

FREE MOVEMENT AND EU CITIZENSHIP: A VIRTUOUS CIRCLE?

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ABSTRACT

The year 2013 was officially declared the European Year of Citizens (EYC) in the European Union (EU). Through this event, the European Commission (EC) reiterates a ‘virtuous circle’ – between citizenship, free movement and a sense of belonging – able to bring citizens closer to the EU. This article shows how this ‘virtuous circle’ tends to translate into a ‘tunnel vision’ that reduces citizenship to free movement. Through the analysis of EC discourses, of the literature on ‘movers’ and ‘stayers’, and of focus groups with young people from Brussels, we suggest to expand the understanding of free movement and its effects. Overall, this article proposes to re-evaluate the scope of the ‘virtuous circle’ by considering that the ‘stayers’ are also EU citizens, that free movement is not indisputably an attractive right, and that the movers do not unquestionably feel attached to the EU as a result of their mobility.

KEYWORDS: Sociology, Citizenship, European Union, Free movement, Focus groups, European Year of Citizens

INTRODUCTION

The European institutions recently decided to bring European Union (EU) citizenship to the fore, making it the main topic of the 'European Year' in 2013. The European Year of Citizens (EYC) was therefore dedicated to raising awareness about the rights attached to EU citizenship. A year before the European elections, one could think that the focus of this event would have been put on political rights and the need to participate in these elections. This was not the case. The institutions decided instead to emphasize the right of freedom of movement to enable citizens to make full use of this right and to benefit from the advantages given by EU citizenship in a cross-border context (European Parliament and Council 2012).

In other words, EU citizenship was conflated into the free movement of persons, much to the disappointment of the civil society organizations that wished to promote an active and political citizenship (European Year of Citizens Alliance 2012). EU institutions, and in particular the European Commission (EC), completed the association between free movement and citizenship with the idea that freedom of movement can enhance feelings of belonging to the EU. The EC notably relies on the assumption that exercising this right can strengthen support for the EU, because it is the right most liable to reinforce societal interaction in the EU space and the right most cherished by citizens (EC 2013a: 1).

The premises of this 'virtuous circle' discourse between free movement, European citizenship and the feeling of belonging to the EU are deeply rooted in the institutional practices and the framework concerning EU citizenship that developed over the years (Wiener 1998). This reasoning appears also in the transactionalist theory proposed six decades ago by Karl Deutsch (1953), who stated that increasing interactions across borders would induce more contacts between people and a greater sense of belonging to the EU political level. Studies today put into perspective the nature of the current cross-border interactions to explain their limited effect on citizen identification with the EU political level (Kuhn 2015; EUCROSS 2014).

The EU vision is clearly dependent on the past political and institutional context in which it has developed. However, the continuous association between free movement and European citizenship has tended to push institutional actors and several EU scholars to adopt a 'tunnel vision' of EU citizenship. In other words, this is a view that focuses on what stays at the centre of the area of vision. In this case, the tunnel vision triggered by the superimposition of free movement and EU citizenship has a double channelling effect. On one hand, it concentrates attention on mobile EU citizens, those who settle in another member state (MS) and who represent less than 3% of EU citizens (EC 2013b). This involves neglecting the consequences of free movement on the EU's more 'static' citizens, those who do not move or who do not have the opportunity to move. It also neglects the potential EU movers who would not develop a feeling of belonging towards the EU. On the other hand, it highlights the transnational aspects of EU citizenship, leaving out some of the rights linked to EU citizenship that EU citizens have without moving (e.g. the right to vote in European elections).

In the context of EU enlargement and the recent socio-economic crisis, free movement is probably more than ever an ambivalent issue among citizens, involving both positive and negative views. For instance, the forthcoming UK referendum on EU membership has been presented as 'a vote about the future of freedom of movement of persons in Europe' (Favell

2014: 2). In light of this, this article proposes to move away from this tunnel vision by disaggregating the relationships between free movement, its effects and its justifications. Building on previous work, this article does not aim to break the ‘virtuous circle’, but proposes rather to extend the vision by highlighting other configurations.

The article comprises four parts. The first starts out from official EC discourses represented by the analysis of texts and some practices surrounding the EYC. It describes the EC’s prevalent discourse in this case and puts it into historical perspective on the development of EU citizenship. The second part discusses different approaches in EU studies exploring the links between free movement and the ways citizens see the EU. This part shows the importance of including the views of the most ‘static’ citizens but also of investigating the views of movers from different angles. From this perspective, the third part contributes to these studies by presenting situated discourses on the topic gathered in collective discussions (focus groups) organized with young people who grew up in Brussels.¹ This move to the micro level makes it possible to deepen the understanding of *some* views voiced on free movement through the comparison of different socio-economic groups of young people in a single cultural context. The final section concludes by confronting the EC vision on EU citizenship with the different meanings of free movement used by these young people when they talk about (EU) politics. It invites to further think about the necessity to get out of the tunnel vision on Union citizenship in the discourses.

THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF CITIZENS: AN EXAMPLE OF THE CONTINUOUS AND INSTRUMENTAL VISION OF EU CITIZENSHIP

Before getting into the substance of the legislative process and debates surrounding the implementation of the EYC in 2013-2014, we will refer briefly to the history of EU citizenship. Our main argument is that the EYC illustrates how the EC links citizenship and free movement and adopts an instrumental view of citizenship. It shows that, despite some important evolutions such as a more political vision of EU citizenship with the development of political rights (Shaw 2007), these evolutions are at least competing with or dominated by a path dependency to the early conceptions of EU citizenship (Olsen 2012) described below.

The roots of EU citizenship appear well before the introduction of citizenship in the Maastricht Treaty, even though these earlier practices remained ‘invisible’ citizenship policies (Wiener 1998: 41). Without exploring all the processes by which EU citizenship has developed, it is important to highlight some elements that still configure European discourses and policies on this topic. Firstly, the path of EU citizenship is largely ruled by initial arrangements that focused on individual rights in the context of the economic market integration of the EU. Indeed, the controversial notion of ‘market citizenship’ is used to stress the market orientation of these rights (see Kostakopoulou 2008; Shuibhne 2010).

Secondly, EU citizenship is mainly transnational because it is based on the rights that a national of a MS can have when moving to another MS (Olsen 2012). In the 1970s, the development of passport policies to facilitate free movement was a policy objective linked to European citizenship (Wiener 1998). At the same time, discussions were launched about political rights, namely the ‘special rights’ (the right to vote, to stand for election, to become a public official in another MS). Even though the inclusion of political rights as components of

EU citizenship cannot be omitted, free movement remains the condition – even if it has evolved through treaty provisions and judicial interventions², to enjoy European rights (even political rights) in the discourses and in the practices. These first two elements are consistent with the critique that EU citizenship focuses on individual rights in a context of transnational mobility rather than on political participation (Bellamy 2008).

Thirdly, the advancement of European citizenship ‘was initially conceived as a part of a package of symbolic measures to promote identification with the Union. It went along with the introduction of a European passport, anthem and flag’ (Bellamy 2008: 601). Union citizenship was thus linked with the promotion of a sense of belonging to the Union that is still today at the heart of the EC argument.

The analysis of the EYC shows a continuity with these elements: a focus on individual rights in the context of a European market, a focus on the advantages given by a cross-border situation, and the idea that the use of citizenship rights would enhance the belonging to the EU. It shows that even if slightly different visions on citizenship appear between European institutions, in practice, the path dependency seems stronger. Indeed, as we will see in the following paragraphs, the EC’s support for the strengthening of political rights as an element of EU citizenship remains weak.

The story of the EYC begins in 2010 when the Parliament, in its resolution on ‘the situation of fundamental rights in the EU’ (EP 2010), invited the EC to make the year 2013 the EYC ‘in order to give momentum to the debate on European Citizenship and inform EU citizens of their rights, in particular the new rights resulting from the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon’ (EP 2010: 5). In this resolution, the focus on citizenship is mainly linked to the political rights existing in the Lisbon Treaty, such as the new European Citizens Initiative, with the aim of enhancing political participation of citizens.

However, in 2011, the formal proposal by the EC (2011) presented the EYC by focusing almost exclusively on a specific right for the citizens: the right of free movement. Citizenship is a close substitute for free movement: ‘[f]reedom of movement is virtually synonymous with Union citizenship, constituting the most tangible expression of the benefits related to Union citizenship’ (EC 2011: 1). The EC emphasizes the fact that it is by crossing national boundaries that citizens can really appreciate European citizenship. To illustrate this more explicitly, one of the objectives of the proposal is to raise the ‘Union citizens’ awareness of how they can tangibly benefit from EU rights and policies while living in another MS’ (EC 2011: 3).

From this perspective, the EC wants to continue to break down the barriers to the exercise of this right, lack of information being seen as the most important one. By raising awareness about the benefits of these rights, the Commission also hopes to ‘contribute to a stronger sense of belonging and adherence to the Union’ (EC 2011: 11). The EC clearly seems to adhere to the main transactionalist theories described in the next section. When other rights are mentioned (e.g. the right to vote), it is only because of this cross-border context (EC 2011: 10). Political rights are only linked to the experience of the few European citizens who live abroad.

After this initial proposal, the EP intervention (2012) had little impact on the definition of the objectives of this EYC. The amendments proposed by Parliament underline that the political rights of citizens, the rights to participate in the democratic life of the Union, are also

important, regardless of a cross-border context. For instance, the Parliament recommends that ‘more emphasis should be placed on participatory democracy and the new rights derived from the Treaty, as for example, the Citizen’s Initiative’ (EP 2012: 46), which does not involve being in another MS. The Parliament intensifies the place of political rights of the citizens ‘in any MS in which they reside’ (EP 2012: 30). The EYC should take this opportunity to ‘tackle the democratic deficit and abstention in elections’ (EP 2012: 47)³. In the adopted text (see EP and Council 2012), even if there is a little more room for the other rights linked to European citizenship, the right to move remains the first mentioned and the key issue. Moreover, the observations of the functioning of the EYC presented in the next paragraphs show that the vision of the EC has prevailed in practice, notably because it was the central player at this stage of implementation.

Concretely, one of the translations of this EYC consisted in the organization of citizens’ dialogues, a kind of discussion forum organized by the Commission with ‘ordinary’ citizens. About fifty citizens’ dialogues were held throughout the MS. This series of dialogues started in September 2012 and continued until the EP elections in May 2014. Organized by the EC in partnership with national or local public actors, these debates were held under the slogan ‘It’s about Europe, it’s about YOU, join the debate’, and invited citizens to participate in this exchange. The following promotional posters (fig. 1) surrounding these events made by a communication consultancy (Media Consulta) are a good illustration of what EU citizenship covers according to the Commission.



Figure 1 Promotional posters of the EYC (source: EC, www.europa.eu/citizens-2013)

These posters show that the campaign is mainly about raising awareness of individual rights in a cross-border context: the right to work, to study, to travel, to shop in other MS is the core message⁴. With upbeat images combining different ‘ordinary people’, they show that the EU offers tangible benefits to all, whether consumers, students or workers. Even the right to stand for local election (see the first poster) is located in the cross-border context. The focus of this campaign is thus individualist, utilitarian and transnationalist, in the sense that it focuses on the individual rights that arise in a cross-border context and that have the purpose of protecting the citizen as consumer or worker. Raising citizen awareness of the EU is linked to

an incentive, a utilitarian cost/benefit calculation and it reduces citizenship to the necessity to move. It does not highlight the fact that all EU citizens are also citizens when they do not move and that free movement is not necessarily perceived as a good thing. Furthermore, the link between the use of the free movement right and identification with the EU is not straightforward. It produces contradictory accounts, as is presented in the next section.

STUDYING FREE MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE: GOING BEYOND THE MOBILE CITIZENS

Studying the mobile EU citizens

Free movement is at the basis of Karl Deutsch's transactionalist theory (1953), which states that the rapprochement between MS can promote interactions between individuals at different levels and, ultimately, foster an individual sense of belonging to this new political community. Free movement is considered an explanatory variable of support for the EU. The design of EU policies (such as EURES, Erasmus, Marie Curie, etc., see Recchi [2015]: 36) that tried to facilitate contacts between Europeans to foster identification with the EU seems to have been inspired by such a transactionalist perspective.

Recent empirical research challenges the Deutschian assertion: while transnational personal contacts across borders are rapidly increasing today, support for EU membership and European identification have decreased in the same period (Kuhn 2011). The literature is indeed vast on the increase of Euroscepticism (see Brack and Startin [2015]). However, these results do not necessarily lead to a complete calling into question of the transactionalist theory: transnational interaction and feelings towards the EU seem linked. The discrepancy between growing interaction and increased Euroscepticism can be explained by the nature of cross-border interactions: firstly, they are 'socially stratified'; secondly, 'their effectiveness depends on their purpose and scope'; thirdly 'they can foment negative externalities among Europeans who are not transnationally active themselves' (Kuhn 2015: 6).

These findings confirm that only a highly skilled and young minority interact across borders. But when they do, a smaller proportion expresses support for the EU. Neil Fligstein (2008) has already shown that only a small portion of Europeans really engage in transnational exchanges. Intra-European migrants develop a sense of identification with the EU under certain conditions (Rother and Nebe 2009) or see it, for utilitarian reasons, as a source of opportunity (Kriesi et al. 2008). The nature of the interactions, whether instrumental or affective, explains their effects: social interactions tend to be more effective for supporting the EU (Diez Medrano 2011). And if we consider that 'the lion's share of intra-European transactions are instrumental by nature, this finding helps to explain why we find little support in spite of increasing levels of transaction' (Kuhn 2015: 14).

While these studies add nuance to the Deutschian approach, they still propose to counter Euroscepticism with the extension of the opportunity to other groups to develop cross-border interactions. However, even in the case of specific types of mobility and supposedly very promising ones such as the Erasmus programme, it has been shown that an affective link with the EU level does not necessarily develop (Sigalas 2010; Wilson 2011). Furthermore the study of free movement is limited to certain 'concrete practices', especially settlement in another MS. Even when these practices are defined in a broader sense by including other

types of interactions across borders (EUCROSS 2014; Mau 2010), these approaches still focus on the most mobile citizens who represent a limited number of EU citizens. More than observing the impact of a 'concrete set of practices' of free movement (such as the fact of settling in another MS) on citizens' views of the EU, the investigation of the construction of the meanings of free movement 'in practice'⁵, when citizens talk about the EU, makes it possible to extend the scope of understanding of this phenomenon.

Extending the framework of analysis

Microscopic and qualitative approaches provide deeper understanding of the possible links between the fact of being in a cross-border situation and the possible development of attachment towards the EU. These studies also expand the understandings of free movement for people, the most 'static' citizens, who did not necessarily settle in another MS.

Still focusing on the 'movers', Favell (2008) puts into perspective their supposed attachment to the EU. The interviews conducted with 'Eurostars', professionals from the upper and middle classes who settled in another MS (London, Amsterdam and Brussels), reveal that these citizens know the EU and practise free movement but do not feel attached to the EU. They seem to root their life in city life rather than in the EU. A gap appears between their practices, which theoretically should encourage EU attachment, and the perceptions expressed in their discourses. The manner of investigating the movers has implications on the findings.

The consequences of free movement as a 'social practice' (Recchi 2015:143) are worth studying from multiple angles. For instance, Wiener (2008) considers two groups of national elites (British and German) in their home environment and two other groups with the same nationality living in a transnational context (Brussels). Considering those in the transnational context, this study shows that there is a flexibility of the meanings-in-use of norms (such as citizenship) rather than their convergence (Wiener, 2008). Even if previous studies on the implications of free movement show that it strengthens attachment towards the EU under certain conditions, these studies moderate these results by exposing other aspects of this phenomenon.

Studies also turn to the most 'static' citizens, those who have not settled in another MS, to investigate the meanings of free movement. These people are not in a cross-border context, but free movement is a theme they use when they talk about the EU. The study of the interpretative categories, the frames of perception (Goffman 1974) underlying citizen reactions when they discuss the EU, makes it possible to deconstruct the relationship between free movement and views on the EU. The observation of these lenses among citizens living in different social and cultural contexts makes it possible to access the construction of the meanings of free movement 'in practice'. This is based on the idea that 'people's attitudes and behaviour towards objects or problems depend on how they conceive of, frame, or represent them' (Diez Medrano 2003: 5). Moreover, as the interpretative lenses are 'acquired by living in society' (Cramer Walsh 2004: 28), the study of these frames provides information about the social and cultural construction of the meanings.

For instance, through the comparison between the discourses collected among 24 focus groups conducted in 2005 and 2006 with 'ordinary' citizens with different socio-economic

and national backgrounds (UK, France and Belgium), Duchesne et al. (2013) highlighted the existing justifications of the EU in these different contexts. Building on the work of Diez Medrano (2003) and using this data, Van Ingelgom (2014) especially showed that citizens use a set of frames to talk about the EU which relate to economics, governance or concerns about the size of European countries. Free movement is part of these main frames, coded as removal of borders in the discussions. It is one of the central and ambivalent frames of perception in the cognitive construction of citizens towards the EU (see also White [2011]).

But the link between this frame and the EU is not always what one would expect. It is mobilized in a positive way to approach the advantages of mobility facilitated by the absence of border controls or by the existence of a single currency. Free movement would lead, at least according to certain citizens, to a strengthening of understanding between people. But for others, especially for those coming from the groups situated at the lower end of the economic spectrum, it is used to express reluctance about, even rejection of, the European project, particularly through the mention of immigration and insecurity.

Besides this mobilization about free movement, both positively (mobility opportunities) and negatively (competition with newcomers), the results of the 18 focus groups organized in mid December 2010 in Berlin, Vienna, Dublin and London by Hurrelmann et al. (2015) emphasize the citizens' expressions of disconnection between EU membership and the existence of EU benefits such as free movement. The qualitative method adopted in the next section comes to confirm these studies and this rather new element: free movement is sometimes recognized as an important benefit of EU integration, but it is at the same time used to express remoteness from the EU political system.

FREE MOVEMENT TO TALK ABOUT THE EU

The enquiry takes place in Brussels, at the heart of the capital of the EU. It is based on six collective discussions (focus groups) involving 35 young people (aged 16 to 26), held between November 2013 and May 2014.⁶ The focus on young people is particularly relevant as they are often the target of European mobility programmes that attempt to make them feel closer to the EU. They also represent the generation that grew up in a particularly debated Europe (Down and Wilson 2013). Moreover, Brussels is both an extremely dense political environment with the presence of many political levels and a cosmopolitan metropolis where different interpretations of free movement (which form the core of this section) might be experienced. These six focus groups of three and a half hours each included 4 to 7 young people who did not know each other but lived in the same area of the city (see Table 1). Considering the spatial segregation of Brussels (Kesteloot and Loopmans 2009), this makes it possible to interview people with diverse socio-demographic features. Each group shared common characteristics so that participants could talk to each other (Duchesne and Haegel 2004).⁷ Through this setting, the aim is not to establish representative samples, but to gather contrasted experiences in Brussels.

The chosen method makes it possible to deconstruct notions such as free movement that have otherwise been conceptualized on a more normative basis. The meanings of free movement are investigated 'in practice', during a series of interactions in a conversation, with different socio-economic groups of young people. This experimentation does not pretend to

reflect the setting of an everyday discussion. Rather it enables observation of ‘the process of people constructing and negotiating shared meaning, using their natural vocabulary’ (Gamson 1992: 17) in a ‘public’ discussion, where the researcher has a less dominant position.

Through the observation of the interactions between participants and the comparison between the focus groups, the structures of the meanings of (EU) politics are made visible. This methodology helps shed light on ‘how points of views are constructed and expressed’ (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999: 5). Rather than investigate the notable different national views on free movement (Wiener 2008; Van Ingelgom 2014), this approach makes it possible to deepen its social constructions, as well as the meanings for a group of citizens, young people, particularly targeted by EU mobility programmes. Indeed, these focus groups were conducted with young people from different socio-economic contexts in Brussels.

(FG1) ⁸ Saint-Josse	(FG2) Molenbeek	(FG3) Anderlecht	(FG 4) Jette	(FG 5) Ixelles	(FG 6) Uccle
5 Naima (F/24) Lila (F/23) Leila (F/18) Jordan (M/22) Abdel (M/17)	4 Asma (F/17) Mariam (F/24) Odomar (M/17) Yassine (M/16)	7 Nisrine (F/24) Amina (F/19) Nabila (F/19) Alexandre (M/20) Ilias (M/18) Bilal (M/26) Waleed (M/17)	7 Catherine (F/23) Nour (F/19) Lucie (F/17) Gabriel (M/21) Nathan (M/26) Adil (M/21) Yusef (M/23)	7 Aicha (F/25) Inaya (F/19) Danielle (F/17) Isabella (F/22) Mun (M/20) Louis (M/17) Maël (M/25)	5 Sophie (F/22) Elise (F/17) Julie (F/24) Théo (M/19) Nicolas (M/21)
Lower end of the socio-economic spectrum			Middle end of the socio-economic spectrum	Middle and upper end of the socio-economic spectrum	

Table 1 The composition of the focus groups

Free movement: a mean to express positive, negative and distant reactions on the EU

In the discussions, participants considered the EU as one level among other political levels. The topic of free movement represented only a small part of the overall discussions. However, it was particularly central when the EU was directly discussed in the fourth question (‘What is the EU for you?’). Even when this topic surfaced at other times in the discussions, it was associated with the EU. For instance, as we will see in the analysis (see quote 1 below), when participants talked about migration, they referred to EU internal migration and thus to free movement. In the rest of this section, we focus on passages from the discussions so as to emphasize the different discourses linked to free movement.

During the discussions in Anderlecht, Molenbeek and Saint-Josse (composed of young people from families situated at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum), free movement was especially used to refer to the negative outcomes of EU integration (e.g. economic competition from EU migrants). This became an important basis from which to undermine the European project. Even if these participants can recognize that free movement can facilitate mobility, they see it as an exacerbation of economic and social competition. For instance, when the young people in Saint-Josse were discussing the problems they considered important in society, they spontaneously mentioned EU migrants from the East, explaining that the latter came from countries that had recently joined the EU (see quote 1 below). The

link between the negative impact of free movement and participants' views on the EU appears clearly at this moment of the discussion.

(Quote 1, FG1 Saint-Josse)

Lila: At the CPAS (*the public centre for social welfare in Belgium*)⁹ ... The fact that they provide social welfare more easily, for instance, to people from the countries that have just joined the EU like, for example, Romania and Bulgaria. And so we see all these people who joined not so long ago ... Well, yeah, it's true, not so long ago, but we see all sorts, all sorts, people who come from Bulgaria, from Romania. They're all entitled to social welfare whereas a person who was born here, in Belgium, and who, who ...

Naima: Who speaks the language.

Lila: Who speaks the language ... Who doesn't have the means to really live ...

Jordan: Who even worked for his country.

Lila: That's it, who even – that's it. And who isn't entitled to his rights, I want to say. Because it's his right too. We were born here. They were born here. We worked for them. And not having the right, it's just ... not having your rights, / it's ...

Jordan: / it's frustrating ...

Lila: It's frustrating. That's also what I wanted to say.

In the discussion in Anderlecht (FG3), Bilal established a direct link between EU enlargement (understood as free movement of EU citizens) and youth unemployment (see quote 2 below). He wondered whether EU enlargement was not one of the main causes of youth unemployment in Brussels.

(Quote 2, FG3 Anderlecht)

Bilal: Me, I want to come back in fact to ... the economic crisis. And hear your opinion (*addressing the other participants*) on European enlargement. Isn't it that rather which is keeping down the young here, in Brussels, who can no longer find any work? There are more – more countries ...

Waleed: The opening of the [European] market.

Bilal: Yeah, and there's no more work for the locals. And they prefer foreigners.

Following this interaction, Waleed referred to the fact heard on the news that the UK has been able to restrict access to its labour market towards migrants from Eastern Europe. Nabila replied that the UK made a clever choice by closing its borders. Most of participants in this group (FG3) presented the UK as a successful country because it does not have the Euro and it can control its borders. At the same time, they are well aware that the UK is member of the EU and they do not put this into question. In sum, their stance seems to be that belonging to the EU is good insofar it brings advantages, but when issues arise, it is better to be somewhat independent from it.

The participants in Anderlecht, Saint-Josse and Molenbeek know that free movement is one of their rights, but they do not enjoy it in practice. Based on their daily experience, they refer rather to free movement in negative terms as they express direct competition with intra-EU migrants, especially from lower economic classes. These discourses reflect, at least

partially, their social experiences. Indeed, this way of seeing free movement does not appear as clearly in the other focus groups composed of young people from other socio-economic backgrounds. As previous research has shown, stigmatization of more recent migrants can be seen as an answer to people's own situation (Jamoulle and Mazzocchi 2011). This stigmatization here especially targets EU migrants and seems to be a strategy adopted by these young people to somewhat justify their own situation. Some of these participants referred indeed directly to 'discrimination problems' when they answered the first question of the discussion about the most important collective problems. The EU's capacity of action is clearly questioned through one of its supposedly most successful achievements. The experience of mobility is not linked here to a physical border crossing, but rather to a certain 'mode of sociality' (Aradau et al. 2010: 946) that is particularly worth investigating to better understand the multiple meanings of free movement.

The discourse differs partly in the discussions collected in the focus groups in Uccle, Ixelles and Saint-Josse (composed of young people from families situated at the middle and upper ends of the socio-economic spectrum). Even if ambivalent views on free movement are also present, the most striking are the passages where they use the frame of free movement to express their distance from the EU. The term 'distance' refers here to the passages where participants explain that they feel remote from this political level. The following quotes in the discussions in Uccle (see quote 3 below) and Ixelles (see quote 4 below) illustrate this point well.

In the discussion in Uccle (see quote 3 below), Julie and Sophie suggest that Erasmus programmes are one of the few EU policies that have an impact on them. However, at the same moment, Julie and Sophie use free movement as a proxy to express the symbolic remoteness that exists between them and the EU. The existence of the free movement right facilitates their mobility through the existence of exchange programmes, but these potential benefits are not considered sufficient to justify the existence of the EU political level.

(Quote 3, FG6 Uccle)

Julie: Well, I don't know it. I think that this idea (*referring to the EU*) doesn't mean much. Everyone (*referring to the other participants*) kind of has it, because we feel at a distance from all that. And because ... Besides, besides the programme (*referring to the Erasmus programmes*)... Let's say, the Erasmus projects / ...

Sophie: / Yeah, that's what affects us.

Julie: Yeah, that's what affects us directly. We're far away from it (*referring to the EU*), then there you are.

Again, in the following passage (see quote 4 below) in the group conducted in Ixelles, free movement is used to express a feeling of remoteness towards the EU. While the young people are discussing the EU, Maël argues that being able to travel around Europe is a real advantage. However, Inaya directly suggests that this is not enough to justify the existence of the EU.

(Quote 4, FG 5 Ixelles)

Maël: Me, I find that in the zone we're in, it's cool because we can travel really easily from one [country] to the other, and I always have good contacts with everyone. And I don't feel like (*referring to a person in a foreign country who could comment on him*): 'Ah, he's from another country, I've got to be careful when he's there'. Well, I don't know.

Inaya: Well, there was no need to call it the EU, then.

Maël: Well ...

Louis: (*inaudible*) / ...

Inaya: / I've the impression that that's the only thing (*the freedom to travel*) that is beneficial.

Maël: I like that.

Inaya: Well, no, it's great, but I mean, what else is there, you know?

In the previous two quotes, even if these participants consider free movement as a benefit of EU integration and a right they are able to make use of, it is not enough to justify the EU project. This specific disconnection also appears in the research conducted by Hurrelmann et al.: 'the concrete positive effects of EU membership for their [citizens] own lives – free travel and the common currency – are discursively separated from the EU as an institution, culminating in the suggestion that one might have the euro without the EU' (Hurrelmann et al. 2015: 51). Paradoxically, perhaps, the fact that free movement has become 'common' (shared and/or ordinary) nowadays implies that it is not enough to make citizens feel closer to the EU project.

This analysis does not mean that concrete cross-border practices do not imply any evolution of citizen reactions vis-a-vis the EU's political institutions. It rather balances the discourses proposed by the EC that presents free movement as the most tangible aspect of the EU citizenship that makes citizens feel closer to the EU.

FREE MOVEMENT AND EU CITIZENSHIP: CHALLENGES TO THE VIRTUOUS CIRCLE

This article puts into perspective the relations between European citizenship, free movement and a sense of belonging to the EU. In its discourses on the EYC, the EC has again proposed an interpretation of these relations that can be qualified as a 'virtuous circle': free movement is both synonymous with EU citizenship and a major benefit of EU integration able to foster a sense of belonging. The Commission presents free movement as a right able to provide resources to citizens to improve their well-being and their support for the EU. In other words, if citizens were more familiar with this right and made better use of it, they would feel closer to the EU. This vision is anchored in different institutional and historical elements. Firstly, it is rooted in the institutional and political path followed by the European economic integration process that provided the frames of the following development of EU citizenship. Secondly, it is also part of a long-standing legitimization process that political authorities such as the EU institutions continuously *have to make* (Schrag Sternberg 2013). Thirdly, it appears in a continuous debate on the different normative meanings of what Union citizenship should be, in view for instance of the previous uses of the concept in national contexts. Finally, this vision is convergent with part of the literature on the transactionalist theory.

Without completely rejecting these elements, this article adds some nuance to challenge this virtuous circle by building both on previous studies and on some young people's perceptions collected in Brussels. By doing so, we proposed to go beyond the transactionalist approaches that focus mainly on the movers. We followed the approaches that re-evaluate the implications of free movement, by investigating the most 'static' citizens and also those who move from new perspectives.

Building on these approaches, the microscopic analysis of young people's views in Brussels enabled us to continue to interrogate the reasoning of the virtuous circle adopted by the EC and part of the academic literature. In the empirical study we conducted, some young people expressed their rejection of free movement. Due to their socio-economic situation, they seem to only *enjoy* free movement through what they consider its related disadvantages (the arrival of EU migrants). Moreover, even for other young people who seem to really enjoy the advantages of free movement, this is not *enough* to justify the EU project. For them, free movement seems to be a common, namely current, right. It is a benefit of EU integration that is used to express distance towards the EU. The underlying structures of the expressions of distance with the EU political level are important to strengthen (Van Ingelgom 2014), especially in a context characterized by a 'feeling of disenfranchisement' with politics (Hurrelmann et al. 2015: 57). The analyses of these views do not pretend to reject the existence of the virtuous circle under certain conditions and for certain groups of citizens. Rather, they help complete its multiple configurations by showing that free movement when it is considered as a benefit of the EU might also be used to express remoteness from the EU political level.

In light of these elements, the discourse adopted by the EC seems problematic because the different components of EU citizenship are gathered without distinction: membership status, rights, use of these rights and the feeling of belonging to the EU. It is also problematic because citizenship is often limited to one of these components. If one focuses on EU citizenship only as a juridical status, moving indeed remains the main condition to enjoy some European rights (Guild 2004). But citizens can still enjoy part of this European status if they do not move, for example when participating in EU elections in their home MS. EU citizenship is more than free movement – or at least, EU citizenship cannot be reduced to free movement. This leads to clear shortcuts.

Firstly, presenting free movement as the main right of EU citizens while some citizens are not able to enjoy it in practice, or do not want to use it, does not fit most EU citizens' complex realities and representations. This involves a tunnel view on free movement and on EU citizenship. Secondly, exercising free movement seems to be a central condition to be a EU citizen in the discourses and also in the practices. Interpreting this from the perspective of those who do not move it is as if the Commission were implying that all the 'stayers' are not European citizens. Lastly, by focusing on the advantages of free movement, European institutions are 'engaged in a dangerous game of rhetoric' (Favell 2010: 192) on the value of citizenship and on the benefits of European citizenship compared to national citizenship.

This article suggests opening up a space for controversy and to further debate the assumptions and implications of the 'virtuous circle' reasoning. The 'stayers' are also European citizens; free movement is not indisputably an attractive right; the movers do not

unquestionably feel attached to the EU as a result of their mobility. Focusing primarily on the benefits of free movement, as the Commission does, is out of step with the political reflections identified here within these groups of young people and in the presented literature. This tunnel vision could eventually backfire on the Commission's goal.

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NOTES

¹ This fieldwork is part of a PhD research conducted under the Concerted Project Action (ARC – Belgian research program) entitled ‘Why regulate? Regulation, deregulation and the legitimacy of the EU: a legal and political analysis’.

² It is outside the scope of this article to describe the influence of the European Court of Justice on the evolution of citizenship, but it has strongly contributed to challenge this vision by stating in 2001, for instance, that EU citizenship is ‘destined to be the fundamental status of nationals of the MS’ (C-184/99 Grzelczyk (2001) at 31). It also disputed the economic requirement in the host MS (Kostakopoulou 2005) and, in other case laws, the cross-border condition for the application of EU law (C-135/08 Rottman [2010]). However, the criticized ‘activism’ of the Court (see Dougan [2006]) has recently been moderated, notably concerning access to social benefits (C-333/13 Dano [2014]; C-67/14 Alimanovic [2015]).

³ In 2014, voter turnout at the EU parliamentary elections was 42.61%, slightly lower than in 2009 (42.97%). Additionally, the number of mobile EU citizens that registered to vote in their host country was globally low: from 0.4% of all mobile EU citizens who reside in the Czech Republic to 5.4% in Germany and 22.2% in Ireland (EC 2015).

⁴ Seven slogans on the nine used on these posters imply to be in a cross border context. One of them focuses on consumer rights and the last one is centered on worker rights.

⁵ We follow the definition of the notion of ‘practice’ proposed by Bueger and Gadinger (2014: 4). The analysis of practices refers to the observation of actors’ behaviours, but also to the analysis of their discourses.

⁶ The discussions took place in French. The names of the participants have been changed in the transcriptions and in the article but we have tried to keep the origin of each name.

⁷ A set of six questions was asked in each group. Two questions were first put to the participants relative to the identification of collective problems in society and of the people able to solve these problems. Participants were then asked in the third question to comment on different political levels on the basis of photos representing various political institutions. The fourth question targeted the EU level directly. The two last questions were focused on the identification of ‘communities’ young people feel a part of.

⁸ In the FG 1/2/3, most participants also come from the second or third generation of migrants in Belgium (Pakistan, Morocco, Turkey or sub-Saharan Africa).

⁹ The explanations necessary to grasp the quotes are in round brackets and the words that were not uttered by participants but that are useful to understand the conversation are in square brackets.

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