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Foresight scenarios and how to deal with the threat of right-wing populism in each of them

PRESENTATION AT THE JOINT POLICY EVENT OF THE CLUSTER OF H2020 PROJECTS ON POPULISM „UNMASKING POPULISM: MODALITIES, SCENARIOS, AND RESPONSES TO A PERSISTENT THREAT"

Foresight scenarios

o   an analytical system for mapping out possible futures within a certain domain or environment in order to reflect on possible consequences or courses of action under different eventualities

o   scenarios do not predict the future

o   they are a tool for critical thinking, discussion and interaction
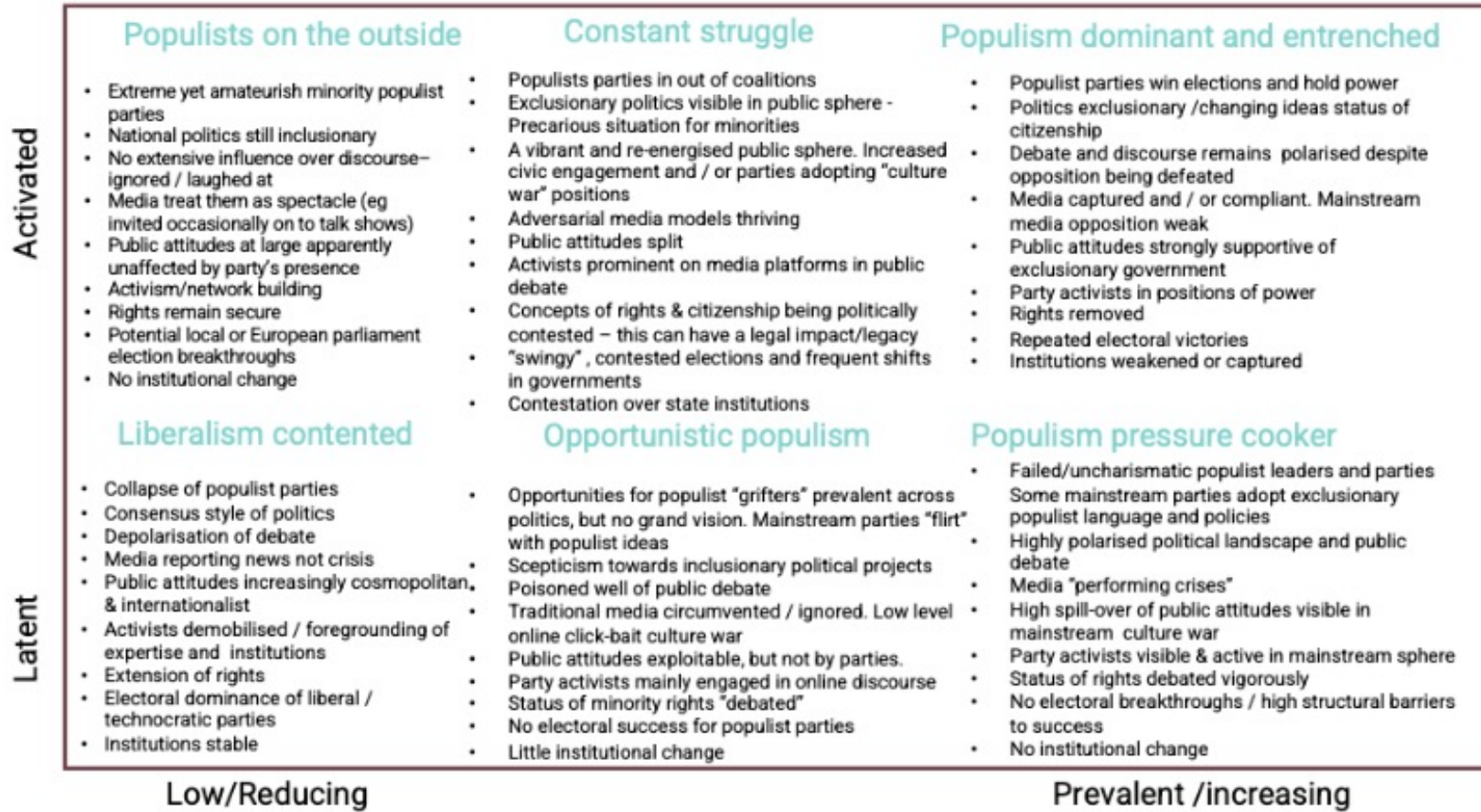
Endogenous & exogenous approaches

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- scenarios **within** configurations of populism

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- scenarios structured by **global trends**
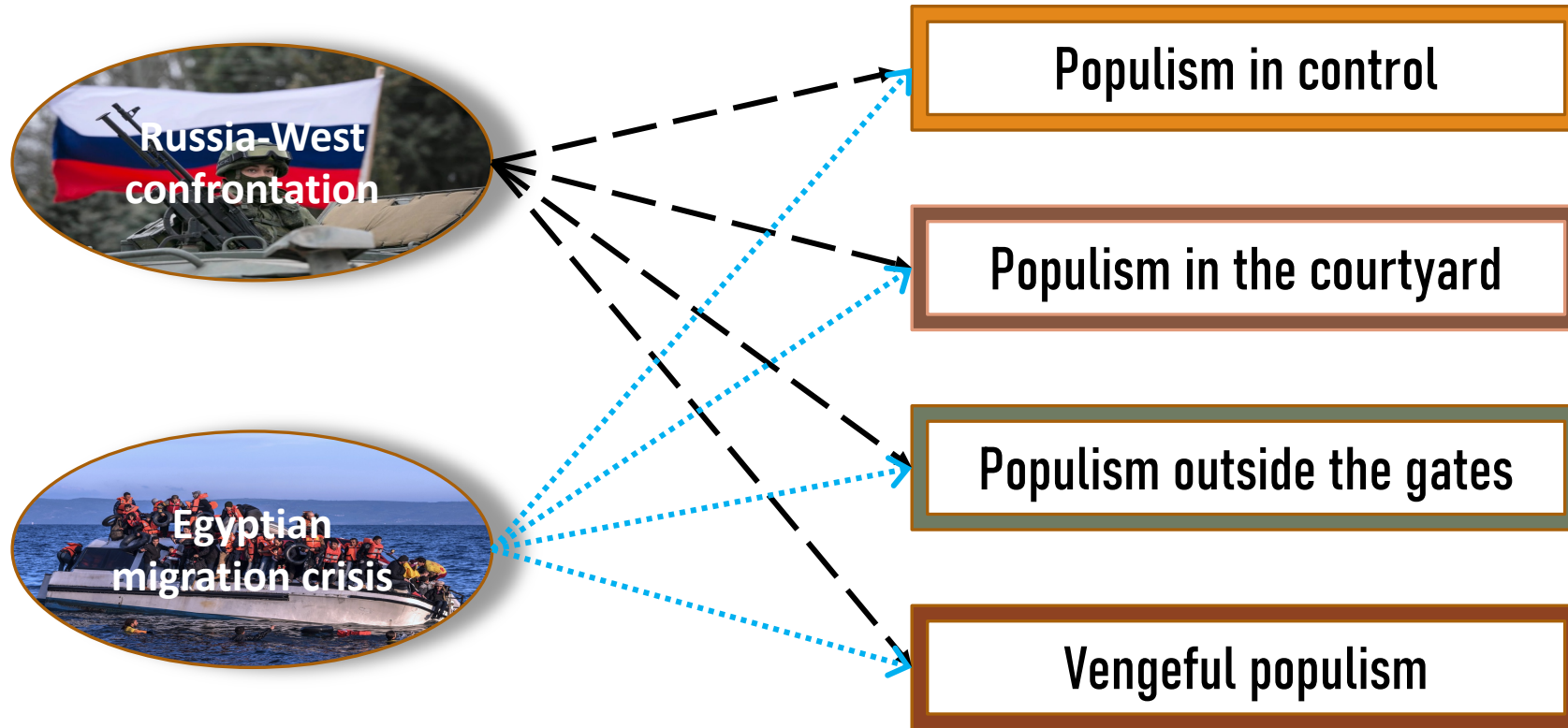
Endogenous: configurations of populism

Populist attitudes successfully 'activated' or transformed (vertical axis: Activated / Latent)

How common are Populist attitudes in the population? (horizontal axis: Low/Reducing — Prevalent /increasing)

Populists on the outside
- Extreme yet amateurish minority populist parties
- National politics still inclusionary
- No extensive influence over discourse– ignored / laughed at
- Media treat them as spectacle (eg invited occasionally on to talk shows)
- Public attitudes at large apparently unaffected by party's presence
- Activism/network building
- Rights remain secure
- Potential local or European parliament election breakthroughs
- No institutional change

Constant struggle
- Populists parties in out of coalitions
- Exclusionary politics visible in public sphere - Precarious situation for minorities
- A vibrant and re-energised public sphere. Increased civic engagement and / or parties adopting "culture war" positions
- Adversarial media models thriving
- Public attitudes split
- Activists prominent on media platforms in public debate
- Concepts of rights & citizenship being politically contested – this can have a legal impact/legacy
- "swingy" , contested elections and frequent shifts in governments
- Contestation over state institutions

Populism dominant and entrenched
- Populist parties win elections and hold power
- Politics exclusionary /changing ideas status of citizenship
- Debate and discourse remains polarised despite opposition being defeated
- Media captured and / or compliant. Mainstream media opposition weak
- Public attitudes strongly supportive of exclusionary government
- Party activists in positions of power
- Rights removed
- Repeated electoral victories
- Institutions weakened or captured

Liberalism contented
- Collapse of populist parties
- Consensus style of politics
- Depolarisation of debate
- Media reporting news not crisis
- Public attitudes increasingly cosmopolitan, & internationalist
- Activists demobilised / foregrounding of expertise and institutions
- Extension of rights
- Electoral dominance of liberal / technocratic parties
- Institutions stable

Opportunistic populism
- Opportunities for populist "grifters" prevalent across politics, but no grand vision. Mainstream parties "flirt" with populist ideas
- Scepticism towards inclusionary political projects
- Poisoned well of public debate
- Traditional media circumvented / ignored. Low level online click-bait culture war
- Public attitudes exploitable, but not by parties.
- Party activists mainly engaged in online discourse
- Status of minority rights "debated"
- No electoral success for populist parties
- Little institutional change

Populism pressure cooker
- Failed/uncharismatic populist leaders and parties
- Some mainstream parties adopt exclusionary populist language and policies
- Highly polarised political landscape and public debate
- Media "performing crises"
- High spill-over of public attitudes visible in mainstream culture war
- Party activists visible & active in mainstream sphere
- Status of rights debated vigorously
- No electoral breakthroughs / high structural barriers to success
- No institutional change

Exogenous: global impacts on configurations

Russia-West confrontation

Egyptian migration crisis

Populism in control

Populism in the courtyard

Populism outside the gates

Vengeful populism

Conclusions: endogenous approach

- as right-wing populism mounts in a country, there are interactive effects vis-à-vis other democratic institutions
  - negative/spillover effects – even when populists not gaining power
    - E.g., erosion of minority rights, polarisation of public discourse, exclusionary politics, degredation of institutions, and mistrust of authorities.
  - highlights unintended consequences of policies to counter populism
    - E.g., increasing structural barriers, 'improving' public discourse, funding restrictions, or 'policification' of politics.

Conclusions: exogenous approach

- global trends clearly stymie, but do not suppress populist politics or sentiment
  - more entrenched populisms may even gain from further global change
  - populists publics are not easily deterred or swayed by global crises, especially where deeper cultural and economic dimensions of populism have become rooted

The role of deliberative policy making in countering populism

- Deliberative policy making is where reasoned discussion is used to leverage the collective expertise

- These can be implemented in terms of Democracy Labs and other, bottom-up, participatory processes

- However, there are also online tools to help in this which is what we see next.

Why and how civic education can be useful in countering populism?

(DEMOS, PaCE, POPREBEL)

Research Methods

Key research questions & hypothesis:

- R1: What is a role of schools in enhancing democratic efficacy? Can civic education be an effective tool for countering populisms?

- H0: national level policies related to civic education have an effect on internal and external political efficacy, political interest, political participation and support for democratic values (equality, tolerance and autonomy) of youth.

- **Methodology:**

- Study of youth in 14 European countries

- Eurydice Report "Citizenship at School in Europe Education 2017"

- Data source for investigating the relationship on the individual and country level we employ data from the European Social Survey, Round 9.

civic education at schools   relation   democratic political efficacy
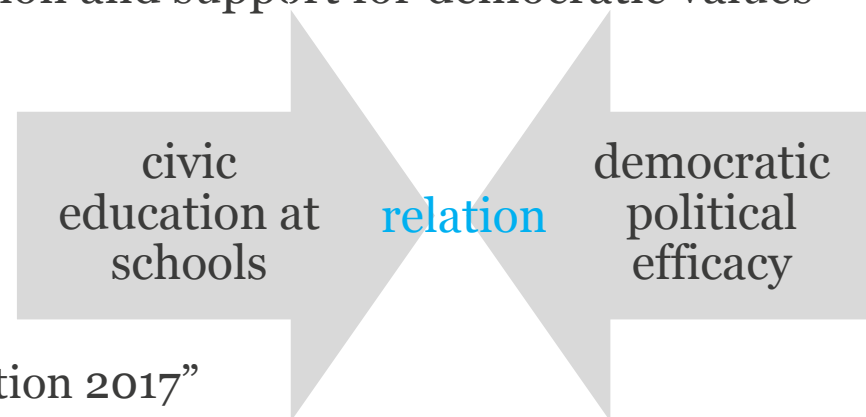
Promising Deliverables

- ## D3.3. Report on Democratic Efficacy and the Youth: the Role of Schools
  - We find that **the most consistent** (though rather small) **effect on youth's democratic political efficacy is exerted by the recommended minimum number of hours of compulsory citizenship education as a separate subject**.
  - **National CE policies are more important** for **internal** and not external political efficacy of young people in the 14 studied countries.
  - All the other variables related to the national CE policies are not significant in explaining different aspects of democratic political efficacy studied in this report.
  - In most cases **parental education level** is positively associated with different aspects of democratic political efficacy of youth in Europe.

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Expected Impact

Family

parental education level

School

minimum number of hours of compulsory citizenship education as a separate subject

Youth's democratic political efficacy

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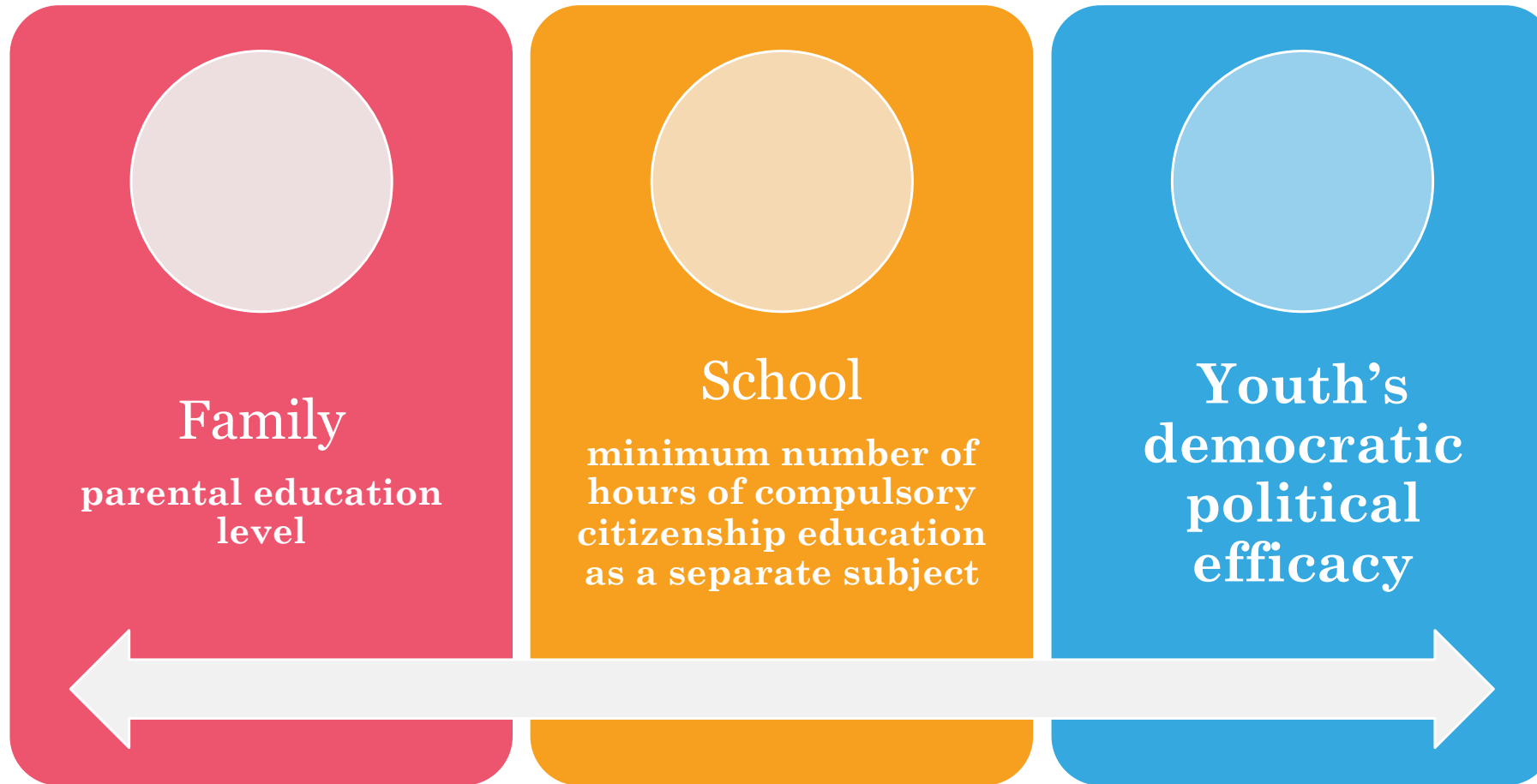
Europe and the EU in educational curricula

- Research on educational curricula in Poland and Hungary – countries where populists are in power since 2010 (HU) and 2015 (PL)

- Conclusions:
  - insufficient education about Europe and the EU even before populists came to power; afterwards – gradual Othering of Europe and emphasis on belonging to national community
  - HU: a shift towards centralisation, less autonomy to school headmasters, more nationalism
  - PL: educational reform, ideological clashes regarding education (re: religion, gender, sex education, inclusion of diversity etc.)

- Policy recommendations:
  - Educating about Europe & EU via non-traditional channels (social media, workshops outside of schools, internships for teenagers at EU institutions)
  - Working with NGOs to organise Europe Days, EU Youth Parliament etc.
  - Direct funding from the EU for underprivileged students

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Conclusion & discussion

- **Enhance the Role of Schools in youth's democratic efficacy**

- **Taking CE in focus**

- **Questions for discussion:**
  - *What are the more innovative ways in teaching civic education?*
  - *How the national level policies might be harmonized with international strategies and policies?*

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Reducing polarisation in discussion

- Debate about issues that involve conflicting interests can get polarized and unproductive
- This is especially so in (a) depersonalised forums (e.g. social media) or (b) professionalised groups

This polarization can be reduced by:

- Face-face discussions over a reasonable period of time where people can tell their stories
- Prioritising positive contributions/ideas and not critique of other's contributions

Pro-Active Positive and Emotional Communication
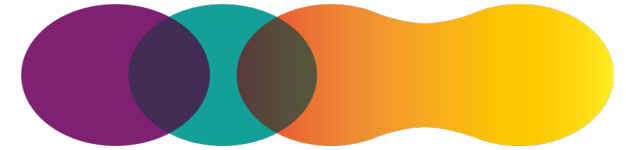
- Pro-actively filling the communicative vacuum exploited by populists
- Communicating optimistic and inspiring narratives about democracy and Europe
- Making the people feel heard and giving them agency
- Communicating about positive examples, role models and heroes
- Promoting the benefits of checks and balances, rule of law and minority rights

Liberal-Democratic Counter-Communication
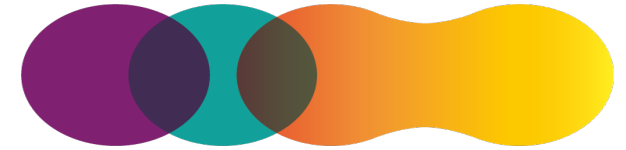
- Not leaving populist communication unanswered (in particular on social media)

- Not hesitating to communicatively engage with populists (being well prepared!)

- Communicatively revealing the populists' illiberal ideology

- Countering populist communication with liberal-democratic ideas

Populism and Civic Engagement

Addressing the heterogeneity and complexity of different groups and communities

Populism and Civic Engagement

- Although some issues capture the 'general public mood'
- Many others will be splintered across many different sub-groupings, identities and interests
- This heterogeneity is a major strength of liberal societies
- But it requires more bottom-up tools and channels for these views and stories
- Local "Democracy Labs" are a proven way of doing this, even if in its online version
- Discussion tools that promotes only positive ideas can also be used to structure consultation (https://citizens.is)

About Democracy Labs
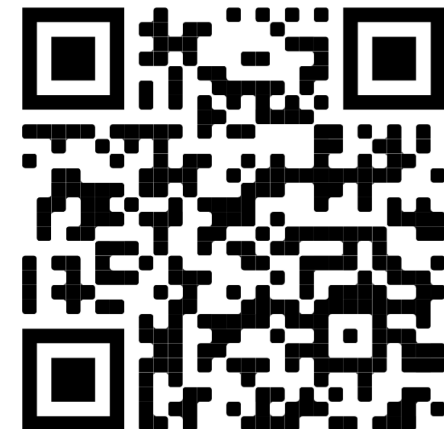
Credits
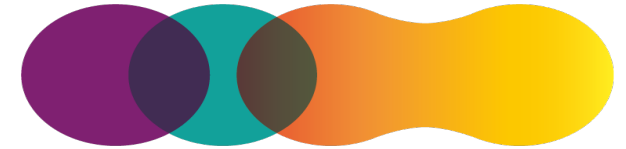
Bruce Edmonds's summary of research in the PaCE project by:

- Róbert Bjarnason, Citizens Foundation
- Sven Engesser, Technical University of Dresden
- The Democratic Society, http://demsoc.org

Also research coming from the "ToRealSim" ORA-net project (https://sites.google.com/view/social-influence-wiki)

"Othering and Polarisation" workshop, Leiden, NL. 15-19 August 2022. http://otheringandpolarisation.org

The views are those of the project members, not of the EU commission.