

A Comparison of Subjective Experiences and Responses to Austerity of UK and Greek Youth

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Research Rationale

- * *Following previous research carried by Chalari (2014, 2015), this qualitative study explores the ways that the younger generation in Greece and UK have been affected by austerity policy measures.*
- * *Exploration of similarities and differences in young peoples' subjective experiences and responses may help to indicate whether there is a tendency of long-term negative effect of austerity across Europe*

Austerity in Europe

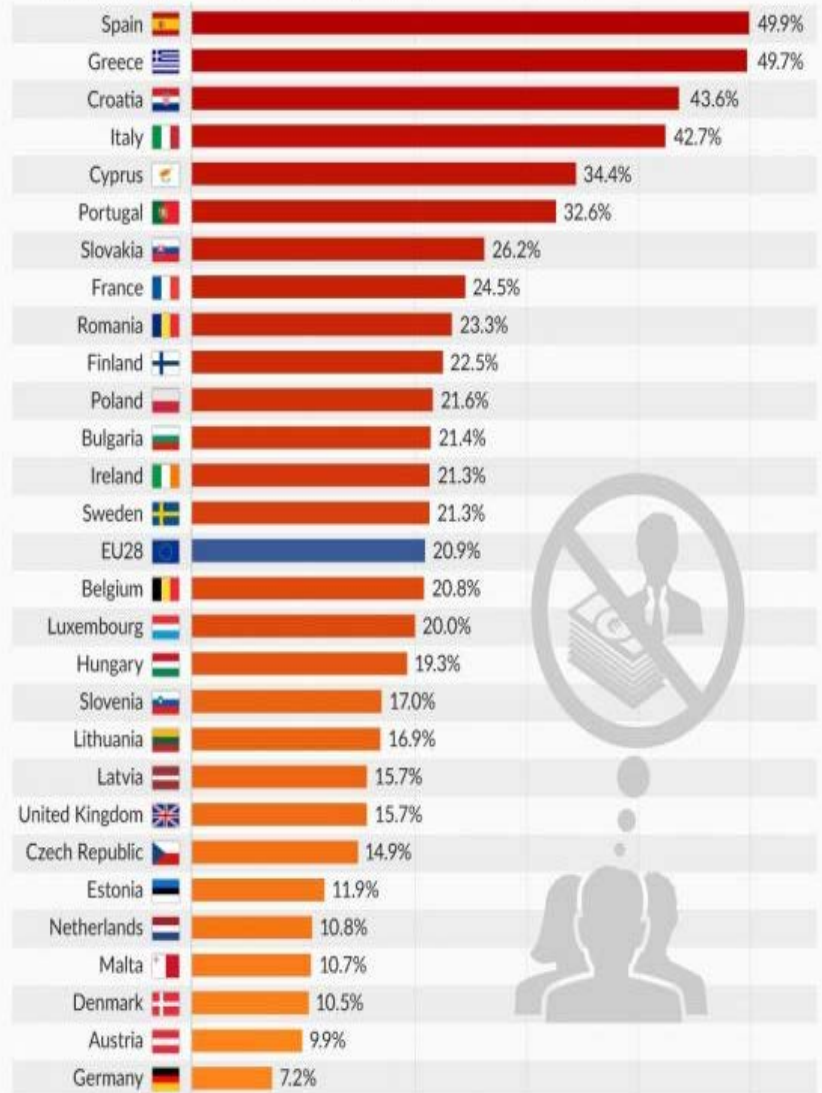
-Since 2010, many European economies have faced severe difficulties → 'austerity' measures

-Busch *et al* (2013): these austerity policies are having a significant impact on the European Social Model → growing unemployment, falling real wages, cuts in the social security system and privatisation of public property across the EU as a whole

-In contrast to previous generations, young people (18-25) in contemporary Europe have experienced a fragmented, de-standardized and uncertain reality, meaning that young people in contemporary Europe are perceived as the first generation to do worse than their parents (Hamilton, Antonucci and Roberts, 2014).

Youth Unemployment Still Unrelenting in Europe

Youth unemployment rate in the European Union in March 2015*



'We all ate it together'

- Youth unemployment (under the age of 25) in Greece remains the highest -along with Spain, at almost 49%
- In 2016 the national debt stood at 185% of GDP
- Capital controls were instituted in June 2015 to limit both the amount of
- During 2015, Greeks had to elect and re-elect the current coalition government
- 2012: Neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn being elected as the third most powerful party
- Referendum on Austerity(July 2015), which received over 60% of the Greek votes against the latest austerity measures



Impact on Greek Young People

- Young people's lives : unprecedented youth unemployment rates and massive youth migration of waves of qualified and over qualified young people
- Young generation: uncertainty, disappointment, pessimism, insecurity, fear, anger, negativism, pressure, anxiety and depression (Chalari, 2012, 2014, 2015)
- About 120,000 Young Greek professionals have emigrated (Koniordos, 2016)



'We are all in it together'

- £36 billion worth of public expenditure cuts to the end of 2014, with another £55 billion worth of cuts initially planned for between 2015-2019 (OBR, 2014)
- Total public expenditure is projected to fall to its lowest levels for 80 years by 2018-19 (OBR, 2014)



Negative Changes to benefits for young people

- In some instances, benefits have been removed altogether, e.g. in relation to Education Maintenance Allowance
- Youth Service: up to 2000 jobs lost and around 350 youth centres closed (Sealey 2015)
- Removing entitlement to housing benefit from some of those aged 18–21, and the tightening of the system of entitlement to jobseeker's allowance for those aged under 21
- Tripling of Higher Education tuition fees from £3000 to up to £9,000 per year in 2012
- Replacement of HE grants with loans in 2016-17

Austerity impact on UK young people

- The biggest losers of austerity in the UK, as they often can't get jobs, or they find temporary, low-paid and with fewer hours than they would like (Blanchflower, 2015)
- Under-employment' (workers working fewer hours than they would like), has also 'disproportionately' affected young people (Lupton, 2015)
- While real earnings have fallen across the board since 2008, there has been 'a clear pattern' of larger falls in earnings at younger ages (Emmerson, et al, 2015)
- Intergenerational gap is increasingly evident in areas as a consequence of policy e.g. older peoples' pensions (Broughton *et al*, 2015)
- The estimate of debt from students leaving university following these changes is over £44, 000, which is nearly £20,000 more than before the change (Crawford and Jin, 2014).
- Led to falls in the likelihood of owning a home and increasing household debt

Methods

Comparison between 36 semi-structured narrative interviews in Greece– on Greek crisis

And 20 semi-structured narrative interviews in UK (Worcester)

Common Basis of Comparison:

*Non-generalizable sample/indicative tendencies

- *Ages: 18-25
- *Lower-Middle Class
- *Both Genders
- *Students (employed/unemployed)
- *Come from various areas within UK
- *Same questions asked
- *Sampling: Opportunistic/convenience (+gatekeepers)
- *Analysis: Based on common 'themes'

Findings: Similarities

Impact on personal circumstances:

- UK participants reported lack of youth facilities, limited access to health services, lack of money, having to work more than one job, and rising costs in relation to food, potential unemployment and welfare cuts
- Greek study: similar experiences but primarily support offered through family not state

Emotions

- UK participants expressed feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, worry about high unemployment rates, and concerns that the future would be worse. They all detailed that economic restrictions were being experienced first-hand and this resulted in prolonged feelings of pessimism and disappointment
- Greek participants also reported clearly negative projections about the future of Greece and fears about even more difficulties

Concern for the future

- * *... so I think that compared with, say, two generations like my grandparents' parents who just walked out of school and get a job straight away and so did my mum to a certain extent she's been in the same job for like 28 years or something. And I don't think that opportunities there as much for people my age. (C2P2)*

Findings: Differences

- **Increased tuition fees:**
 - **UK:** a need to work, and the majority of participants worked, some in more than one job, or had to rely on other family members for financial support.
 - **Greek Study:** no such concern although most had to work to support their income
 - **Comparison with other countries:** a number of participants stated that their current economic circumstances were good, or that they felt or were feeling better compared to other countries
 - **Greek Study:** no such evidence
- ## Emotions
- Both did express anxiety but the way they expressed them was different. Anxiety was also reported by British participants in relation to increasing class divide
 - **Greek Study:** participants did not express class consciousness
 - Some UK participants realised that they were in **a better situation** because as students had access to a steady income from tuition fees, and felt lucky as a consequence of this, and had optimism that a university degree would secure a better future
 - **Greek Study:** no such evidence

Crisis? What Crisis?

- * *Yeah, yeah, I think like knowing I've learnt how much we have to pay off an when like it's the whatever we're earning above £21,000 for example not the whole lot gets taken away, and then it gets written off after 30 years. But also my degree will really take me to a career rather than doing another degree which I still have to do then, so yeah that's the reason the good degree itself is valuable. (M3P3)*
- * *Well, like I said before I feel very guilty because I'm better off, I'm as a student even though I know most of it is loans, I'm living a better life than when I was that's generally because I've moved 130 miles. But then it's hard to look back, I'm very grateful for where I am but then I want everyone else to be happier. (A3P3)*

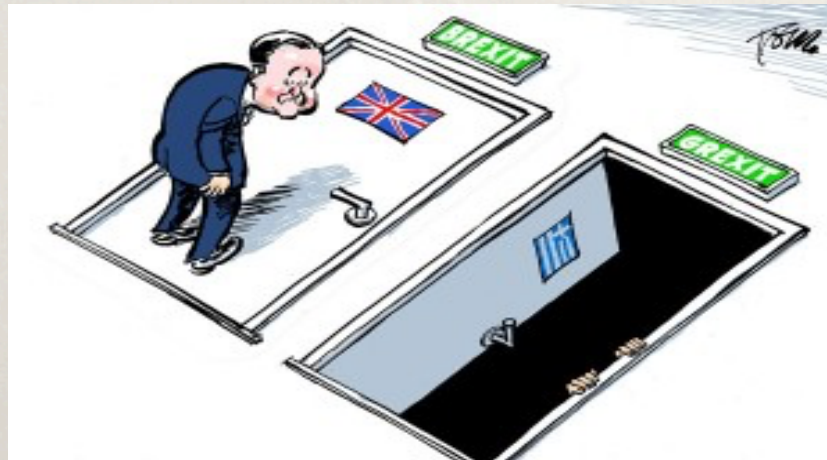
Conclusions: Crisis vs Austerity

➤ Greek participants described their experiences as akin to an intense and rapid change of the prominent norms, an almost violent transformation of their everyday life, of their feelings, their concerns and ability to cope with the rapidly changing reality

* UK participants' experiences of austerity as challenging and infused with everyday anxieties and tensions, which, however, seem more like a continuous life struggle rather than a series of unexpected threatening social, political and economic transformations.

Younger vs Older Generations

- * Greek Debt: younger generations are called to repay older generations' debt and ways of life
- * They will end up receiving lower pensions and even fewer benefits
- * Some have to leave Greece in hope for a better future
- * Many are still relying on family
- * Brexit: Younger generation voted to remain whereas older generation voted to exit
- * Current policies (debt) determine the future of younger generation (eg increased tuition fees)
- * Not as many rely on family



Conclusion

* Paradox: The effect of UK Austerity in participants is been mediated by the impact of the perceived positive impact of increased tuition fees. This means that they have not been exposed to the consequences of the austerity as the Greek young people have

* However in the longer term when they leave University and the tuition fees are no longer mediating the economic circumstances then there is a potential for them to experience austerity in similar ways compared to Greek youth had. Eg debt repayment, unemployment, underemployment, uncertainty, anxiety, fear and inability to plan their future.

Conclusions

- * Whereas the Greek debt problem is more of macro economic, social and political problem in terms of the fact that it is the government that has borrowed on behalf of the people, in the British case, it is more of a micro economic, social and political problem, as the debt is individualised to each person
- * Greek younger generation has to pay back the money borrowed by older generations (old debt) by relying on Family support
- * British younger generation is 'forced' to borrow money (create new debt) by relying on the state (loans)
- * Greek circumstances shows us that once debt becomes an emotional and social concern (especially for younger generations) , then it has the potential to impact in terms of facilitating prolonged experiences of:
 - * Disappointment, uncertainty, fear, pessimism, insecurity anger, pressure, anxiety and depression.
 - * In the longer term this will have implications not just for individual countries but the wider European prospect for prosperity as a whole.

Questions?

