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The impact of Brexit on constructing the youth identity in the UK

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Abstract

Facing the events of Brexit a large number of economic, political, social and cultural changes are taking place in the modern United Kingdom and the European Union. The given thesis presupposes and is aimed on discovering possible alterations in the national identity of the youth among the other changes in the aftermath of Brexit. The work is divided into three substantive sections that give overview of existing theoretical framework on the notions of national identity, outlines the methodology of qualitative focus groups conducted in three types of groups (students, working youth and working students), and analyses possible influence of Brexit on the self-identity change accordingly. As a result of the work, the events of Brexit were found out to appear one of the possible reasons of impact on the youth national identity while another aspects influencing the national identity were also uncovered.

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Introduction

The given master thesis is aimed to research and analyse the possible alters and modifications of the British youth identity in regards to the events of Brexit starting from the European Union referendum in 2016 and with the final decision for the UK to leave the EU made in 2020.

Initially, for an appropriate uncovering of the topic, a short context of the events in the UK connected with Brexit scenario should be outlined. One of the most impactful milestones in the timeline of the events was undoubtedly the referendum on the 23rd of June 2016 when 52% of turned out British voters declared a will to leave the European Union (the EU). Concerning the statistics of the electoral behaviour of the young people (under 25 years old), the figure has shown that the majority of this group of people voted to 'Remain' rather than to 'Leave' (71% and 29% of voters accordingly). Subsequently, the opposite trends were typical for the elderly generations. To be more specific, 64% of citizens over 65 years old voted to 'Leave' (Moore, 2016). Thus, the details described above became a starting point for the active Brexit discussions and negotiations until 31st of January 2020 when the UK eventually left the EU.

The objective of this thesis is to figure out whether the events of Brexit being to some extent a consequence that led to the economic and political crisis had a significant influence on the process of how the British youth construct their identity. The research question is: *'How have the events of Brexit influenced the way the youth in the United Kingdom construct its national identity?'* The given question is aimed at finding out whether Brexit has consolidated the youth identity perception and made it more Eurosceptic, more pro-European, increased the level of national self-determination or possibly did not have a significant impact on the youth's identity at all, or this impact was insufficient to influence the forming of the young British people identity or changing it due to prevailing of the other affecting factors.

More specifically, the thesis is going to, firstly, summarise and analyse the theoretical concepts that exist in relation to British youth identity which are national, collective and European identities. Secondly, the hypotheses about a probable influence of Brexit are tested, providing an empirical part of the research. Thirdly, some common patterns of British youth identity will be figured out and assessed according to the results

of this research. Thus, the given thesis is not aimed at finding any new factors of impact on the identity but rather at testing how significant the impact of the events of Brexit was. However, in case of appearance of the other factors that have a crucial importance regarding the national identity change during the empirical parts of the research, they are going to be mentioned and outlined. This will be done in order to identify the place of such political events as Brexit in the list of other factors which are constructing and changing national identity.

The relevance and importance of the topic can be justified by the fact that 2020 is characterised by being a transitional period of Britain leaving the EU and a lot of political, economic and social changes are subsequently expected as a result of this process. Obviously, this changes will probably influence the notion of British identity and Eurosceptic attitudes significantly. Moreover, considering the tendency of identity shifting and modifying, they are probable to be detected specifically in the behaviour of the young people who are reported to be pro-active citizens and are usually prone to experience dynamic changes in all the spheres including social, cultural and, therefore, notion of identity as well. Thus, the probability of the identity's change after the Brexit decision was made is highly anticipated as long as the appearance of a bigger quantity of distinctions between the British national and European identities is becoming more conspicuous.

Considering the choice of specific age group of young people may be justified by the fact that most of them nowadays are politically engaged, and, moreover, the youth has been always the most active part of the population. While studying the relation towards national and European identities it also plausible to make some conclusions on constructing of the future position of the UK in relation to the EU. The results of the given thesis will be aimed to predict the probable future attitude of the British towards their country and the EU. From this perspective it is also necessary to investigate in the research the feelings of the British youth towards the decision of Brexit and how it may influence their viewpoints of the UK and the EU relations, whether the 'Leave' decision has led to creation of resentment towards the UK and its government, undermine their political engagement or political loyalty. Finding out the answers to these questions might be essential from the International Relations perspective. Finally, it is interesting to investigate the identity change of the youth especially relying on the statistics of the

voting results on 2016 Referendum where the young people appeared to be the adherents of the EU and opponents of Brexit.

Regarding the other aspects of evidence for the relevance of the topic, it is the prevalence of economic and political (Bulmer, Quaglia, 2018) rather than cultural views in the prior researches connected with the events of Brexit but the notion of young people's perceptions is not fully studied in academic scholarship. Key factors that were discussed and highlighted were the consequences of Brexit in the economics and politics (Gamble, 2018). Recent research has also included the psychological aspects of Brexit influence (Hughes, 2019) and the other possible notions such as the fear of economic austerity, feeling of uniqueness of the British identity, negative or senseless factors of the presence of the UK in the EU to be one of the reasons on the background of an achieved result during the Brexit vote.

Considering the methodology and data used in this thesis, the qualitative method of focus groups is going to be applied with regard to the interpretive approach of social science. The choice of the methodological approach is justified by the fact that identity is a socially constructed phenomenon and one of the aims of the research is connected with defining the motives and personal reasons that basically predetermine the social decisions (Weber, 1981), thus as far as it is a central part of the research it should be studied this way. Using the constructivist approach the linkage between theoretical and empirical part from this perspective will be provided. Regarding the research method, the focus group method is shown to provide a wide range of individual opinions and research categories which still might have common patterns. Moreover, the process of measuring these categories using quantitative methods is possible to be realised, however, this type of research will not provide in-depth answers, probable explanations and reflections will be missing out in that case. While focus groups can provide necessary data by provoking a discussion with open questions as a result of which an extensive scale of answers will be received and, apart from that, new patterns or attributes of the British national identity change might appear which will broaden the categories examined by the thesis.

Considering possible implications of the study in the field of International Relations the concepts of 'we' and 'others' that go alongside with the concept of identity but strongly contradict each other are going to be applied (Huntington, 1996). In other words, the given thesis will provide an opportunity to evaluate the attitude of the British youth

not only towards their national identity but also towards the EU and pro-European sentiments. Thus, it will be feasible to predict the direction of the future relations between the EU and the UK while assessing how open towards the EU the British young people are.

Finally, theoretically the study suggests that the outcomes of the research might be relevant to the understanding of the deeper reasons of young people's voting behaviour against of Brexit and taking into consideration the fact that most of the young people did not have a possibility to vote at that times due to their age . Structure-wise the given thesis is divided into five main parts: introduction, literature overview and conceptualisation chapter, the methodology and research design section, chapter dedicated to the empirical results and obtained data analysis, conclusions.

1 Literature overview and conceptualisation

In this part of the thesis, an overview of the theoretical literature covering interrelated concepts or studying the Brexit events results and connection of identity issues to it from different angles. Correspondingly, in this section the main focus will be put on the previous studies of identity with a further conceptualization of the central categories of the thesis such as national and collective identity, and specifically the grounds of the British, the European identities and Euroscepticism.

Conducting a general overview of the literature a few general aspects related to the context of the thesis were already widely studied and analysed. Among them there are reasons and actual caused of the achieved Brexit result (Outhwaite, 2017), the consequences of the Brexit for ordinary citizens in terms the change of their working conditions and rights (Coburn, Gormally; 2017), the social changes in the life of nationals due to the fact of Brexit (Banaji, Mejias, Velez; 2018). Regarding the studies of British identity and Euroscepticism there are also several exhaustive topics of studies such as study of the British identity itself, its history and principles (Kiss, Parker; 2014), the notion of division of the British nation in terms of national identity in relation to the consequences of Brexit (Ford, Goodwin; 2017), perception of the national British identity and Euroscepticism in the narrative of media and social networks (Flaherty, Roselle; 2018). The mentioned studies and viewpoints will be furthermore elaborated in the given section to rely on them as a theoretical framework of the thesis. However, what is going to be currently studied, namely, the correlation between the events of Brexit (independent variable) and the change of young people national self-identity (independent variable) provoked by it haven't been covered in scholastic literature yet.

To begin with, the question of transition of the British youth in post-Brexit period was more thoroughly examined as it will be demonstrated in the context of the social life changes rather than from the perspective of the forming and altering the identity. Interestingly, one of the examples of mentioned researches was ethnographic one conducted to observe the active citizenship youth participation. To be more specific about the identities, authors mentioned that more detailed aspects of social life such as learning, places, institutions, peers ('contexts') matter more significantly regarding the process of identity forming (Banaji, Mejias, Velez; 2018 – 111).

In addition, a specific attention in the scholar literature has been drawn towards the working conditions of British and non-British youth with reference to the events of Brexit. It was shown that the British youth are less likely to be influenced by the Brexit consequences while non-British citizens might have faced these issues. Regarding the identity change, some of the authors claim that with the Brexit the identities of originally British and non-British young workers will vary even to a bigger extent because of different conditions for the process of application, job environment etc. (Coburn, Gormally; 2017 – 7). However, this particular topic is not yet studied enough because of no possibility to judge on the real practical results and consequences of Brexit after the transition period which finishes on the 31st December 2020.

Another big theoretical part that is already widely discussed and being currently researched among the political and social scientists is the question of the division of the nation mostly within the UK not tackling the EU question (Denham, 2018) or, vice versa, focusing mostly in the phenomenon of Euroscepticism of the British, its level in society, recent modifications and the possible impacts of Brexit on it (Henderson, 2016; Kaufmann, 2016). Nevertheless, the recent results appear to be rather generic than specific. For instance, it is claimed by some of the scholars that despite of the liberal consensus present in the modern UK, national identity in the case of drastic geopolitical, economic and social alterations is ‘a matter of civic attachment but not ethnic ancestry’ which means that Brexit is causing the division of the nation with the small minorities becoming more proactive. Moreover, in case of not committing to the generally accepted national identity, the minorities are becoming negatively stereotyped and separated even to the larger extent (Ford, Goodwin; 2017 – 19). In the context of the given thesis it might be concluded that national identity might be have ethnic roots and both civic attributes.

In addition, similar approach was used in the research conducted to study the British identity itself and to identify the term of ‘truly British’ person. Kiss and Parker (2014) demonstrated that 63% of the UK citizens claim that both ethnic and civic factors matter in defining the identity and some of the attributes of these factors might be acquired (e.g. learning the language or obeying local traditions). Other than that, the authors drew a strong distinction between Britain-focused and Eurosceptic views of citizens and claimed that the notion of ‘Britishness’ can be defined by the Britain’s relations with the rest of the world and the EU, in particular (Kiss, Parker; 2014). In a more recent work, age and

education were shown to have played the most crucial role in dividing the voters' opinions both on Referendum in 2016 and General Elections in 2017 (Kavanagah, 2018; 2).

Another group of scholars focuses on the question of whether or not it is feasible to judge the British youth identity relying on the results of the Referendum vote. Still taking into consideration the turnout of the young voters (64% of voters under 25 years old), it has been indicated that the results of youth voting indeed showed comprehensible outcomes and demonstrated that the millennials tend to have a more accepting views towards 'the pluralist identity' and integration (Bruter, Harrison; 2016 – 1). Moreover, in the case of the Brexit Referendum, the young voters could be referred to as non-active and disengaged, (Kingman, 2017; Ehsan, Sloam; 2018).

A number of scientific research was dedicated to the analysis of the reasons of the referendum result which has definitely had an input of researching the question from the IR point of view. Although the central factor was claimed to be the economic interests of specific groups of citizens and of territories that were mostly dependent of the subsidies from the EU, some scholars as Outhwaite (2017) still made an assumption on a quite low validity of identity question in the outcome. It is rather impossible to track and measure how strong the national identity of 'Leave' campaign adherents and its influence were, however, it is clear that there are a lot of diverse incoherent positions under these 'Leave' identity. Therefore, identity here was not perceived as a primary force in the case of Referendum results (Outhwaite, 2017). Interestingly, at the same time the results of such research may be extremely valuable for the given thesis as they show that the British society was, currently is and probably will be highly polarized on the issue, and will face further political contestation. For instance, in London which is imagined as a separate part of the UK being a global and multinational city, the number of votes to Remain prevailed (59,9%) (BBC, EU Referendum vote results) which could be explained by the big number of the cosmopolitans, foreigners, immigrants etc. in the city and reluctance to be separated from the European integrity. Thus, the cleavages in society and, subsequently, movements towards different directions are inevitable and should be further studied from the identity perspective.

Among the other topic-related research it is necessary to approach a specific field of literature that analyses the ground identity and the common perception of the Brexit context by the nationals through the media and social networks. Some authors reached

conclusions that a narrative formed in the British media were not always neutral but in a few cases had some features of Eurosceptic discourse and, vice versa, some of the media were, quite the opposite, pro-European and promoted the European strategic narrative (Tournier-Sol, Gifford; 2015). However, this influence did not turn out to be crucial as far as percentage of the artificially constructed stories was rather low (Flaherty, Roselle; 2018 – 59).

Finally, the high importance and validity of identity notions in the given context can be also articulated and described by the fact that in the process of Brexit, Referendum and also within the elections' procedure the identity question was also politicised by several political British parties in addition to economic, political and constitutional questions. Such parties as Conservative Party, Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party (SNP) and UK Independence Party (UKIP) in their political race were frequently referring to the core beliefs of nationals and were trying to appeal to their common grounds i.e. identity (Oliver, 2017; 168).

To effectively discover the given theme, it is necessary to turn the topic-related theories and previous works that might uncover appropriate concepts for the further research. Thus, the notions mentioned above lead to the one of the first concepts and theories around it that would be the concept of identity and, more specifically, the concept of national and collective identity, identity of separate age groups (youth in the particular case). It is instructive that the central concept of *national identity*¹ is already extensively studied and analysed by the various scholars and scientists. And in the following part of the thesis these concepts are to be defined and related to the research aim and question.

1.1 Conceptualising identities

In the next section of the thesis the main focus will be drawn on uncovering the concept of national and collective identities as far as in the practical part of the research an example of national (the British) and collective identities are going to be explored more widely. The concept of national identity is evidently a core notion of the research while an importance of uncovering the phenomenon of collective identity can be explained by the fact that the European identity which is one of the concepts of the thesis

¹ National identity 'is constructed and conveyed in discourse, predominantly in narratives of national culture; national identity is a product of discourse' (Wodak, 1999; 22)

might be considered as a collective identity. In the following sections of the thesis this fact is going to be spelled out in more details.

The concept of national identity

The concept of identity has varying definitions in academic works. Still, as a whole, it is derived from the phenomenon of the nation with all its attributes such as common language, shared history, network of similar cultural values and public traditions, having a mutual ancestry (Barret, 1996). Thus, the acknowledging of these attributes and perceiving oneself being a part of it is considered to be a national identity. However, different external factors tend to have a large impact on the process of identity forming and altering, e.g. education, economics, social background, parents and peers (Tartakovsky, 2011). Oftentimes the appearance of the concept of ‘nation’ and ‘national identity’ is related to analysing the development of nationalism by different social groups in diverse historical circumstances. In scholastic literature there are number of works which have comprised indicators of national identity or its attributes. In this work classification of Anderson (1983) that includes six components of national identity will be taken into consideration and applied in the next section to determine the concept of ‘Britishness’.

British national identity

Turning to the topic of the given research which is aimed to study the probable influence on national identity in the UK, attention should be drawn to the British national identity and the identity of British youth more specifically. It can be assumed that abrupt, sudden and significant political and social events such as Brexit might have a certain impact on the establishment of identity. But beforehand, turning to the history it is possible to summarise how British national identity developed over time and then probable influencing factors will be considered. Initially, as Eyre (2004) in the Guardian stated, “being British is a variable ideology”. Starting from the period of aftermath of the Second World War, the Britishness was significantly revisited by changing tendencies in the whole world: the empire did not exist any more, a rapid flow of migration appeared, the EU was established and, in general, the world became more globalised. And therefore sense of being British has been reconstructed during several decades and is still changing

(Morley, Robins; 2001 – 4). Significant attempts of restoring and creating ‘a creative British identity’ were done during the governance of Thatcher when an image about Britain was constructed around the notion of modern, new ways of living and building economics on the basis of free trade era. Afterwards during the government of Blair ‘rebranding of Britain’ was aimed to be conducted promoting ‘New Britain’ with such attributes as internationalism, democracy, tolerance, being open to the outer world but staying patriotic (Driver, Martell; 2002 – 143). Therefore, in current times British identity is perceived as still being modified as far as the process of defining a national identity might be eternal (Parekh, 2000).

To determine the concepts of the British national identity it is important to address those scholars who distinguished several defining components of Britishness. Firstly, Anderson (1983: 4) considered a nation as an ‘imagined community’ and therefore it implies that modern national identities do not have many common points with the original identities but they are rather re-imagined by people. Secondly, although common history for a nation is one of the foundations of the national identity, the modern historical discussions have showed that this factor is nowadays varying and the recent historical events might play a more decisive role in the process of identity modifications or re-imagination of a community. Thus, for example, the recent events of European integration and signing of the Treaty of Rome might appear more meaningful than the history of hundreds years ago if to consider the UK and its international relations (Dewey, 2013; 21).

Thirdly, the active development of nationalism is easily traced by the electoral campaigns of the British parties even back to 1950-1960s when the prototypes of the contemporary EU firstly emerged and then in 1970s with the process of the UK’s accession to the EU. The electoral narratives with a goal to achieve public support were aimed to reach the national interests and therefore were directed towards the roots of mutual national identity recognition (Dewey, 2013; 22). Thus, here it might be argued whether the commitment towards the Common Market and an idea of integration in general were confirmed by the politically motivated cynical interests or more instinctive and emotional appeals. It is not excluded that the motivations of people included both factors described above which by all means played a significant role in defining their national identity.

The fourth attribute of British national identity presupposes the existence of the other forms of identification that can intersect and coexist with the national one. Smith (2012, 123) divided the identities to collective and individualistic or situational, the last includes respectively the family, region of origin, ethnicity. Therefore, this duality is also present in the British identity as far as, on the one hand, it has always been displayed as a collective and distant for the outside world identity. Still, on the other hand, Britishness is 'a source of personal identity... an occasional rather than a constant presence' (Samuel, 1989; 15).

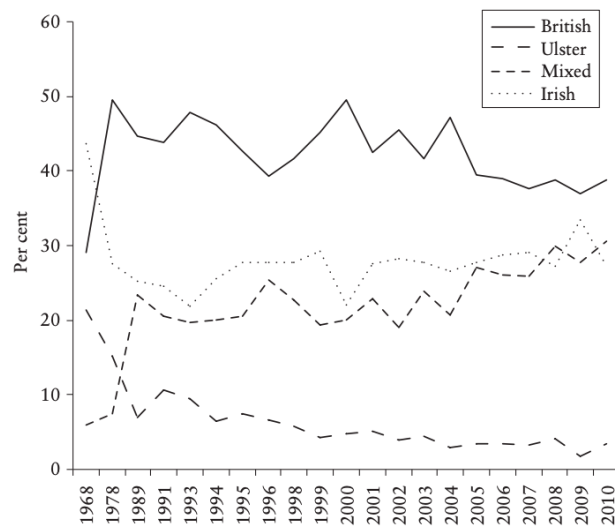
One more attribute is dedicated to acknowledgment of sustainable past definitions that were prescribed by the history and a strong cultural identity that has been evolving through the centuries and are still stable. Here it entails the symbols and institutions of hegemonic British identity that are globally associated with the British empire. However, the components of multinational identity are also included into this part as the EU accession is taken into consideration. Eventually, it can be argued that the Britishness comes not only from the imposition from above but also including the multinational component that results in the development of both collective and situational identities (Brockliss, Eastwood; 1997 – 195).

Finally, the last attribute is connected to the primary definition of the concept of 'identity' where the distinguishing between 'us' and 'others' takes a core place. In this case, it is essential to memorise that national uniqueness does not appear a priori and the process of 'we' identifications is explicitly linked to the process of comparative differentiation between 'us' and 'others' considering that such a comparison is frequently negative (Colley, 2003).

When speaking of factors influencing British national identity, Billig (2007, 39) argued that national identities are revisited daily but not only re-imagined taking into account the dynamism of self-awareness and outside factors that create instability and compel to eternal reflection. Among these factors it might be assumed that religion might serve a crucial attribute of the national identity. It is argued, that a common protestant religion lies in the basis of British national identity as far as their commitment to identity is stronger than of the Catholics. Interestingly, those who do not associate themselves with any religion claim to be more attached to the British or mixed identity. Moreover, a direct correlation between political and national identities is also emphasised that

altogether lead to the process of social categorisation. A research conducted on the evolvement of the British national identity from 1968 to 2010 and studied the external influencing factors demonstrated that the highest level of support of British national identity occurred in 1993 (the number included more than a half of the population) with the further decrease until 39% in 2010 that was described as the lowest rate since 1968 (see Figure 1. Trends of national identity in Britain) (Hayes, McAllister; 2015 – 57).

Figure 1. Trends of national identity in Britain 1968-2010 (Hayes, McAllister; 2015)



Collective identity

Another phenomenon to be explored and uncovered and that was already referred to several times in the previous part of research is ‘collective identity’. More commonly the concept of collective identity appeared in the academic literature starting from the 1980's with the emphasis of people being attached to a specific group and having a mutual sense of this attachment (Reicher, 1996). One of the most widespread and used definitions is that ‘Collective identity is an interactive, shared definition of the field of collective identity opportunities and constraints offered to collective action produced by several individuals that must be conceived as a process because it is constructed and negotiated by repeated activation of the relationships that link individuals to groups’ (Melucci, 1989; 793). Oftentimes the defining of this concept always leads to the notion of the understanding ‘who we are’ with a separate distinction of individual and collective levels considering its linkages to individual and collective identities (Klandermans, De Weerd; 2000) with understanding the common goals, interests, solidarity and experiences in general on a collective level (Taylor, Whittier; 1992).

In case of the UK, studies conducted on analysing the ‘Europeaness’ and Euroscepticism related to Brexit the terms of national and collective identities began to be discussed actively by the scholars with regard to the emergence of collapse of this identities (Brack, 2015).

European identity

Collective identity as a contested concept tackled not only rather small groups of people but also more global ones such as the whole EU. Without a doubt, debates around the question of European identity, its right on existence and position among the other national identities of the Member States are still taking a place. Simultaneously a large number of scientists have been working on studying the fact of relevance of European identity. Therefore, European identity is often associated with the ‘respect of the EU institutions’ and ‘identifying oneself with the EU’ (Kohli, 2004; 116). Another important aspect of European identity is symbolic Europeaness, political and cultural, taking into consideration the national identities and co-existing with them. Among the other attributes here might be listed the fact of integration and economic cooperation, process of unification and belief in privileged ‘European citizenship narrative’ (Amelina, 2016; 130).

On the other hand, the theory of European identity is becoming blurred, vague and ambivalent as far as it does not have an empirical foundation. Besides that, a theoretical strategy of equating European identity to one of the forms of collective identity was strongly criticised by some of the scholars arguing that producing even strong identifications of people with the EU does not yet presuppose the existence of common collective identity. This conclusion stems from the fact that collective identity should be rather an object which identifications refer to but in fact it is not a result of identifications (Eder, 2009). Moreover, the European identity is not perceived as a collective identity but as a common story and narrative, commitment to the institutions and values, common project of control of social relations but nothing to a wider extent (Kantner, 2006).

In addition, the core sentiments of European identity formation lie in ‘unity in diversity’ principle which presupposes the coexistence of strong national identities and acceptance of a totem-like symbol of the EU as an integrated uniting community.

Moreover, regarding the European cultural identity, its discourse mainly refers to the multiple identity and a strong form of belonging to it (Sassatelli, 2009; 43).

After summarising the concepts of identity, the issue of belonging to a certain identity should be taken into consideration. Belonging in this case is perceived as considering someone ‘making a choice that they want to be included in a collective (Jones, Krzyzanowski; 2011 - 47). Thus, it might be argued that before Brexit and especially after the referendum and during the transition period, the dynamics of changing patterns of belonging is highly likely. Ranta and Nancheva (2018, 3) in their research of identities of the EU citizens and the UK nationals reached a conclusion by defining four diverse patterns or categories of people's’ behaviour according to their attitude in the context of Brexit in the UK and EU: ‘breakaway, cosmopolitan, in-between, and patriotic patterns’. However, as a result of Brexit events these patterns became vague and the feeling of belonging to a certain identity/group of people has blurred because of economic, political and social insecurity of citizens.

Euroscepticism

A phenomenon of Euroscepticism is usually defined as an ‘opposition to or scepticism of the increasing powers of the European Union’ and is usually considered as an inevitable factor of the European integration process, a natural and reactive phenomenon (Trenz, Wilde; 2012 – 542). However, the term firstly was recognised in 1980s and started to be actively used in the journalism (e.g. in The Times). In academic literature the notions of Euroscepticism are frequently related to the identity politics of the EU (e.g. Mintchev, Moore; 2019). It can be also defined as refusing from the other and the being assertion of ‘us’ that is why it is usually associated with something not legitimate, ‘unacceptable’ and full of animosity towards the common identity (Brack, 2012).

Moreover, as Westlake (2019; 4) stated there is a direct relation between the level of European integration development and Euroscepticism manifestations: the more progressive and rapidly evolving the first one is, the second is appearing respectively afterwards and is becoming more outspoken in the society. Historically the phenomenon of Euroscepticism initially appeared in the UK to demonstrate the ‘country otherness’ towards the Continental Europe (Daddow, 2006; 310). Furthermore, it also eventually developed starting from 1990s in European political debates and acquired absolutely

different form of intensity: beginning with slight critics and finishing with total denial of any European integration and values' manifestations. Nowadays cases of Euroscepticism in diverse countries (Italy, France, Sweden, Hungary, Poland etc.) are widely studied by the large number of scholars (Harmsen, Spiering; 2005).

Euroscepticism in the UK

The central incentives that served as a reasons for voting to leave the EU for the British were economic and political on the first place followed by the other aspects. However, some research demonstrates a possibility of cultural involvement and, even more than that, suggests some of the cultural factors to play a crucial role in the Brexit outcome. Some of the scholars have studied the historiographical roots of the Brexit, forming of the modern British identity and Eurosceptic sentiments in the British society (e.g. Henderson, 2016). Others look at values as variables that differ in diverse social groups which might be also an additional explanation of the Referendum results (e.g. Kaufmann, 2016). Eventually, as it was later on disclosed by Veltri and Redd in a result of conduction questionnaires in the UK by contacting different socio-demographic groups of citizens in the UK, macro regions differed in their opinions to a large extent. This fact was confirmed by the diverse discrepancies between proportions of votes to 'Leave' or 'Remain' (Veltri, Redd; 2019). Considering the relevance of the mentioned research with the given thesis, a common pattern with identity enactment was detected and interpreted in a statement of 'interpersonal bond and niche of belongingness' (Veltri, Redd; 2019 - 2) which insists on the relevance of studying and analysing the identity network.

Another relevant point to be done was outlined by a number of scholars who stated that the Brexit outcome was directly influenced by the fact of British national identity re-imagination and a lack of Europeanization and therefore a lack of acceptance of European identity by a big number of British citizens (Brown, 2017). Beyond that, a bulk of work focuses on the patterns of territorial differences of vote results in accordance with self-identification of the British nationals. The attitude to immigration and European integration processes were taken into consideration as far as these sentiments and central for the EU and the European identity presence (Green, 2017).

Some scholars in their studies tend to relate the phenomenon of Euroscepticism in the UK with crisis on national identity that was caused mainly by the rejection to become

a consistent part of a 'New Europe' and a big number allusion towards the empire and 'great power' identity which is however becoming a weaker argument in the modern scientific literature (Dukes, 2004). Apart from that, a big emphasis is put on the distinctions between Englishness and Britishness which is not aimed to be uncovered in the given thesis as not being related to the core question of it (Julios, 2017).

1.2 Constructivist perspective on identity

Shortly summarizing all the information above, it might be concluded that a multifaceted and extremely complex nature of the voters' behaviour, fast development of the Brexit events and its' subsequent influence on identities can be explained by distinct theoretical approaches. All the concepts covered above can be linked by the common ground of the constructivist theoretical approach that is taken into basis of this study to understand the processes of identity formation from the constructivist perspective. The choice of the theoretical framework can be justified by previous research demonstrating a strong connection of the fundamental principles of national and collective identity concepts with social constructivist approach. However, the thesis does not imply an idea of testing the theory of social constructivism but apply some of its standpoints to interpret the core concepts of the thesis correspondingly.

Inherently, the main focus of constructivism is aimed at consideration of norms, beliefs and ideas, rules and conventions that occur to be overriding for the national British politics and the politics of the EU in particular. Thus, that fact that not material component is in the centre of interpreting 'us' and 'others' but a component of identity formation confirms the given theoretical approach to be valid and therefore used as a common theoretical framework for the given thesis.

By addressing the identity from a social constructivist position, social constructivism looks at two sides of the concept. On the one hand, the interests of actors are taken into consideration, related to the political events as in our case and explained in terms of norms and beliefs. On the other hand, constructivism treats the identities as socially constructed entities (Risse, 2010; 20). Besides that, Risse states that social identity is correlated with the collective identity from the point of view of social constructivist and therefore represents the presence of the linkage between an individual and a group which consequently means the intersection of a part of an individual identity with collective one. More interestingly, as in the case of the EU, a social identity can be

shared among several social communities. And as a result creation of a common social identity leads to dividing individuals into members and non-members of communities (Saurugger, 2014; 156).

Turning to the roots of collective and thus national identities (British and European identities in the particular case), social constructivist studies presuppose a combination of certain factors that eventually might result in the process of unification of people's values within one group. These factors created three different types of identities members of which have diverse common grounds for unification: primordial, civic and sacred identities accordingly. According to Risse, primordial identity is formed on the basis of uniting natural properties that make a specific group unique and differing from the others (in-group and out-group). In addition, the in-group is frequently supposed to be superior than the out-group which theoretically and practically contributes to the conflicts and clashes emerging. Taking into consideration the natural or inborn character of common attributes of this type of identity, ethnic groups can serve an example of a primordial identity. Regarding civic identity, the unifying grounds here can be found in shared values and also existence of distinctions between the in-groups and out-groups. However, in contrast with the primordial identity, here the individuals can change the preferences between in- and out-groups which will not cause an intergroup conflict. Finally, sacred identity suggests common faith and beliefs, therefore an individual can be included in the group in case of being genuinely committed to it (Risse, 2010; 27-28).

Thus, the difficulty in allocating European identity to any of above mentioned terms refers to the fact that EU is perceived and arguably is in fact an *imagined community*. Primarily, it is a community that is not united by the tangible relations but rather exists as 'a reality of mind as far as the members of it allocate a defined image of such a community (Anderson, 1983). As constructivists view it an imagined community consists of individuals that share a common history, background and attach themselves to similar meaningful symbols. Moreover, a feeling of acceptance and loyalty towards the other members of community are also indispensable attributes of an imagined community. Regarding the central concepts of the given research, this term can be in the basis of a nation-state with a national collective identity in case an imagined community becomes appealing and is accepted by the citizens. Thus, that is the reason why the EU is discussed as an imagined international community with the European social identity at the core

(Dewey, 2009; 23). Therefore, the even sense of the imagined community and allocating the European identity to it was also one the reasons for the Eurosceptic sentiments.

Brexit from constructivists perspective

Continuing with relating the constructivist viewpoint to the research question, a vast number of studies were conducted on the issues of analysing Brexit by an attempt to interpret the behaviour of different groups of voters, their attitude towards the EU and the EU nationals at the same time to explain the trails of actions of these groups towards each other. Principally, in the literature it was done by examining the self-image of those British citizens who voted differently on the Referendum dividing them accordingly to those ones who acknowledge the ‘great power’ of the UK and those who aspire to achieve ‘an ever closer union’ and have a commitment towards the EU and its values of integration (Oliver, 2017; 155).

In international relations social constructivism does not aim to take the same place of validity and importance as the other central theories of European integration as intergovernmentalism or neofunctionalism. However, in the context of Brexit and social identity construction it might play a defining role as far as it fulfils a complementary but a rather significant function in the process of identity formation (Checkel, 2001; 51). Eventually, the process of identity formation influences the process of individual and state interests evolving (Reus-Smith, 2013; 225). Thus, as far as this thesis will examine how the national British and European identities of the British youth in the EU interact or overlap it might have a practical input regarding the future of international relations between the UK and the EU.

Returning back to the main concepts of social constructivists, the question to be address is this study is whether or not the UK and EU are understood as an in-group and out-group from the point of view of the British youth in case of their identity construction in relation to Brexit. It can be assumed that according to the constructivists theory some of young people might have stronger or weaker ties with the out-group (the EU) due to different social background, impact of attitudes of the closest surrounding (family, friends, colleagues) and age. On the other hand, it can be also presupposed that none of the mentioned factors have a central influence on their identity in case of Brexit but rather the outer community, the news from the media, probable economic and political

consequences of Brexit and a cost-benefit analysis are what really matter in the British youth identity modifications. Finally, the option that Brexit had no specific influence on identity alterations is also valid and will be considered within the conducting of empirical part of the research.

Another important point to be mentioned in the given context is that in the existing literature the role of social identities in the case of Brexit is considered as something already pre-existing and not playing a crucial role anymore (Tyrrell, 2018). Moreover, the influence of the other external factors was also actively pointed out by the scientists (Checkel, 2001; Reus-Smith, 2013). However, in this thesis the question will be approached from a different angle: the possible impact on the social and collective identity will be regarded.

1.3 British youth in the Brexit context

In this part of the research the previous considerations of youth identity in the UK should be referred to. As it was figured out and outlined a big number of scholars analysed the voters' behaviour on Referendum and some of them made an emphasis on the youth in particular (e.g. Moore, 2016; Kingman, 2017). However, regarding the influence of the young voters and, on the contrary, the impact of the events of Brexit on the British youth self-perception and self-identification, it would be relevant to draw attention to some of the previous scientific and social outcome.

Many works have examined the modifications of young people who originally came from different countries and then lived for a continuous period of time in the UK. The strongest feeling of belonging had those ones who came to the UK in the early childhood and therefore associate their primary school years with the British educational systems. In the other words, those young people in most cases now have an absolute attachment to Britishness. However, other factors such as family, employment, life level, the level of importance of traditions and religion of the countries of origin also influenced the identity formation (King, 2018). With reference to Brexit, the central defining aspect for these young people is whether they are British citizens or not. In the research conducted by Tyrrell (2018) the following fact was spelled out: some of young non-citizens in the UK feel the sense of British identity and expressly associate themselves with it. It was also claimed that independently from the fact of citizenship most of the respondents expressed future uncertainty caused to their lives and families as a result of

Britain's decision to 'Leave'. One of the researchers came to a conclusion about the stage of in-between-ness of these young people and a probable situation of being 'othered' due to the fact of the EU citizenship (Tyrrell, 2018; 8).

In the studies conducted by Rakib Ehsan and Sloan, the focus was on the British youth in particular and their values and identity were found to have a significant impact on the voting results. Eventually, post-materialist attitudes and acceptance of collective identity were among the strongest reasons to claim support of the EU and vote for 'Remain'. Interestingly, in the result of the research it turned out that the young British cosmopolitans tend to have less fear towards 'cultural backlash', diversity and immigration. Other than that, the fact of the differences of voting patterns between genders was observed: according to the research young British women mostly voted for Remain in comparison with male representatives of the same age group. The authors explained this by the attachment of most of the people to the cosmopolitan-left movement and high level of support of providing economic equality and rights by women (Ehsan, Sloam; 2018 - 64).

Thus, although there exist some literature on the position of the British youth before and after the Referendum, evidently there are some issues to be further studied. Among them there are the incentives for a decision that was made of the Brexit Referendum, the attitude of youth towards probable consequences of Brexit after the transition period, the idea which is located in the core of identity formation and its probable change. The last two notions will be uncovered in the given thesis.

1.4 Other theoretical interpretations regarding identity

Returning to one of the central concepts of this thesis, national identity, and, more specifically, European and British identities, a certain number of scholars claim that in the situation of Brexit the acknowledging of the existence of European identity, feeling 'European' and a desire to be a part of the EU for the British people were not the most dominant argument leading the UK and its citizens towards European integration. However, it was an exceptional approval of cultural diversity and a rather significant fear of negative economic influence in case of Brexit that was present back in 2016 (Sloam, Henn; 2019 – 71). This possible explanation of voting to 'Remain' in relation to the non-identity grounds is going to be explored further while conducting the current study.

In addition, a large contribution in academic works concerns the analysis of the patterns of voters' behaviour and explaining the deeper reasons of the Referendum results. Some of them provide information relevant for the current thesis in terms of interpreting the voting behaviour of different age and social groups. For instance, it was demonstrated by the YouGov and Lord Ashcroft polls that majority of both of the groups such as degree educated group of citizens and youth (18-30 years old) voted to 'Remain' and statistics of voted in both groups is revealingly similar (YouGov and Lord Ashcroft polls).

Those who voted to 'Remain' did not tend to be linked to the 'Europeanness' and European identity itself but were rather the representatives of 'winners of globalisation' or 'cosmopolitans' and opposed to 'losers of globalisation' who voted for 'Leave' accordingly (Sloam, Henn; 2019 – 78). However, this was not connected nor caused by the commitment to the British government. On the contrary, the vast majority of young and well-educated voters made such a decision with regard to the fear of economic austerity (Goodwin, Heath; 2016 - 325). The argument described above might be extremely valid for the current research and is going to be proved/disproved in the result of the research.

Interestingly, a part of literature is examining the psychological parts of the changes of identity in relation to the events of Brexit (Hughes, 2019). Namely, two types of identity might be distinguished in this case: 'the Brexit identity' and 'the Remain identity' among the voters and citizens of the UK in general. More specifically, it is stated that the 'the Brexit identity' entails an unbiased respect to the past of empire, a strong belief in the possibility of Britain to restore its independent dominating positions in the world, mostly support Christian values and British traditions which altogether plays a relevant example of a collective identity but is represented in a rather idealistic for the modern realities way (Hayes, McAllister; 2015). On the other hand, 'the Remain identity' is contrast and entails respecting of European values, honouring the principle of integration that provides the Member states with peace and security, embracing multiculturalism and diversity, giving an extremely high priority to cooperation with the EU (Veltri, Redd; 2019). All in all, both categories risen by the scholars serve an example of evidence of the absolute impossibility to retain the further identity crisis and clashes in the UK.

Conclusions

This chapter provided a literature review of the key concepts relevant for the research. Among them there were national and collective identity, the concepts of Euroscepticism, British national identity and European identity. All in all, in spite of a vast number of scholarly works on the patterns of voting behaviour at the EU referendum in 2016, preconditions and consequences of the events of Brexit and roles and positions of the British youth within the context, the issue of how young people alter their identity as a result of Brexit has not been extensively studied and can be perceived as a novel research topic.

Based on the central concepts of the thesis, research question and aims of the research, the hypothesis of the thesis are formulated accordingly:

H1: 'Being a form of a situational collective identity, the identity of the British youth was altered by the events of Brexit'

H2: 'Social attributes of individualistic identity and cultural factors have the strongest impact on the process of British youth identity formation despite any external political or economic crises'.

2 Methodology and research design

In this part of the thesis the research design, methodology and case selection will be explained and justified with the further interpretation of received data in the last chapter of the thesis.

First of all, before uncovering the method selection reasons, a linkage between theoretical and methodological parts of the thesis should be represented. As far as the given work is based on the notion of identity which is socially constructed phenomenon and due to the referring to constructivist approach in the theoretical part, qualitative methodology where interaction with the respondents is needed was applied to examine the core concepts and research question. Thus, the choice of the methodology was primarily caused by the research question and also by the previously existing theoretical approaches and studies conducted in the field. Thus, qualitative methods give a researcher a possibility to consider the concepts of social world and relationships between them relying on the way how social actors interpret them (Marsh, Furlong: 2002 – 18).

Regarding the epistemology, applying qualitative methods refers to giving a deep explanation of the concepts, more appropriate understanding of the scale of events and innovative personal viewpoints and ideas that might be generalised for a certain group of people (national identity in the case of the given thesis). At the same time concerning ontology, the outer world is considered as socially constructed and due to this fact a researcher is not absolutely independent (Bryman, 2008; 15).

As is it widely accepted, qualitative methods are connected with the interpretivist standpoints therefore they will be applied in the research taking into consideration that all the individuals even within one social group might have diverse experience and, hence, view the ‘objective reality’ differently (Lamont, 2015). Apart from that, interpretivist approach does not imply searching for the causal relations but is rather aimed to explain a definite concept (e.g. ‘national identity’). Even though this fact might be a ground for criticism from the positivist point of view in terms of lack of validity, interpretivist approach of social science still will be followed in a particular case as far as in the centre of the research there is a socially constructed concept of identity (European, British, pro-European vs. Eurosceptic).

Case selection and methodology

The thesis is a case study on the example of the UK. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), the study can be site-specific or can be pursued in different sites around the world. Taking into account the fact that this research is focusing on studying the concepts of national self-identity of youth in the UK and its modifications, thereby this research is site-specific research. The choice of site can be justified by the fact that the population of the UK has faced the events of Brexit which can be considered as a crucial and, to a certain degree, even crisis political event in history of the country and the EU as well as. Therefore, the UK nowadays is representing an example of a field suitable for the research of national identities, rise of nationalism to some extent in specific regions and, potentially, the modifications of identities caused by the consequences of political events of Brexit and its consequences regarding all the spheres of the state functioning and both daily life of citizens.

Other than that, the research is aimed to analyse specifically the group of young people (18-25 years old). The choice of the age group from 18 to 25 can be justified by the facts that were already mentioned in the previous part of the thesis. Namely, in 2016 general elections on leaving the EU the statistics on voting turnout showed that only 27% of people aged 18-24 voted for the UK to leave the EU, while more than 55% of people over 45 years old had the same choice on the election (Lord Ashcroft Polls). Apart from that, it is possible to provide additional factors of this particular age-group choice. First of all, as it was stated in the theoretical part of the research there is a noticeable lack of existing research of this particular group in academia within the context of Brexit and identity issues. Secondly, being a generation of millennials modern youth throughout the whole world and in the UK are becoming more politicised and involved into the world of politics due to the massive impact of media coverage influence. Finally, the availability and rather easy access of contacting and recruiting possible participants of the research are less considerable but also still tangible factors.

Regarding the choice of methodology and taking into account applying of interpretivist approach, the method of focus groups was used following the interpretive approach of social science as far as in the centre of the research there is a socially constructed concept of identity (European, British vs. Eurosceptic) to learn the personal reasons and motives which predetermine their decisions to socially act in particular way

(Weber, 1981). The selection of focus groups method can be justified by the ambiguity of researched categories which are difficult to measure using quantitative methods.

On the other hand, such method as the focus groups is able to provoke a vivid, sincere and deep discussion by posing open questions which will eventually provide the wide scale of answers and explanations. Other than that, in comparison with the method of interview in case of the focus groups the researcher acquires the role of a moderator being on the periphery of the talk and does not have a possibility to interfere the discussion or impose his viewpoints (Kitzinger, 1994; 115). Moreover, considering the case selection and specific age group that are crucial matters in the research conducting, referring to Bagnoli and Clark (2010), focus groups became a widespread method in social science when it comes to working with the young people. It is argued by the fact that this method empowers participants to speak with their voices as experts within a peer discussion.

Returning to the hypotheses of the research, there is an aim to uncover the factors which are having a major influence on the British youth identity (whether it comes more from the socio-cultural aspects or outer world events such as Brexit). Thus, the method of focus group discussion will give a chance to build interpretations and constructions by finding the connection between the young people perception of themselves and socio-cultural and political contexts (Berkes, 2004; 623). Following Morgan, Krueger and King (1998) conducting of the focus groups consists of four main steps such as elaborating the research design, collecting data, analysing and reporting the results. This scheme was accordingly applied in the process of focus groups implementation.

Regarding the research design and to be more precise about the details of methodology, five focus groups were carried out (29 participants in total). According to Kitzinger (1994), the focus groups predominantly consist of between six to ten participants. The choice of the specific quantity of focus groups is related to the fact that a small number of them may result in an outcome not telling sufficient volume of information and usually most of the researchers rely on from four to six groups avoiding a risky situation with receiving incomplete results (Litosseliti, 2003). In the given research the five focus focus groups with five or six participants in each were conducted in February-April 2020. Thus, two of the focus groups were carried out in the period before the coronavirus outbreak and the official quarantine launching in the UK. The

subsequent three focus groups were conducted already in the period of quarantine that is why a few responses tackled the question of it abruptly which was not taken into consideration in the research analysis.

Apart from that, one more clarification about the participants of the focus group should be spelled out. The focus groups were divided into groups of the students, working youth and both students and working youth. The reason of launching such a distinction lies in the fact that in relation to the different current surroundings might be crucial for the forming of the opinions around self-identity and national identity. So the idea is to check whether or not the actual sort of occupation and activity of the youth might change their self-perception and understanding of the identity. If the differences in the mentioned thematic units by different groups occurs the analysis of rationale will be provided in the last part of the research. On the other hand, if the claimed thematic units are relatively similar this fact will give an opportunity to report that the type of current occupation does not play a crucial role in the process of national identity alterations. All in all, the focus groups conducted in the result of the research are demonstrated in the following table:

Table 1. Conducted focus groups

<i>Type of group in relation to type of occupation</i>	<i>Number of focus groups</i>
Students	2
Working students	2
Working	1

Considering sampling, the volunteering sampling method is the optimal one to be applied in terms of dealing with young people. In addition, an effective way might be a snowballing approach through intercepting in public. The University College London students' background, student events and all the venues popular among the students in London served an appropriate location for searching the candidates. In order to receive the answers which have a wider scale a few participants from Scotland, Northern Ireland, Southern and Northern England were recruited. The process of searching the participants from different regions included using social networks and snowballing method by getting new contacts due to already existing ones. A few screening questions were asked to understand whether the individuals were interested in taking part in the focus group,

whether they met the requirements (specific age group criteria and type of current occupation) and whether their input could be relevant for the research (Stewart, Shamdasani; 2007 – 48). (*Do you ever think of your national identity? How is this issue discussed in your surrounding? Are you following the events of Brexit?*)

When looking at the groups' compilation, it is possible to conclude that the age of the participants of the students' groups was predominantly between 18-20 years old which means that they are mostly first and second year students, working students were in the age category from 20 to 25, while the working youth were between 23 and 25 years old. Regarding the gender, there was an aim to follow the gender equality in each group, so in total there were 15 male and 14 female participants. In terms of the fields of studies and work that the participants have, it was figured out that the majority of the participants come from different spheres of interests and occupation: music industry students, business and administrations students and workers, political science students and working youth, media and advertising workers etc.

After finding a needed number of participants, the next stage was the contact phase that was carried out via emails and social networks. Interestingly, contacting via social networks and using less formal approach of invitation for the focus group turned out to be more effective which can be explained by the age group of interviewees. From the moment the participants agreed to take part in the focus group, a written confirmation and the letter with details and conditions of the research were sent out and all the appeared questions about the research were covered.

Among the other organisational points was a choice of suitable location and time. Eventually taking into consideration the situation of quarantine, the focus groups were conducted online which gave a possibility to collect together people from different regions of the UK and have a more productive discussion. Moreover, referring to Edmunds (1999) online focus groups entail 'the aura of dynamism, modernity and competitiveness' and might be a full equivalent to face-to-face discussions. The entire focus groups were recorded via laptop recording software and all the participants agreed on the conditions of data collection and recording procedure. The responses were kept anonymous and all the materials received were deleted after being processed. The length of each focus group did not exceed one hour and a half. For creating an in depth discussion among participants and in order to receive relevant information connected to the research

question, a discussion guide was elaborated (see Appendix 1 – Discussion Guide). It contained introductory part, ground rules and procedural part explanation and four sections of the questions. Each section was aimed to uncover the participants' attitude towards their national identity, the role of Brexit in their lives and in lives of their family and community. A separate section of the questions was dedicated to the factors which might lead to the national identity reaffirmation or, vice versa, can weaken the understanding of it. Considering problems which appeared during the method conduction were some difficulties with recruiting people from different regions and with different backgrounds.

The process of conducting the focus-groups was carried out by one researcher, there was no assistant present during the discussion as far as the given thesis is an individual work. During the talk some field notes were taken and afterwards used to make short review of impressions right after the process of discussion. All the field notes were destructed together with recorded data after being processed. The next step of the research consisted in transcribing the discussions without using the first name of the participants. The process of transcribing provided a general understanding of common patterns in the responds that were eventually grouped using the scissor-and-sort technique. To be more specific, it entailed several stages of working with the transcript. Firstly, after a thorough going through the whole text the sections connected to the research question were identified. Afterwards there was developed a classification system of the quotations of participants that were directly related to certain thematic or categorical units which are going to be described and analysed in details in the next section of the thesis.

According to Krippendorff (2004), it is possible to outline sampling units in the text that demonstrate the way how the general structure of the discussion is divided into relevant units. These units depending on the type of the research and research question might be categorical, propositional, physical etc. In the given research in the process of analysing several outspoken thematic units were repeating. Usually the thematic units indicate recurring explanations, range of beliefs and ideas, thus these units represent wide interpretive set of meanings.

Finally, when the received data was analysed and similar or different thematic units were outlined, the results of the research are consolidated to the report in a coherent form to be presented in the next part of the thesis. In total, the outcomes of the focus groups

data interpretation might acquire various forms from the generic conclusions based on the impressions of the researcher to detailed computer-based review (Stewart, 2007; 132). According to Morse (1994) the results or the report can hold a format of narrative or be divided in subpoints, whereas in the given thesis both types will be applied.

3 Empirical data analysis

In the given part of the research the data received from conducting the focus groups will be reviewed, analysed and reported on the basis of concepts stated in the theoretical framework part of the thesis and relying on the methodology and research design part. This chapter includes two main sections which are divided into several subsections accordingly to cover more detailed aspects of the phenomena mentioned. In the first section general thematic units in relation to recurring codes will be demonstrated and explained in conformity with the theoretical concepts from the initial part of the research. Conversely, in the second section similar and different patterns of thematic units between different groups of participants (students, working youth and working students) are going to be summed up and analysed. The citations of the respondents will be marked with G1, G2 and G3 accordingly where G1 refers to two groups of students, G2 – two groups of working students and G3 – the group of working youth.

3.1 Prominent thematic units

As a result of conducting focus-groups within different groups several common illustrious standpoints should be outlined. The ideas of the participants were collected and gathered in accordance to methodology described in the previous part with their relation to the similar thematic units which are going to be presented in this part of the research. On this stage no differentiation between the participants' affiliation to one of three groups (students, working youth and working students) will be outspoken, but rather summarising points from all the responses are provided.

National self-identity origin

In this section, it is necessary to claim that this unit was not aimed to be discovered in the thesis, therefore it was not included into the research question. However, during the process of conducting the focus groups and analysing the transcript it became noticeable that majority of participants referred to the probable roots of their identity when they received a question about the connection of their national identity and family or socio-cultural surrounding impact. This fact may be explained by the fact that the respondents were able to compare and contrast the way they perceive themselves now and how they were taught to perceive themselves back to their childhood in terms of national identity.

Some of the participants refer to the unprecedented admiration of the British national identity and were talking about it with the exceptional feeling of being proud.

G2: 'I've always loved being British and I love British history, I am proud of being British and part of my country. I am not necessarily proud of what my country has done but I just love being British as it is. It is a hard thing to describe. I am nationalizing everything connected to my country.'

However, the majority of respondents of all groups agreed on the fact that national identity would not be placed first while talking about the self-identity process. Prior to it there are local regional identity and class identity which put in place several differences in family traditions, lifestyle and surrounding at the earliest stage of identity formation. To be more specific, this process of identity acquiring and first understanding of it started to become clear already in the primary school age according to the respondents. Therefore, the notion of national identity does not take the stance of everyday thoughts of the British youth, however, they define it as *'something extremely important that significantly makes us feel different from the whole world'*. Such an approach might be also possibly explained by the fact that all the participants have or are in the process of receiving a university degree, several participants are Political science students. Hence, they are able to judge and argue on the identity-related topics rather fluently and confidently.

Another broad topic that caused a vivid discussion of participants was relation to the national British history and political events back to the times of the British Empire existence. Without doubts, respondents agreed on the fact of British history being 'dark' and not fully uncovered in the school curriculum while stating that *'a lot of facts and details were missed out'*. Such position gives an understanding that the youth do not consider common British history being on the first place among national indicators. On the contrary, according to the answers the youth mostly rely on social and cultural events in the country and national symbols which are evidently connected with the historical events although are not associated with the history or 'power of British Empire' and imperial incentives of it with overtones of superiority.

One more thing to be pointed out is the fact that when imagining the national identity, some of the respondents assumed that they feel quite strong attachments to the territory and geographical characteristics of the country. To be more precise, it is possible

to quote one of the participants (G2): *'Having some kind of physical feeling unites us'*. Also the fact of being geographically separate from the EU, in opinion of some respondents, makes the country psychologically different and separated from the EU. However, the participants agreed that this fact did not change their predisposition towards the EU and the 'Remain' campaign.

Finally, all the participants confirmed that they have had talks about their national identity with relatives of an immediate family. More interestingly, in cases of several people these discussions were raised more actively with the Brexit era initiation. However, a number of differing patterns in the responses by the participants of different groups appeared which will be covered in the next section of the chapter.

Social and cultural influence on identity

In the given subsection, first of all, it is necessary to mention that during preparation of the Discussion Guide and the process of conducting focus groups a special attention was drawn to uncovering the extent and level of influence of social and cultural factors on the identity formation and alterations of it. Moreover, these factors were brought up in the second hypothesis of the research. Therefore, a defined section of the questions in the Discussion Guide was dedicated to these notions. As a result, interestingly it was found out that all the participants referred repetitively to the importance of common social and cultural background providing quite specific examples of national indicators that are going to be elaborated in this particular part.

When speaking about national indicators, most frequently the respondents claimed and agreed on crucial importance of national symbols that play a role of unprecedentedly accepted by the majority of the British unifying common phenomena that have been formed historically and appear to be per se respected and proud of by people. All the participants referred to the national and religious holidays to be an integral part of their identity and the things which make them feel more united as a nation and a country. In the case of public and religious holidays the families tend to reunite and therefore such family gatherings are oftentimes accompanied by collaborative watching of the TV shows and the news where patriotic sentiments appear and play the role of maintaining and to some extent exaggerating the importance of the appeal to the nation and, consequently, to the common national identity.

G1: 'We all admire similar celebrities, we all speak similar accents. I am more identified with the things which I am supposed to. Almost an ironic proud of a nation.'

Among the other national indicators that appeared to become the most supported by the respondents was the symbol that was mostly associated with the British nation in the childhood - the Royal family and the events related to them e.g. the Royal wedding. Even though the young people in the UK do not permanently follow the ongoing events in the Royal family, moreover, some of them distinctly say about not supporting the monarchy and the whole idea of such system.

G1: 'I am kind of against of monarchy and I am not really supporting the Royal family, and when I was talking to my mum she asked: 'How could you hate the queen? It's all about feeling British'. I am proud of being British but I am not proud of sort of history and now I am more proud about these symbols but in a sarcastic way.'

Still, similarly with the national indicators from the previous paragraph, the fact of existence of Royal family from the early age gave a sense of affiliation to something strong and purely exclusive. According to respondents, this fact strengthens the attachment to the nation on an unconscious level and is definitely associated with the British identity not even depending on the age of the citizens. Thereby, all the Royal symbols and using them in the exterior of the buildings in British cities provides this unconscious effect of the nation endorsement. In addition, the other vast group of national indicators mentioned were the national symbols such as the flag of the UK (claimed only as Union Jack among the respondents).

A separate attention among the national symbols should be paid to mentioned by several participants symbol of a Remembrance poppy. The British people wear a mock of a poppy flower on their clothes during certain parts of the year in order to remember the dead of the British war. Interestingly, claiming about this symbol demonstrated evidence on how contested the things about Brexit events and national identities are. So on the one hand, this symbol tends to have a uniting function that leads to the validation of 'we' concept, still, on the other hand it was figured out that there are different standpoints on this particular symbol admiration and commitment to it. For instance, as it was published in several sources of media, the adherents of the 'Leave' campaign were blamed for wearing the Remembrance poppy symbol as far as it was aimed to glorify peace, organisations and institutions that were established to maintain the world peace

and security (Lubbock, 2017). Such modern prototype of this type of organisation is the EU inter alia. Thus, as it was stated by the participants, the ‘Remain’ campaign followers claim the ‘Leave’ campaign supporters to be historically illiterate as currently they refuse to support the UK membership in the EU.

Lastly, another substantial national indicator that emerged during the discussion was the sport events and devotion towards the British football teams (e.g. Manchester United mentioned by one of the participants). Arguably enough, this one concerns only the sport fans for whom sport events have a significant place in their lives. However, as the participants stated, even not being a serious sport fan, the acknowledgment of the fact that the national sport teams are rather competitive on the worldwide arena gives a sense of being proud of the nation in general for all ordinary citizens.

Feeling British Vs. European

In order to figure out whether the events of Brexit could have had an impact on the national identity of the British youth, it was also necessary to examine the actual attitude of the young people towards their current feeling of identity taking into consideration that the decision about Brexit has been already adopted and the UK is at this point in a transition period of leaving the EU. Thus, a separate section of a Discussion Guide was devoted to revealing the approaches of the youth towards the British and European identities.

First of all, interestingly, it was firmly stated in almost all groups of the participants about being British on the first place without strong doubts while still feeling a strong connection towards the EU.

G3: ‘I don’t think I have anything different with the Europeans, I don’t think of myself as a British person but not European, like French European or German European, we are just from the different places as far as I am concerned.’

G1: ‘It’s so hard, I’m so proud of the EU, it’s great, it needs a reform but it’s a great organisation and a great union but I think I wouldn’t say straight away that I am European, that won’t go first for my self-identity.’

However, the question of ‘European’ identity itself rose a vivid discussion as several participants made a proposal about not existence of the ‘European’ identity as it is and called the EU to be an ‘imagined community’. This matter showed the tendency of

some young people not recognising the European identity as a separate national identity and claiming about a negative connotation which is put into this term:

G3: 'I don't feel myself European at all, I don't like the idea of the European Union at all personally. However, I cannot say I feel absolutely British for the same reason but I would rather go for a regional identity.'

Nevertheless, at the same time the discussion overwhelmingly showed that the respondents rather assumed about the feeling of being pro-European and articulated a confident attachment towards the EU and some of its vitally necessary benefits for all the EU members including the UK. Returning to the British identity, some of the participants argued about the negative connotation that is appearing in the term 'English' identity and stated that they opt for considering themselves the British. Moreover, most of them stated about an exceptional proudness about being British just for the matter of this fact.

Secondly, before applying to the analysis of statements on the European identity, it is needed to draw attention to the thought expressed by the respondents regarding their local identities. In this case it is possible to conclude generally that for each of them adhesion towards a local identity (e.g. Scottish, Northern Irish) has a valued place in terms of identity and in some cases is even prevailing depending on the region and also the level of support of the political parties dominating in that region that is not going to be outlined in details in the given thesis as it does not relate to the research question and aims.

Finally, when discussing the European identity, even though as it was already mentioned, some of the participants cast doubt on the essence of the European identity itself, all of them agreed on the fact of being exceptionally pro-European and tended to favour the 'Remain' campaign. Moreover, some of the participants put being pro-European prior to the British identity by appealing to the question of national identity. Among them there were two respondents who even referred to the European identity being stronger for them than the British:

G1: 'I would probably go with European before British in a sense that I don't really regard myself as British in sense that I go with smaller regional identities. So when people ask where I am from, I usually say the city, I don't feel such a big affiliation with a country even. I would put being European firstly and then Northern Irish. I would say: 'I am from the UK'. But I don't really like British and I don't really

know why. And sometimes it's breaking the cliché about the British in the eyes of other people.'

In this case it became clear that for the youth European identity is not equated to the national identity but it can coexist simultaneously with their British national identity having to some extent a function of a collective identity. It was concluded by the facts that, firstly, majority of the respondents dispose their national British identity on the primary place and, secondly, the European identity is not perceived by them as a national one but still a collective identity.

G3: 'When I was younger I didn't actually realised I was European until I was about ten or eleven, but I was watching a TV show where a celebrity did a European tour where London and Paris were included. And I thought: is London European? And now I am definitely a pro-European, but I don't know why but I don't see myself as European before anything else. So I feel British and then European, it's weird.'

Turning to the theoretical framework of the thesis, it can be claimed that the British national identity of the youth has obviously a primordial character while collective European identity having a civic character of the identity. In addition to that, the concept of in-groups and out-group is also applicable here (Risse, 2010). Therefore, the central discussion turned around the reasons of the strength of pro-European self-perception. Among the most prominent ones it is possible to highlight 'practicality' of the EU which was accounted for the economic benefits of the EU member states while viewing the EU as a trade union and thinking of the EU principally in economic rather than political terms.

Other than that, feeling of being pro-European is supported by shared common values among the EU, its member states and the UK such as democracy, tolerance, descent level of diplomacy, freedom of speech and protection of human rights. As one of the interviewees observed (G3): *'The European Union provides us with a sense of security in a first place'*. After a short elaboration it was possible to analyse that this security stands for the everyday life of the EU citizens which are secured at the job places with the ability to receive the protection of workers' rights. Besides that, the majority of participants agreed on the fact of common lifestyles of the Europeans and the British which entails the everyday life of ordinary citizens, some traditions and values. The British people can easily feel it while traveling to the EU countries.

G2: 'The EU is all about collective bargaining, it is a club of countries with the similar interests. Even though all people are different , they speak different languages they have a similar agenda.'

More interestingly, those interviewees who had a chance to live in one of the EU countries or travelled there quite often on a continuous period of time, tend to place the European identity before the British when it comes to the question of national self-identity. So as it was presupposed by the respondents, this fact might be among the primary ones that refer to the sense of *'having something in common and sharing values'* with the Europeans.

Influence of Brexit on identity

To start with, during conducting the focus groups before getting to the issue of probable influence of the events of Brexit on the national identity, it was also necessary to figure out the general attitude of the participants towards the Brexit Referendum and the outcome of it. Thus, two questions of the last part in the Discussion Guide were aimed to discover this information.

Initially, an attention should be drawn to the fact that not all the participants had a right to vote in the Brexit Referendum in 2016. Those ones who were able to vote and were ready to speak openly about their choice on Referendum stated to have voted for 'Remain'. The other younger respondents claimed that they would have made the same decision in case they had a possibility to vote. Moreover, all of the respondents explained this fact by the general support of the 'Remain' campaign within their surrounding and friends. One of the participants claimed about voting to 'Remain' quite reluctantly:

G3: 'I voted for 'Remain' cause I figured it was way better to vote for 'Remain' that to not vote at all, it was my protest against the 'Leave' campaign and the narrative of political groups that promoted it.'

Undoubtedly, the level of being immersed into the topic of Brexit discussions varied to a certain extent in terms of age of some participants who used to be school students in 2016 when Brexit Referendum took place. Thus, it caused some differences in the opinion and knowledge on the topic between different groups of respondents that is going to be covered in the following section of the work.

Nevertheless, it was important to notice that regardless of age, all the respondents had discussions on Brexit within their family but although in some of the families parents were adherents of the ‘Leave’ campaign and voted accordingly, their children were not mostly influenced by this choice and still supported the ‘Remain’ campaign.

Another important aspect that appeared during the discussion and should be brought up is the fact that as it was stated by all the respondents the notion of identity did not have a strong meaning in the pre-Brexit period. Obviously it does not mean that people did not consider the issue of identity at all but there was no sense or matter to raise questions regarding it. Besides that, the vast quantity of information around the national identity appeared in the media exactly with the beginning of the active phase of Brexit discussions in 2014-2016. Thereby, in that period of time most of the people including the youth became politicised to a certain extent and all citizens were following the political events to varying degrees. Apart from that, the participants agreed with the fact that media became ‘toxic’ and the Eurosceptic and, vice versa, pro-European articles prevailed in that period of time in the media to reach the aim of the influencing the population by promoting the ideas of governmental establishment. Already after in 2019-2020 when the decision was made ‘*media were still trying to justify the causes of Brexit*’ being afterwards replaced by the news around the epidemic of coronavirus that started to have its outbreak in winter of 2020 and tackled the attention of the media throughout the whole world including the UK. What is happening now with an attitude of the British youth as regards to following the events of Brexit in the media or initiating the discussions on it can be best illustrated by the quotation of the respondent:

G1: ‘Before the Referendum happened everyone was talking a lot about what we should do and what we shouldn’t, we should have voted this way or that way. Though after the decision was made and after, so during the last two months I was not trying to follow the events how they are going on. Currently people do not keep up, the topic (of Brexit) has been swamped by the coronavirus.’

Subsequently, returning to the research question and the first hypothesis testing whether or not Brexit had its influence on identity alterations, it should be pointed out that knowing the results of Brexit became very negative news for the majority of young people in the UK (according to the respondents) which can be explained by the fact of high level of involvement of the youth and certainly the absence of apathy:

G1: 'I was extremely upset by the Brexit results. And adding to that, all my family voted to 'Leave'. I remember that day everyone was talking about it in the class and we were quite stressed about it. So we were waiting for an exam, revising, and then we got the results, so everyone would have rather had a conversation on that instead of exam, we didn't want to 'Leave', that felt really bad.'

Furthermore, a separate vast section of the Discussion guide was aimed on finding out the consequences of Brexit in terms of identity alteration. Thus, the prior thing that came out during the discussion was the fact that in the period of active Brexit talks and even in the aftermath of the decision was made in 2019, all the participants stated that Brexit served as a strong leverage to push themselves towards private thoughts and both self- and collective reflections about their identity, identity of their families, friends and social surrounding. Interestingly, big part of the respondents agreed that Brexit initiated a period of their national and collective identity reaffirmation:

G2: 'My personal view is that identity is inherently unstable and what we try to do is validate it using the markers of identity, reaffirming how we view ourselves.'

A strong impact of media and powerful flow of Eurosceptic incentives, on the one hand, and feeling of being pro-European, having a lot to share with the Europeans and finally having friends who supported the 'Remain' campaign, on the other hand, contested and has led to a better understanding of the national identity and of themselves to certain extent.

Therefore, on the basis of the discussion it can be retrieved that the UK now is perceived in a more negative way in the outside world and especially in the EU. A strong argument on this point was demonstrated by one of the respondents:

G1: 'Not enough that the UK has been usually associated with powerful empire and echoes of colonialism, now it is treated even in a more superior light.'

Moreover, being a national of the country the citizens one way or another associate themselves being a consistent part of this country and are perceived as representatives of the nation, national identity and culture. That is why it was crucial to observe the way how the attitude of the citizens towards their country and citizenship influenced their attitude to the concept of British national identity and how their self perception in the context of the EU existence has changed. This outcome might have an important implication from the IR point view. From this perspective due to the responses of

participants it was figured out that the young people in the UK have a slight sense of being disregarded now while traveling to the EU countries that some of the respondents have already experienced.

Arguably, they recognise that this kind of feeling has probably a temporary nature while the UK is in the transition period of Brexit, however, this fact certainly does not positively contribute to the British identity affirmation. In this case not only the sense of British identity itself obtains the negative connotation from the point of view of the youth in the UK but also probably other groups of population. Here the attention should be repeatedly drawn to the national symbols as far as their interpretation changes in accordance with the attitude towards national identity and everything which refers to the nation:

G3: 'Brexit has really brought out a sharp, nastier, more vindictive side to symbols like the poppy. What we get here is a really intense performative sense of British national identity, and subsequently satire of that intenseness.'

From that it can be concluded that Brexit did not explicitly bring the actual change to the identity but it rather created a wide range of discussions on it, and in the outcome of the result of it, the attitude towards the nation itself and, consequently, towards the national symbols have slightly altered. And already this fact might have had an impact on the identity and have caused its distortion to a more negative connotation.

However, all the previous judgements are valid in case of common national British identity that all the citizens tend to share. When turning to the regional identities that appeared to be from case to case even stronger in comparison with the British one, the pattern of identity influence by Brexit is different. In case of regional identity in Scotland the events of Brexit have led to the rise of individual patriotism taking into consideration that in the period before that Scottish nationalism had already been developed to a significant extent supported by the active growth of Scottish National Party and its dominance since 2014 (Cockburn, 2019; The Independent).

Thus, it should be stated that even though Brexit did not change the national identity of the British youth substantially it did give an implicit influence on it that was manifested through attributing a more negative connotation to British national identity even though young British people are still supporters and inevitably representatives of it. More detailed information on how exactly young people feel themselves in terms of

national identity in relation to Brexit events will be outlined in the next section as far as there appeared certain differences in the thematic units of responses within different groups of respondents.

3. 2 Groupwise distributed patterns

In this part of the research when the general thematic units have been already described, attention will be drawn to similar and differing patterns of responses according to the group which the participants belong to (students, working students, working youth).

Thus, as a result of analysis of responses of the participants from different groups it is possible to differentiate several common patterns that were repeated by the majority of participants. While at same time there a few crucial differences to be pointed out regarding the process of identity formation and modification under the circumstances of the outer political events such as Brexit in this case. In this part of the thesis these patterns are going to be outlined and further analysed.

Before the analysis of the patterns itself it is crucial to point out that all the participants in terms of defining the national identity referred to a strong value and importance of existence of national identity but defined it as something that rather differs them from the outer world (including the EU after the events of Brexit):

G3: 'For me it's all about differences, I have never thought of British national identity until living in France. So it goes through seeing things that you do not identify with.'

Similar patterns in the responses:

- Impact of media coverage

All the participants agreed on the fact that the notion of national self-identity itself became outspoken and widely discussed due to the whole situation with the events around Brexit and also willingness of Scotland to become independent. Thus, the active media coverage brought a powerful narrative of national self-identity supporting both pro-European but also Eurosceptic tendencies varying from media and informational cause. Although the attitude towards the media coverage has differed between groups, the feeling of having a necessity to discuss the notion of identity while following the events of Brexit in the news was stated and agreed on by all the respondents.

- Role of the national symbols

As it was previously mentioned each group confirmed one similar pattern in putting the core role of identifying the national British identity through national symbols, holidays, sport events and traditions even though oftentimes the youth do not follow or respect most of the entrenched British tradition (e.g. ‘five-o’clock tea tradition’). However, as it was figured out on the example of the young people, they tend to respect and admire most of the national symbols in an ironic way, not perceiving value of them seriously. This fact, nonetheless, does not diminish the importance of these symbols (e.g. Royal family, Remembrance poppy, the Union Jack etc.) on an unconscious level and taking them for granted. The same pattern was followed by the example of classical British style of architecture which is elsewhere preserved in the British cities and also is an example of unifying national indicator being inherited and viewed by the nationals in this way per se without oftentimes recognising it.

- Friends and community impact

When discussing the social groups that might have had an impact, the participants of all the groups turned their attention to similarity of viewpoints on the question of Brexit Referendum voting and all of the respondents and their close friends and social surrounding (apart from families in some cases that are hereby outlined) were adherents of the ‘Remain’ campaign. However, regarding the question of national identity itself, it did not appear as a common topic of discussion within the friendly circle with only exceptions of close friends. As a result, it can be concluded that such a social group as friends did not have a meaningful impact on the national identity altering although it might have only supported or confirmed already existing opinions of close community.

The opposite can be stated about the influence of the social environment at university and/or working place. Both respondents from groups of students and working youth declared high level of engagement of majority of their colleagues and study mates in the discussion around Brexit. The participants described these conversations as *‘trivial small talks on substantive topic that Brexit always appear to be’*.

- National identity change caused by Brexit

The biggest outcome of the research was to find out the similar patterns of probable identity alterations due to the events of Brexit when considering national identity as dependent variable and Brexit as independent variable and not taking into consideration

other influencing socio-cultural aspects as family, friends, community, national symbols that were vastly referred to in the previous section. Thus, when asking direct questions to the participants of focus groups: ‘ Could Brexit play this role of changing the identity? Did it work like that in your case? Can you imagine and describe a situation which would have an enormous impact on your national identity and would have changed it?’ (see Appendix 1. Discussion Guide) the received results appeared to be valid and curious.

To begin with, most of the respondents claimed about being perceived differently by the EU nationals while traveling to EU countries. That aspect was the first one in the way of rethinking and re-establishing the national identity. In those situations in international context while traveling the British nationals are assumed to be the representatives of the whole nation, therefore a slightly negative attitude towards the adherents of ‘Leave’ is currently translated on the entire nation:

G2: ‘It was not so much like a personal reflection but when I start to meet people in other countries in Europe, Brexit would be the first question to ask about. Then you would have thought, personally I would start to defend myself, I didn’t want to Leave, that wasn’t my choice. So we feel that there is a lot more judgement of British people.’

Apart from that, not only the feeling of being offended but also embarrassed for the nation and the decision that the country has made in a consequence caused the process of deterioration of the attitudes of the British youth regarding their common identity. The outer influence of the foreigners and opponents of Brexit in the EU and throughout the world in fact as it turned out have had a stronger impact in terms of understanding or confirming for themselves the incorrectness of the whole narrative of Brexit and truly not supporting it . This opinion can be illustrated by the quotations:

G2: ‘In terms of Brexit and our identity, if something happened and majority of people voted and that sense of way, that sense of narrative was pushed across and I don’t identify with that narrative, feeling at same time that I don’t identify with a different nationality which I am kind of different with, I identify less with this nationality as well.’

G3: ‘I feel distancing myself more from the idea of being British. Especially since I have started working in different countries, and always the first question people ask: ‘So what do you think about Brexit?’ And I am always trying to go through that. I guess it is a notion of shame and embarrassment that kind of comes with it.’

However, answering the question about possibility of a similar political event being able to cause the alterations of the national identity, some participants answered negatively and firmly stated that their attitude towards British identity was negative even in the pre-Brexit period. Still, Brexit has brought a clearer understanding of their own opinions and was an unusual, unpredictable and definitely thought provoking political situation:

G1: 'So as a result, immediately in the aftermath of the Referendum I felt like, but that's because my view of British national identity was already quite negative and not really built on any core ideas. But then the narrative about Britain abroad became dominating it definitely can change the part of my national identity in that sense. Especially when travelling abroad, like Respondent X said, you confront the most with your national identity and then you start to understand how you feel about it being a bit offended. So it was quite unusual.'

All in all, even though on the example of the majority of respondents it has been observed that Brexit indeed changed their attitude towards identifying themselves, still, the young people associate themselves with British national identity as it was figured out in the first section of the chapter. Possibly it might be explained that national identity belongs to the category of primordial identity (Risse, 2010) as far as the criteria of it correspond with the perceptions of the British youth of British identity: existence of in-group and out-group, an inborn character of identity, natural superior position of an in-group, but still a possibility to change the place between in-groups and out-groups which demonstrates the situation about majority of the studying working British youth in the EU. So, despite all the modifications including negative ones the primordial identity remains strong considering the fact that several participants claim about acknowledging the situation of their identity change and perceiving it as consequent situation within the crisis:

G2: 'National identity has definitely changed, it became more, can I say, dogmatic. But I think that what happens anyway when your national identity comes under threat especially by the other people or other nations.'

Differing patterns in the responses:

Identity modifications due to the fact of Brexit

- Family impact on formation of self identity

Prevailing dominance of the family influence in the question of national self-identity formation and its changes has been observed in case of students who did not have a possibility to vote on the Brexit 2016 Referendum in terms of age. Afterwards there would be influence of friends and media which are demonstrating and interpreting the political events and therefore played an important but less significant role in this process. However, this pattern of a strong family influence was mentioned only by a few of the respondents of this group. Still, it was not necessarily connected to the family relationship type or the extent of trust or respect within the families. Interestingly, it was possible to report a correlation between the fact of leaving the hometown to enroll the university by the students or staying in a family place. Some of working youth group respondents at the same time have denied being coherent with their parents in a point of view which best is illustrated by the quotation:

G3: 'It's less about family for me, but more friends because it is contrasting how you lived your life compared to their lives, and you see what is culturally similar and culturally different, what boxes you don't fit in regarding identity.'

Thus, the process of separation with the family also eventually predetermined the way of students' reaction on the Brexit events in terms of identity: whether they were following the viewpoint of the family or constructing their own perception of the situation and their relation to the British nation and identity.

Other factors that influence the identity and its change

In this part of the section attention will be devoted towards the aspects that were not initially expected to appear during the research. However, even though those factors did not have a clear influence on the national change but rather they have had an implicit meaning in this process that is why it is needed to mention them.

- Different attitudes towards media

In the previous section it was mentioned that the influence of the media coverage in the question of influencing on national identity formation attitude varied among the groups of respondents. The groups of students respondents dedicated significantly longer period of time to the discussion of media impact as far as it was the first option and the

way to realise the actual course of events for them. Apart from that, in terms of age the participants agreed that the Brexit was one of the first resonant and widely publicly discussed political event in the life taking place in their country. That is why they were predominantly actively following the news especially in the beginning of Brexit talks. Hence, the media in this case assisted young people in their political opinion formation and, consequently, played a role of a thought provoking factor regarding national identity.

On the contrary, those working students and working youth who already had a possibility to vote felt themselves more engaged into the questions around causes and consequences of Brexit, relied on their own knowledge, experience and research on this topic and tend to be influenced more independently by receiving the information from the most prominent British media (BBC, The Guardian) and making their own conclusions. Thus, the representatives of the working youth perceived the information about Brexit in a less sensitive way which did not lead to the drastic national identity change.

In this case also not only the allocation to one of three groups mattered but also the field of studies or line of work distinguished the viewpoints. Thus, those students whose major subject at university is politics or social science and working youth are working being engaged in this sphere, tend to follow the news owing to the studying/job functions. However, this group of respondents considered the British media being biased to a more significant extent than the other participants. Consequently, they are prone to have a lower level of trust towards media so its influence on them even in terms of national identity discussion appeared to be weaker.

- Working in multicultural surrounding and its influence

The participants of working students and working youth group agreed on the fact of reaffirmation of the national identity and denied its stability. Thus, it might be explained by the fact that outer world events such as Brexit are probable to play a certain role in identity modification. The participants accepted that having a strong core of a national British identity but diverse circumstances such as living, studying or working abroad might slightly change. For instance, those British people who lived in the countries of the EU for a long period of time tend to feel themselves more pro-European and associate themselves with European identity.

Interestingly, the group of working youth agreed on the fact of distancing from the feeling of being British in case of working in the international companies in the UK. It

was explained by the respondents that a probable reason of it is the corporate culture of international corporations being imposed on all the levels of working within it. Thus, it brings up an understanding of the world, states and even the national identity specifically through the prism of globalisation. Another important point that the group of working youth and working students mentioned (but possibly can be also applied for the group of students) about the companies where they work in is promotion and sense of respect towards multiculturalism. It means that on the example of this group of participants a civic type of identity (Risse, 2010) prevailed as it was built upon their national identity and has led to the formation of a collective identity which is more global than national identity. Thus, this group of respondents during the period of their work has more probably already gone through the process of national identity reaffirmation and the Brexit even though being a crucial event for the whole country it did not have an impact on national identity.

Change of lifestyle and a country of living/residence for a rather long period of time that some of the working youth have already experienced in the life might bring a significant change into understanding of their own national identity. Moreover, before the Brexit will have come into force large number of students have travelled from the EU to the UK and vice versa on the exchange studying programmes (e.g. Erasmus+). The same situation also is related to recent graduates who have had an opportunity to have an internship in of the EU member state. Therefore, those participants who have had such an experience of living abroad (for job purpose) stated about a stronger feeling of attachment towards the European identity and having a sense of being a part of the EU. Those respondents without doubts claimed that the events of Brexit did not have a direct meaning on their identity as far as even before that and during the entire process of Brexit discussion they national identity has already shifted to being more pro-European and even a sense of being a global citizen of the world. This fact might be explained that in case of British youth working in the EU countries, an understanding of having a lot to share becomes dominant and people consequently are acknowledging the fact of having a common collective pro-European identity which is also shared by them.

- Personal issues influence

Interestingly, among other unpredictable results of the research was the fact that the participants of the students' group have also slightly touched upon the issue of having a

personal psychological crisis when becoming a student and subsequently living through a new challenging stage of life. For those participants who are first, second or third year university students the events around Brexit coincided with the period of serious personal difficulties. Therefore, for them question of national identity alongside with self-reflection and self-identity were included into the list of things which were deeply revisited and overestimated. Even though this aspect was not included into the research question and was already figured out during the process of conducting focus groups, in terms of identity change it might play an additional role that exaggerated to some extent the notions of being nationally patriotic in case of regional identity, to be more specific, Scottish national identity in Scotland. Regarding those students who live in England, it was concluded that the events of Brexit for them either did not bring an influence or modified the attitude towards British identity in a way with acquiring a more negative connotation as it was analysed in the previous section.

To sum up, conducting the empirical part of the thesis has demonstrated the existence of strong notions of British identity as a prior national identity of the participants, however, this information cannot be generalised as far as some of the participants referred to the European identity primarily to the British. Besides that in this section of the thesis main factors influencing the national identity of the British youth of three groups (students, working youth and working students) were outlined. The main focus of this section was to define the thematic units that were relevant for the research question and were mentioned by the respondents repetitively. Also, similar and different patterns of these thematic units among the three groups were identified and analysed.

Conclusions

The given thesis was aimed at exploring the notions of British youth national identity in terms of the possibility to be influenced by the events of Brexit. Thus, as a result of the work in the first part of the research the outlook of relevant theoretical framework and concepts was provided where the notions of national and collective identities in general, alongside with the British and the European identities, in particular, were examined. The literature review was based on the constructivist approach towards identity and allowed to frame the central categories of the study. In the second part, research design and methodology for qualitative method of focus groups was described and justified being applicable for the research in terms of its aims and research question. Moreover, the usage of such a qualitative method as focus groups has provided a possibility to receive in-depth individual responses that represented the way how the youth in the UK construct their national self-identity. Finally, in the last section of the work, the main outcomes of focus groups conducting were grouped, summarised and compared according to the category that five focus groups were divided into: students, working youth and working students. The last part of the thesis provided the main findings and based on them it is possible to make conclusions.

To begin with, what is central among the outcomes of the research is that the hypotheses of the research were tested and both of them were proved ultimately which has led to a conclusion that indeed social attributes that were referred to in the work as ‘national indicators’ did play a more crucial role in identity formation and alteration in comparison with the external political events or crisis situations. However, at the same time the influence of Brexit on British youth national identity change also appeared to be critical. The further justification of the hypotheses testing and proving are provided in the following conclusions:

1. The British youth tend to have a clear understanding of their national identity which was formed by the number of factors even though acknowledging the imperfections of the national narrative and lack of support towards the current direction of the UK in international relations i.e. Brexit, as far as the majority of the British youngsters represent the adherents of ‘Remain’ campaign. The dominance of putting British national identity on the first place is prevailing in opinions, however, it cannot be called ubiquitous taking into consideration that for some of the young

people regional identity is more crucial (on the example of Scotland, Northern Ireland). Besides that, cases of prioritising the European identity in comparison with the national one were also detected and described. Apart from that, the outcomes of the research did not demonstrate any correlations between the fact of placing the British identity prior to the regional or European identity and relation to one of three categories of groups of participants.

2. Regarding the notion of European identity, there is a tendency of pro-European views and beliefs among the British youth and acknowledging by them the fact of sharing a lot in common with the Europeans. The direction of Euroscepticism is not supported by the interviewed young people. Moreover, nearly all the participants of focus groups support the idea of the EU and view as a 'practical' organisation that promotes a lot of notions which are respected by the young people: democracy, tolerance, diplomacy, multiculturalism. However, from the point of view of the British youth these facts are related mostly not to the European identity itself but to a pro-European feeling and attachment to the EU. Thus, it means that for them 'Europeanness' is mostly associated with a collective identity which exists apart from their national identity and in the biggest number of cases it does not go prior to British national identity. Moreover, as it was figured out, the idea of European identity for some of the youngsters is not considered as and not equated with the term 'identity' at all and especially 'national identity'.

3. Socio-cultural attributes appeared to have a core meaning in the question of identifying the affiliation towards a nation in the case of the British youth. To be more specific it was found out that national indicators such as symbols, public holidays, cultural events, celebrities and sports have a unifying role and contribute to the national identity construction. This process happens this way even though the attitude of majority of the young British towards national symbols is rather sarcastic, they are still perceived dogmatically and give a sense of common shared history, traditions and values which leads to the feeling of being proud of being British. The patterns mentioned above also did not vary on the basis of three groups of participants.

However, regarding specifically the social influence, family did play a crucial role for the majority of British students as far as at the moment of Referendum they were younger and were not able to vote in terms of age. Thus, discussions of the issue with a

family and the closest surrounding predetermined the direction of the personal opinion of the youth with some exceptions when the family members were supporters of the 'Leave' campaign and, therefore, could not have a serious impact on their children opinion because basically all the youth in their friends' communities would opt for 'Remain'.

The main outcome of the research which was basically targeted on answering the research question which was formulated in a way: *'How have the events of Brexit influenced the way the youth in the United Kingdom construct its national identity?.'* Mainly it was necessary to find out whether this influence existed and more specifically what this impact entails. So, it was figured out that in fact Brexit did have an impact on a way of national identity and, moreover, it has changed an attitude of the British youth towards their national identity. Namely, the British national identity acquired a negative connotation for them which was explained by several reasons. Firstly, young people refuse to support the general narrative of the country which has made a decision that they did not accept. This fact undoubtedly undermines the credibility of the governing political parties and deteriorates the standpoint towards the whole idea around this state and nation which, consequently, results in the weakening of affiliation with the British national identity. Secondly, tremendous effect on the youth (and probably the other groups of the UK citizens) self-perception of identity is still being caused by the outer world (the EU specifically) and especially the nationals of the states that were initially against Brexit. Thus, while currently travelling to the EU member states the British young people oftentimes have a sense of shame and embarrassment when being covertly accused for representing the 'Leave' campaign viewpoint although, on the contrary, in most of the cases about the British youth, their political preference is opposite.

In terms of implications of the research in the field of International Relations it may be concluded that the findings of the research provide quite an exhaustive understanding of the incentives of British youth in relation to their identification with the nation and state. Returning to the concepts of 'us' and 'other' that is widely applied in the sphere of international relations and conflicts resolution, the research demonstrates that currently a political event of Brexit has brought a negative connotation to the British identity from the perspective of the youth. On the other hand, taking into consideration the stability of their viewpoints concerning support of the EU it may be interpreted and predicted that this generation of the UK citizens will be still open and eager to travel to

the EU, study or work there. So, despite the decision about Brexit for the young people there is no severely distinguishing boundary between the UK and the EU which might probably be visible in terms of international relations and cooperation in the next decades.

The given research to a certain extent fulfills the gap in the scholastic literature in terms of national identity change of the British youth specifically caused by the global political event. Considering the further implications of the research, it might serve as a starting point for the further research of the British youth national identity alteration. In a further research both qualitative and quantitative methods may be applied in order to assess the statistics of answers depending on the region. Therefore, the region of the youth, different types of job occupation, the field of studies might be among the major indicators of defining categories for sampling. This will give an opportunity to find more other detailed patterns and thematic units specifically for each category.

Finally, based on the qualitative analysis conducted in the form of five focus groups divided into three categories (students, working youth and working students) it is plausible to conclude that the research clearly illustrates the negative impact of a crisis political event such as Brexit on the perception of national identity by the British youth, but it also raised a question of the other factors that construct, modify and reaffirm the identity as far as the attitude towards and understanding of national identity cannot remain stable and is revisited by the influence of these factors (national symbols, public holidays, sports etc).

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Discussion Guide

Moderator Introduction (2 minutes)

Welcome, I would like to thank you for finding time and opportunity to share your experiences in the topic about the construction of youth's identity taking into consideration the events of Brexit in the UK. What you have to say during this discussion or focus-group is important – it will be used to further work on the project which is aimed to study possible influences on changes in British youth identity. The discussion will take around 1 hour and 15 minutes. I will introduce myself and then I will let you to introduce yourselves.

(Introductions)

Now I will read out information about the procedure, Informed consent, recording and data collection (2 minutes)

- Firstly, I want to be sure that everyone is comfortable with the discussion topic.. Does any of you have any questions about the study?
- If at any point you become uncomfortable with our discussion you can leave at any time.
- All first names will remain private.
- It is important to fix all the ideas that will be brought up by each participants so the whole conversation will be recorded. The recording will be destroyed after reviewing.

Ground Rules (2 minutes)

I would like to present some rules for us to keep in mind so that the discussion goes smoothly.

1. Everyone's participation is important. Feel free to say what you think...and remember, there are no right or wrong answers.
2. It is important that we hear everyone's honest opinion. I may interrupt you to move the discussion along so that we can hear from everyone and cover all of the questions.
3. Think about what is true for you.

Does everyone agree with rules and data collection procedure?

Do you have any questions concerning the procedure or ground rules?

I. Introductory questions(15 minutes)

Where and what do you study?

If working: What is your current work connected with?

What do you like doing in everyday life aside from studies/work?

Have you ever participated in any focus-groups or interviews?

What do you expect from the ongoing focus-group?

II. Warm-up questions, getting to the topic

To what extent are you interested in the world of politics? How/in what way do you follow the events of Brexit?

How interesting do you find the issues of Brexit for yourself?

Do you discuss it within your families/friends?

How do your parents define their national identity?

III. Core questions

Part1: Identity (10minutes)

When did you firstly think about your national self-identity?

To what extent do you feel British, European or any other relation to national identity?

Do you feel you share something in common with other Brits, Europeans/local citizens?

What do you share?

Is it easy for you to answer these questions precisely?

Part2: Eurosceptic or pro-European (15 minutes)

What can be the reasons of Eurosceptic moods in the UK?

Have you ever read/heard any mentions of Euroscepticism in media? How do the media in the UK discuss the question? Does it somehow influence your attitude towards the EU?

How would you explain the term 'Euroscepticism'? How often and in what context to you meet this term?

Part3: Brexit talks, its influence on identity (20 minutes)

Were you able to vote during the Brexit referendum? If yes and you can speak about it openly, what did you opt for?

If not, how would you have voted?

Has the way you think of yourself or see yourself (in terms of national identity) changed with the events of Brexit? Was it different before? Is it stronger now?

How do you think a person develops his understanding of national identity? What influences that? Is it family, friends, media ?

Could Brexit play this role of changing the identity? Did it work like that in your case?

Can you imagine and describe a situation which would have an enormous impact on your identity and would have changed it anyway?

IV. Concluding questions and remarks (5 minutes)

Do you think it even matters how people view their national identity? What does it change in their lives? What does it change in a society?

Is there anything else that you would like to mention, add or bring to the discussion?

Thank you for participation in the research.