culture that seeks to enhance respectful relations and social justice, and as an ethos that implies co-constructing a democratic ethos. The first advantage is that people with a deeper understanding of deficits in current democratic narratives, practices and procedures are more inclined to address these deficits or support initiatives from fellow citizens in this regard. Whereas for the passive and thin types of democratic engagement, a lack of political efficacy will most likely result in a withdrawal from engagement in civic and political issues (Tully, 2010), a thick type of democratic engagement will seek for spaces in society where one can generate and strengthen counter-narratives and 'counter force' (RMO, 2011). The second advantage concerns the interrelatedness of this type of engagement with the quality of a democratic culture. Because this type co-creates institutional, corporate and public cultures that foster 'shared authority' and 'shared responsibility' (Thayer-Bacon, 2008) and advocate fairness rather than equal opportunities or outcomes for all, these 'democratic' cultures, in their turn, can provide (young) citizens with the necessary critical thinking and participatory competences to guard and strengthen such cultures. The third advantage relates to the ethos of challenging and co-creating hegemonies in multipolar societies. Citizens with a thick type of engagement contribute to such an ethos in several ways, such as engaging in conversations about civic and political issues and the different ways in which these issues are interpreted within and among religious, cultural and political communities and by corporations. In this way,

citizens with a thick type of democratic engagement contribute to the co-construction of a normative framework and language that surpasses these specific communities. In addition, through engaging in such conversations, citizens belonging to this type also develop the necessary capacities to recognize multiple normative frameworks and deliberate about their possible value for the vitality of the democratic character of their local and (inter)national communities. In our discussion of the strengths and limitations in section 6, we further elaborate on this third advantage.

## 5.2 Thin democratic engagement

A thin type of democratic engagement implies that one understands democracy as a political system in which the people rule and where people's rights are protected by the constitution. It most likely also implies that one participates in accordance with this thin perception of democracy: one might vote, become a member of a political party, and/or participate in deliberative platforms. In this way, thin types support one of the basic principles of the political system, that of 'popular sovereignty' (Dahl, 1989; Peonidis, 2013). Citizens with a thin type of engagement might also be aware of the complexity of negotiating interests, and as a consequence, have realistic expectations of the possible outcomes of deliberation processes. They might have an understanding of past and present accomplishments of politicians in addressing economic and cultural issues, and they might be cautious about judging politicians based on media reports broadcasting malfunctioning politicians and snapshots of political debate primarily for their entertainment value. In our study of adolescents' narratives about democracy, most students were categorized as thin and 'mixed' types: types whose meaning narratives contained both thin and thick elements. Frequently made 'thin' critiques related to the declining voting rate. Students also regularly mocked, in their view, the unreasonably high penalties for ignoring a red light when cycling, high tax fees, legislation that forbids people under the age of eighteen from buying alcohol and the lack of firm action against criminal behaviour. The more 'mixed' types would also, for example, mention a responsibility towards enhancing respectful relations. Yet, they did not identify a responsibility towards addressing social justice issues or democratic deficits. Our study of adolescents' citizenship efficacy revealed that several of the students felt that they could make an impact in the political domain and also felt a responsibility towards participating in this domain.

The disadvantages of this type relate, amongst others, to limitations with respect to the understanding of democracy. Since citizens falling within this type envision democracy as a political and legal system, their reflections about democracy also do not transcend the political domain. They are also less inclined to reflect on deficits in the current democratic narratives and procedures, since they tend to perceive democracy as an accomplishment; a system where every citizen has an equal say, rather than as a continuously evolving set of

practices and procedures which is constantly shaped and challenged by economic and environmental developments as well as existing and emerging normative frameworks. A third disadvantage relates to their rather dichotomous image of the separation of the church and the state. Because of this image, citizens with a thin type of democratic engagement believe that religious and other normative frames have, and should have, little impact on political deliberation processes and on the development and implementation of legislations and policies. In line with their neutral stance and their interpretation of the equality principle, thin types are also inclined to supporting policies that treat all religions and cultural frames in the same manner.

### 5.3 Passive democratic engagement

Typical to citizens with a passive type of democratic engagement, is their lack of democratic commitment. They have few narratives about what democracy entails and how they (might) benefit from living in a democratic society. Their understanding of current democratic narratives and procedures and subsequent deficits is superfluous and largely based on personal/second-hand experiences. They do not inspire to contribute to the democratic process and they are rather ignorant about how democracy evolves. The findings of our empirical study indicated that several of the students developed a very limited democratic engagement: several students had limited images about democracy and the possible merits of democratic practices and several fell under the 'passive citizenship efficacy' category. Our findings on students' appreciation of democracy could not, however, be easily translated into conclusions about a certain type of democratic engagement. Having a neutral attitude towards democracy, for instance, does not automatically imply that one has a passive type of engagement; one can judge one's attitude towards democracy as neutral and simultaneously have a thick understanding of democratic deficits and participate in ways that resonate a thick conception of democracy.

That lack of a sense of democratic commitment amongst this type does not mean that they do not contribute to democracy. Contributions to democracy, for instance, through engaging in political deliberation practices in their communities, can also be inspired by a Christian interpretation of good citizenship (and images of good citizenship vary widely among Christians as well). However, the contribution to democracy of this engagement type is not a conscious act. Furthermore, citizens who fall under the passive engagement category are probably unaware of how their contributions might frustrate or contribute to the vitality of democratic practices and narratives.

Educational researchers who depart from a thick conception of democracy have expressed several critiques that relate to this type of engagement. De Winter (2012), for instance, argued that democracies risk implosion when a growing number of citizens are ignorant about the democratic process or have not learned how to actively relate to democracy and guard the democratic process. Likewise, political researchers

(Macedo, 2005; Bovens, 2006) have pointed to the negative impact of a decline in political participation, especially among lower educated citizens, on the representativeness of parliamentary political parties and labour unions. It is important to note that these scholars do not primarily blame citizens for this lack of engagement. In their view, government officials and citizens have a shared responsibility towards shaping political bodies and procedures in which all citizens can and *want* to participate.

### 6 Analysing strengths and limitations of thin and passive types of engagement

Passive and thin types of democratic engagement can both also comprise caring and actively participating members of local communities, who can be critical about a whole range of issues, and like the thicker types, might commit to addressing hegemonies within their own communities. While the cultivation of such types of engagement is certainly valuable for democratic societies, several scholars have argued that these practices alone will not make democratic societies thrive. Kahne and Westheimer (2003) and Parker (2003), for instance, have claimed that citizens also need to (learn to) address civic and political issues beyond their local communities. Further, Nussbaum (2002) has stressed that in a globalised world, one should actively seek to foster the Socratic ability to criticise one's own traditions; the ability to think as a citizen of the whole world; and 'narrative imagination': "the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have" (Nussbaum, 2002, p. 299). Narrative imagination, Nussbaum states, enables people to develop a critical and emphatic understanding of the judgement and actions made by people from different historical and socio-cultural backgrounds.

Building on our typology, we point here to three additional limitations that passive and thin types of engagement have in common with regard to their contribution to the vitality of the democratic character of (inter)national societies (See also table 2). The first limitation concerns the fact that both types have *limited possibilities to develop a strong appreciation of democracy*. This stems from the perception of democracy as a political and legal system. Several students in our study who envisioned democracy as a political system, for example, explained that they did not have an interest in politics, and that they had little or no idea of the impact that democracy has, or might have, on their own well-being and on how a society addresses economic, cultural and sustainability issues at the local and (inter)national level. If these students had also been introduced to the idea of democracy as a culture that seeks to stimulate shared authority and shared responsibility at home, at school and at work, and if they would have had the opportunity to participate in such cultures, they might have developed a more sophisticated and embodied appreciation of democracy than the appreciation they developed from just learning about



democratic institutions and participating in school elections.

Table 2 - Limitations of the passive and the thin types of engagement

	Passive type	Thin type
<b>Unique Limitations</b>	<p>Understanding of current democratic narratives, practices and procedures and subsequent deficits is superfluous (if present) and largely based on personal/second hand experiences</p> <p>Unawareness about how their (unintended) contributions influence democratic practices and narratives</p>	<p>Understanding of democratic current democratic narratives, practices and procedures limited to the political and legal domain</p> <p>Limited reflection on deficits of current democratic narratives, practices and procedures</p> <p>Awareness of contribution limited to participation in the political domain</p>
<b>Common limitations</b>	<p>Limited possibilities to develop a strong appreciation of democracy</p> <p>(Relative) blindness to the normative frames that underlie current democratic narratives and practices</p> <p>Limited understanding of the possible value of (elements from) community specific normative frameworks for the continuous development of democratic narratives and practices</p> <p>Limited contribution to co-construction of (democratic) outlooks that people envision for their societies</p>	

The second limitation concerns the *blindness to the normative frames* underlying current democratic narratives, practices and procedures that is typical for passive and thin democratic engagement types. When talking about the democratic political system as a system in which the majority wins, Daisy, one of the adolescents in our study, remarked, "Actually, when I think of it, this is not really fair". If she and other students in our study would have had a broader understanding of the checks and balances that democratic systems might set in place, of the theoretical and political background of current hegemonies, and of processes of power preservation, they might have been better equipped to imagine ways to address current deficits in these areas. In addition, they would probably be more inclined to improve the 'citizenship situation' (Biesta & Lawy, 2006) of groups of people whose lives are strongly affected by government policies, but whose voice has limited weight in policy development processes.

The third limitation concerns the *limited contribution of passive and thin types to the co-construction of a democratic ethos*: a normative framework that underlies and provides directions for the further development of a democratic culture and political system. Contributing to the development of a democratic ethos implies that people learn to challenge their images of a) what makes a good citizen; b) what makes a good society; c) alternative images of good citizenship and the good society; and d) the theoretical and normative frameworks that these images (might) build on. It also implies that people reflect on e) their own interpretation of democratic values like freedom, equality, brotherhood, representation and accountability, and f) on the interpretations of such values that underlie current policies in different areas, like healthcare and education.

Additionally, it implies that they de- and reconstruct each other's understandings of g) the quality of the conceptions of representation and participation that underlie current policies; h) aspects of current conceptions, and the actual policies and practices themselves that need improvement, i) the direction in which the conception or policy in question would need to improve, and j) fair ways to proceed in this direction. In short, people would have to engage in the continuous process of developing their 'located' narratives (Goodson, 2012) on good citizenship, on the good society and on existing and alternative democratic outlooks. The modifier 'located' stresses that these narratives, other than individualist accounts of (good) citizenship, will take into account how one's images of good citizenship, the good society and key democratic values are influenced by economic and socio-cultural developments and the theoretical and normative frameworks present in society.

How are passive and thin types of democratic engagement doing in this respect? Do they reflect on the interpretations of democratic values that underlie current policies and practices? Are they aware of the interrelatedness of their personal views and outlooks and the numerous theoretical and normative frameworks present in their community? And do these types entail conversations in which people probe into their own and other's democratic literacy and civic or democratic outlooks? Since the passive types focus on shaping and protecting their personal freedom and interests and the freedom and interests of their own communities, they most likely develop few images about the kind of society that they want to live in, and what it takes to sustain and vitalise a democratic society. They probably also have few conversations with people inside or outside their own environment in which current

understandings and views are probed. Thin types on the other hand, do engage in conversations about political issues. They will, for instance, engage in discussions about the desirability of replacing a student grant system for a student loan system in higher education. However, in contrast to the thick types, citizens adhering to the thin type of democratic engagement are less inclined to scrutinise the normative positions that they depart from, and their understandings of key values in such a debate, like 'high quality', 'high accessibility' and 'affordable education'. In the same vein, thin types will, for instance, claim that they foster a certain democratic value like freedom rather than question their interpretation of these values.

We illustrate this limitation, and its possible consequences, with the following example from the field of education in the Netherlands: The Dutch State Secretary of Education, Sander Dekker, who is a member of the Neo-liberal party (VVD), recently agreed with the plea of the National Education Council (Onderwijsraad, 2012) to adopt 'participating in a democratic community' as the main aim of citizenship education. More specifically, in his letter to the parliament, Dekker (2013, p. 2) defined the essence of citizenship education as, "Transmitting knowledge about the Dutch legal and political system and expressing the (democratic) values in classes [...] (and) stimulating the appropriate behaviour in class". One might argue that Dekker's stance resonates a thick conception of democracy, since, rather than taking a neutral position, he advocates inculcating certain types of values (democratic ones) among students. Yet, whereas Dekker considers citizenship education as an enterprise directed at instilling certain values, a thicker engagement type would emphasise the need to stimulate students' engagement in the processes of co-constructing a democratic ethos, and the need for students to learn how they can challenge their interpretations of democratic principles, and how they can scrutinize which principles are actually supported in current democratic procedures and practices (in accordance with whose interpretations). From an educational perspective, one might also critique Dekker's call for imposing democratic values which, though well-intended, risk generating an authoritarian type of citizenship education; a type of education that seeks to meet fixed ends, rather than a world-centred education; a type of education that seeks to bring children into the world (Biesta, 2013).

Besides illustrating how thin democratic engagement types will act upon rather fixed and under-reflected images of what good democratic citizenship and what a good society entails, the example above also exemplifies possible implications of this limitation for the provision of spaces and platforms where youth can engage in the (de)construction of a democratic ethos. Overall, we can expect passive and thin types of involvement in the de- and reconstruction of conceptions of democratic principles, as well as their understanding and appreciation of the possible contribution of multiple normative frameworks to this process, to be limited.

## 7 Theoretical and practical value of the typology

In this article we presented a democratic engagement typology that was developed based on a narrative inquiry into the democratic engagement of Dutch adolescents, and that distinguishes between a thick, thin and passive type of democratic engagement. We also discussed three limitations of passive and thinner democratic engagement types in terms of their possible contribution to the vitality of democratic communities: that they are less inclined to question current democratic policies and practices; that they have limited insight into *the normative frames* underlying current democratic narratives practices and procedures; and that their contribution to co-construction of (democratic) outlooks is limited. Based on these limitations, we argue that in order for democracy to thrive and in order to strengthen the quality of young citizens' commitment to 'the democratic experiment' (Biesta, 2011), European societies need to cultivate a thick type of democratic engagement.

Our plea resides with and adds to the work of educational scholars who have argued that democratic societies need to provide (young) citizens with the *opportunity* to gain the necessary deliberative and critical participatory competences to detect and address civic and political issues (Parker, 2003; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004); acquire the necessary skills to examine and practice their ideals in a 'reasonable passionate' way (Sieckelink & De Ruyter, 2009); generate the narrative imagination competence that enables them to bond with people outside their own community (Nussbaum 2002); and reflect on and strengthen their (inter)religious and democratic citizenship (Miedema et al., 2013). For instance, in this article we argued that, apart from providing spaces where adolescents can practice participation in discussions and deliberations about civic and political issues in a reasonable passionate way, and guiding adolescents with the development of their personal worldview and ideals, European communities also need to introduce adolescents to the practice of reconstructing their images of good citizenship, good society and their interpretations of democratic values. It is through such practices that one can learn to engage in fruitful conversations about the viability of dominant conceptions of democratic values and about the value of different normative frameworks and democratic outlooks for the further evolvement of democratic practices and narratives.

Our typology also contributes to existing engagement typologies. While De Winter (2012) critiqued people with an anti-democratic and passive attitude towards democracy for their lack of participation in democratic practices in general, our typology also discusses additional limitations of passive and thin engagement types. In line with our discussion of these types, we for example argue that the threat that such citizens pose to the vitality of democratic communities also relates to their lack of understanding about how their participation impacts the continuous evolvement of democratic practices, procedures and outlooks. Whereas Veugelaers'



(2007) critical democratic type of citizen and Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) social justice type of citizen emphasise which types of commitment and participation are detrimental for democracies to thrive, our typology theorises about the interrelatedness of one's participation and one's perception and appreciation of democracy. For instance, it envisions how one's conception of democracy will affect one's contribution to addressing a discriminatory practice: where a thin type will probably push for a solution that embodies a certain conception of equality and respect, a thick type will try to address this practice in relation to the various conceptions of equality involved. Finally, our typology stresses the narrative dimension of democratic engagement: how one's democratic participation, one's democratic attitudes and one's sense of citizenship efficacy and responsibility is –or can be– strengthened in the continuous process of narrating about democracy and one's sense of efficacy and responsibilities as a democratic citizen. Apart from combining various components of previous typologies, our typology thus builds on a more elaborate conception of democracy (envisioning democracy also as an ethos) and evaluates citizens on a broader range of components (apart from evaluating one's type of (intended) participation it also evaluates one's narratives about democracy; one's sense of efficacy; and one's narratives about one's democratic citizenship responsibility). Furthermore, it allows for a more systematic analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the various engagement types.

## 8 Outlook

To conclude, we explain how our typology can be helpful to envision how European societies, through their educational institutions amongst others can also cultivate a thick type of engagement, and how it might inspire further research and discussion among educational professionals and politicians in this area. Preparing young generations for their role in sustaining and vitalising democratic cultures and co-constructing a democratic ethos, we argue, requires that educational professionals go beyond teaching about democracy and organising participatory experiences in existing democratic practices and procedures. It means that teachers also need to guide students in the process of giving meaning to their citizenship in a high-modern democratic and pluralist society and challenging their understanding of, and commitment with, civic and political issues on the macro- and meso-level that affect the daily lives of different groups of citizens. This guidance can be offered, for example, through facilitating the development of adolescents' narratives about good citizenship and democracy and through facilitating critical examination of the interrelatedness of their own narratives and the dominant and counter-narratives and theories on democracy and democratic citizenship in local and international communities. On a meso-level, this implies that educational institutions also need to offer the necessary provisions for participatory and narrative teaching and learning. In general, we argue that

education for democracy and democratic citizenship implies that educational professionals teach students how they can explore and challenge their images about democracy and democratic citizenship; their understanding of strengths and limitations of current deliberation practices and procedures in their daily lives, in school and in the political domain; the impact of socio-economic and political conditions on the extent to which different groups of citizens can, and do, participate with voice (Warwick Cremin, Harrison & Mason, 2012; Jover, Beando-Mortoro & Guio, 2014; Macedo & Araujo, 2014); their images of possible small and structural gains of their participation as citizens; their knowledge about 'good practices' of citizenship participation in different contexts; and their understanding of their current contributions.

Our typology as well as our understanding of the societal prevalence of each of the three types it delineates, stem from an inquiry into the democratic engagement of a certain group of Dutch students at a certain moment in time. Further comparative studies will need to provide insight into the type of democratic engagement that prevails among larger groups of adolescents, across Europe, and into commonalities and discrepancies among different student groups in different circumstances. Given the lack of knowledge about thicker components of the democratic citizenship of European adolescents, we specifically recommend further comparative studies into adolescents' narratives about democratic deficits, which could include narratives about the lack of deliberative arenas in professional areas and organisations (Bovens, 2006), or the impact of the interplay between media and politicians on the quality and stability of Western democracies (Elchardus, 2004). We further recommend comparative studies of adolescents' narratives about their democratic citizenship responsibilities in relation to these democratic deficits, more specifically, about conditions that preserve the current situation, and about their participatory and narrative competences in this context. Overall, we hope that our democratic engagement typology will instigate further research and discussion among educational professionals and politicians about the extent to which (inter)national and local educational institutions (can) provide the necessary spaces, infrastructure, narratives and teacher competences for young citizens to also develop a thick type of democratic engagement.

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**Appendix: Table 1 - Main features of the three types of democratic engagement**

	<b>Passive type</b>	<b>Thin type</b>	<b>Thick type</b>
<b>Images &amp; narratives about democracy</b>	Has few narratives about what democracy means and how one (might) benefit from living in democratic society	Understands democracy as a political and legal system in which the people rule and where their rights are protected by the constitution	Understands democracy as a political system under construction; a culture that aims for interpersonal respect and social justice; and an ethos that implies co-creating and challenging hegemonies in multipolar societies
<b>Sense of efficacy</b>	Is ignorant about one's sense of efficacy in the civic and political domain	Focuses on one's sense of efficacy in the current political domain	Focuses on strengthening one's sense of efficacy in the civic and political domain
<b>Contribution</b>	Has no aspiration to contribute to consolidation or vitalisation of democratic narratives, practices or procedures at the local or (inter)national domain	Engages in local and/or (inter)national election processes; (sometimes also) participates in deliberative platforms and/or works for a political party	Challenges deficits in current democratic narratives and practices; Generates counter narratives and counter force  Co-creates institutional, corporate and public cultures that foster shared authority and responsibility  Questions current hegemonies and underlying normative frameworks and contributes to the co-construction of democratic outlooks

