

When I think of Europe ...

Wendekinder as a diverse 'Generation of Transformation'

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1. Introduction: 1989/90 – after over a quarter century and the recent rise of the unhappy and the fearful

1989 was, in effect, the breaking of a political sonic barrier. Parts of mankind – in the industrialized “West” – moved into a new era and forces like globalisation, trans- or denationalisation, digitalisation, etc. became formative for societies (Beck 1986; Castells 2010; Dalton/Welzel 2014; Pries 2008; Zürn 1998). Some scholars considered that this time period marked the end of this age in history and that the time of Kantian eternal peace was upon us (Fukuyama 1992). But it was not the end at all. For the states of the former Warsaw Pact it was the start of transformation process that put a market economy in place of a command economy, swapped socialist one party systems for liberal democracy, and, in some cases, even stimulated nation-building (e.g. Baltics, Slovakia and Czech Republic, or the states of former Yugoslavia and former Soviet Union) or nation-reunification (Germany) to be performed (Merkel 2010).

Fukuyama mentioned the idea that democracy as a concept won and hence liberal, capitalist, and democratic countries would be found everywhere because it was the most successful societal system. In accordance with his train of thought, an economic centered Union of European States expanded successfully and tried to integrate up to 28 states (Wirsching 2012). Recent political situations in Hungary (Fidesz) and Poland (PiS), but also in other European Countries like France (Front National), Netherlands (PVV), or Great Britain (UKIP and Brexit), show that the cleavage between nation and Europe is all but gone, and that post-democratic (see Crouch 2008) developments/perceptions seem to be ever more visible in parliamentary systems.

Through the looking glass, the influence of macro trends as well as questions about the future of Europe and democracy can be analyzed in the new *Bundesländer*, where there is a specific political culture that shares a lot of traits with other post-socialist societies including a traditionally strong left party that is defined by the European Council on Foreign Relations as euro skeptic and populist (Denison 2016, S. 20). Since the elections in Sachsen-Anhalt, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and Berlin in 2016 a right-wing populist party – the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) – garnered support of 15 to 25 percent of voters.

All of that – the transformation in 1989/90 and the 25 years thereafter – left a huge impression on the population of said areas. On the one hand you can see infrastructural improvements in new streets,

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modernized houses, diversity of products in supermarkets, and a very mobile society travelling and migrating throughout Europe and the world. But you can also see shrinking populations in a lot of these countries and rising poverty of special (mostly the inflexible) parts of society. Beyond these general experiences it is widely argued that the imprint was strongest with the so called 'Generation² of Transformation' (Ahbe/Gries 2006; Lindner 2003). In this paper we want to take a look at the German group. In Germany the terms "Generation der Wendekinder³" and "Dritte Generation Ost⁴" were established in the first decade of the 21st century. Both terms described certain age cohorts born in the GDR. They represent people who were old enough to experience parts of their socialization in the former system and lightly experienced the revolution process, but who were still too young to be overly integrated in or tarnished by the old system institutions, like the army, labour market or political parties (Koschkar et al. 2014; 2016). It is a point of ongoing discussion which birth years can exactly define this group. For the GDR/East Germany, it was discussed to count all people who were born between 1973 and 1984 (Ahbe/Gries 2006; Lettrari/Nestler/Troi-Boeck 2016), or between 1975 and 1985 (Hacker et al. 2012). This would be a number of estimated 2.4 million people. Others argue that one can not define this whole age group as one generation. Due to different experiences with GDR institutions like schools, the army, FDJ, and different cultural experiences, it would be better to divide this generation into a generation of "Wendejugend", born in the 1970s, and a generation of "Wendekinder", born in the 1980s. The "Wendejugend" experienced socialization in GDR institutions like school where the "Wendekinder" did so just very marginally (Kubiak/Weinel 2016). However, for this defined/framed group, and even if it is debated to call it at all a generation, the important question after over 25 years still is: What is the result of the aforementioned imprint for young (East-) Germans in united Germany? Are they different in their political beliefs and values to older and younger generations in Germany (Gerland 2016)? Is there a specific ability/competence we can find in this group due to the experience of the transformation process in their youth?

This contribution builds on the premises put forward in recent years by younger scholars taking a look at this generation (Lettrari et al. 2016a; 2016b), and assumes that, despite the diversity of the generation not only within different countries, but also between them: That distinct habitual differences vis-a-vis older and for the matter at hand younger cohorts do exist.⁵ Therefore, a relative importance, accelerated by recent European developments, could be bestowed on the whole group.

2. Nation and 'Wendekinder'

The very strong concept of 'nations' came up in the 19th century. This concept was and still is consid-

² This concept of generation (originally sociological analyzed by Karl Mannheim 1964) is used because of some distinct advantages in scientific usage vis-a-vis simple age cohorts or sum such but simultaneously accepting the constructive moment that is inherent (Kansteiner 2014). However it is not easy to define exact age cohorts for this generation.

³ Generation of children of „Wende“.

⁴ Third Generation East.

⁵ Some empirical evidence shows that "members" of the generation share some beliefs and gain successively influence for example in German political party system (Nestler 2016).

ered to be a very important category for identity processes. Benedict Anderson describes the construction process of nations through several constituting pillars: language, history, territory/borders, book print, and the imagination of a community (Anderson 1988). When we think about post socialist states, we need to keep in mind that some of these tried or try to create a new national identities by narrating their history in a linear fashion from long ago – so called “Ursprungserzählung” – till the present day; henceforth constructing a nation. States like Ukraine or Slovakia needed to establish unique myths because of their strong historic linkage to other nations, as well as most of the time being bereft of their own territory and institutions.

Focusing on Germany, Herfried Münkler (2011) shows a similar problem, traditionally speaking, with regards to 1871 and the breaches in national continuity in the 20th Century due to totalitarianism. Here a lot of events, e.g. Barbarossa, Nibelungen, Luther, Faust, Prussia, Nazis, and the partition are included, which could contribute to the creation of a German identity. According to Münkler, the German reunification is in line with the events mentioned above, and has a rather strong impact in the process of identity creation. One has to wonder how the author would interpret the summer of the refugees and the “Wir schaffen das” from Chancellor Angela Merkel in this context. One core question, over 25 years after reunification, could be made about which groups benefited from the way the German reunification has been narrated, and which groups maybe have not benefited (Port 2016)? This questions have huge implications for the assessment respective to the presumed importance of the nation versus Europe.

But national analyses and national identities are not helping a whole lot to explain societies in the 21st Century. It is more and more necessary to see both nation and migration as transnational concepts. People do not move from A to B to stay in B forever, they retain strong connections to their homes, and sometimes there is actually more than one place they call “home” (for basic explanation of transnationalism and the distinction to the term globalization look at Pries 2008). The same happened to the concept of integration. This term should not mean any more that the individual from A needs to integrate into the defined culture of B, when B, at the same time, is not changing at all. With people having ties to different places on earth society is also getting more diverse and the concept of one unique and homogenous nation is getting more and more obsolete. In the German context the term “Die neuen Deutschen”⁶, created by Naika Foroutan (2010), discusses that the German society needs to change as a whole to integrate every migrating individual, thus creating a new Germany, something that not everyone is ready to accept.

For us it is important to keep this image of nations, nationalism, transnationalism, and integration in mind when we want to present our results concerning the question: Are young East Germans distinctively positioned on the cleavage of “nation vs. Europe”?

After the German reunification, East Germans needed to find their own identity in the unified Germany. They maybe already have felt German before, but you can find data that shows that until now East

⁶ The new Germans. This term is now also used by Herfried and Marina Münkler (2016). This idea is interesting in the sense that it refers to an integration where all parts of a society need to adapt to create a multiple identity.

Germans are not seen as “real” Germans by the old West German population. This degradation of East Germans (Hollenstein 2012) and the fact that a majority of East Germans feels more East German than German (Klausmeier 2012) represent an existing gap within the German population. This notion is stronger among older age groups, which have been socialized and also ideologicalized by the Cold War and the Separation, but can be seen in the younger generation as well.

In correspondence to the statement above, it can be conclusively stated that the Wendekinder are a very diverse group of people. *Firstly*, there are the open minded young people who are more European than nationalists. Most of them are living in the urban centers⁷, something that more often than not means that they are not living in East Germany anymore, but in the western parts of Germany or abroad. Interestingly the founders of “Dritte Generation Ost” are mostly found in this group. They left their hometown, but still had or started to get the feeling that there is an East Germaneness inside them. In the beginning this group of academics was living mostly in the central districts of Berlin, and began to participate in identity politics as East Germans. Also, you can *secondly* find the people, who stayed in East Germany. Here you can also find groups that are open minded and say that they want to try to be part of the future of a diverse Germany.⁸ However, *thirdly*, we know relatively little about the whole 2.4 million ‘Wendekinder’. It is to be expected that they constitute a large group of anti-European oriented people, especially among young, males with low educations and low incomes.

All in all, this led to the formulation of three hypothesizes. With data from Eurobarometer and surveys of exit polls from Länder elections we want to answer these questions, and give a brief insight into this diverse Generation of the East German children of transition.

1. On average they are more open minded as a whole than their ancestors.
2. There are national distinctions that put the respective groups in line with their fellow countrymen and, therefore, produces levels within the data. It is quite possible that states that shared similar transformation experiences, as well as an ever-nebulous cultural space, will be pretty close to each other.
3. On top of this, differences, even within national peer groups, will show the moment the questionnaires include socio-economical and educational data underscoring the importance of accounting for intersectionality vs. constructed unity.

3. Empirical results

Cross national data for the Wendekinder is hard to come by. In fact most opinion polls don’t differentiate between region of birth, birth cohorts, education, and socioeconomic parameters. The big shots, like World Value Survey (WVS) and Eurobarometer (EB), allow scientist to analyse their data question by question with distribution of age and other demographic factors. Thus it is possible to put for-

⁷ In East Germany we just have two or three of them (Berlin, Leipzig and maybe Dresden).

⁸ The authors of this article belong to this group, but were born in cities (Berlin and Rostock).

ward some assumptions, but the researcher is faced with a twofold problem. First, the assertions rely on a depressingly low sample size (n). Equally important is that, especially with EB, we question who asks what question, when, and why. Some papers argue that the distinction between propaganda and serious opinion poll is fluid (Höpner/Jurczyk 2012; Nissen 2014). Furthermore, despite having access to detailed data, no distinction between East and West Germans are made. Therefore, this contribution will use only metadata from EB, and look closely into exit poll reports from East German Länder elections since 2014.

On the meta level, Immigration (48 %) and terrorism (39 %) are the most important issues facing the EU at the moment. This opinion is shared among all member states since early 2015 and leapfrogged the “economic situation” that has ever since declined (Eurobarometer 85, S. 5–7). At the same time, connected to the topic of refugees and migration, the image of the EU is diminished in public opinion. A negative view is shared by 27 percent of the population which is a rise of eight percentage points within a year (S. 15). Funny enough, the outlook on the future of the EU is rather positive, especially in Eastern member states, with the populations in the UK and Germany have to be counted to the least optimistic (S. 20).

Within the German case, the concept of nation is more accepted than EU. But, on average, German citizens tend from a majority standpoint not to trust in either of the two. Among professions students, therefore younger cohorts, the EU is seen as beneficial, while they are accepting of the nation as part of their identity at the same time (see table 1).

Table 1: EU vs. Nation (GER) in percent⁹

		tend to trust	tend not to trust	no idea
EU	<i>Age</i>			
	15-24	41	47	12
	25-34	33	60	7
	35-44	19	67	14
	45-54	27	59	14
	55-64	20	71	9
	65-74	25	63	12
	+75	36	50	14
	<i>Socio-professional</i>			
	Selfemployed	33	61	6
	Managers	35	50	15
	Other white collars	27	65	8
	Manual workers	20	70	10
House persons	21	65	14	
Unemployed	21	64	15	
Retired	28	60	12	
Students	49	37	14	
GER	<i>Age</i>			
	15-24	40	49	11
	25-34	35	60	5

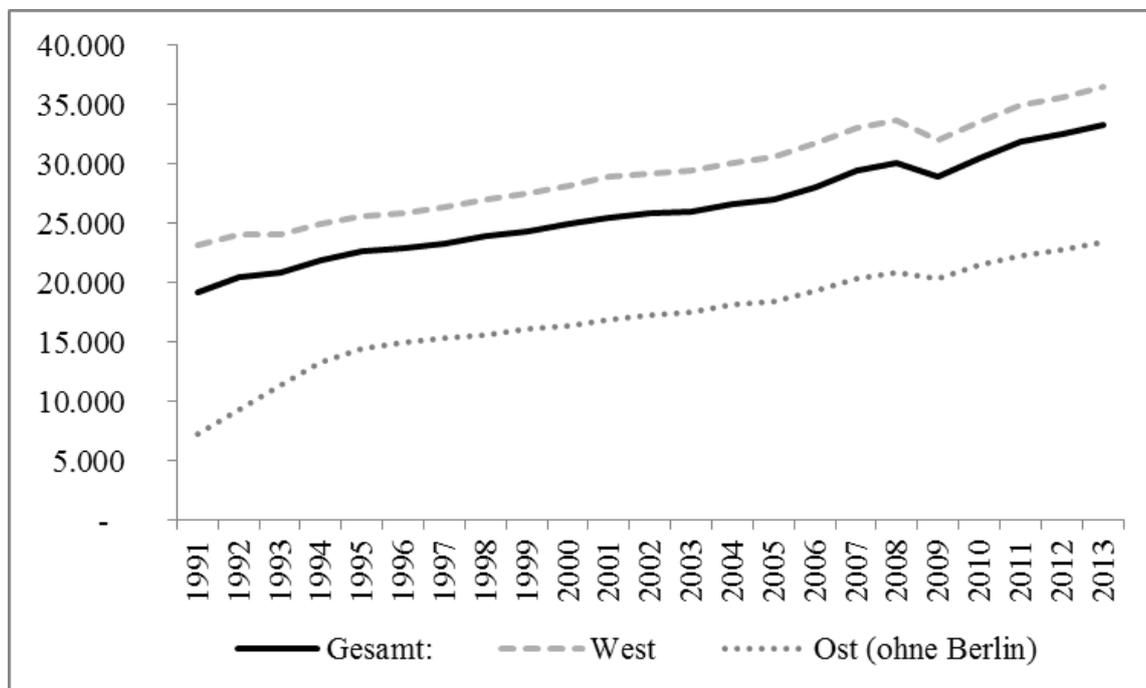
⁹ “Trust” would be translated into German as *Vertrauen* but is better perceived as *Zutrauen*. The questionnaire asked: “I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it.”

	35-44	31	64	5
	45-54	38	56	6
	55-64	33	64	3
	65-74	43	51	6
	+75	59	35	6
<i>Socio-professional</i>				
	Selfemployed	31	54	5
	Managers	45	52	3
	Other white collars	39	52	9
	Manual workers	27	68	5
	House persons	26	68	6
	Unemployed	23	72	5
	Retired	47	47	6
	Students	55	35	10

Source: Own representation from EB-Data (85.2, QA8a.7 und QA8a.9).

It can be said that the concept of a nation when compared to the EU is more trustworthy in the opinion polls. This trend has been reenergized since the Euro crisis, and has reached new heights since Angela Merkel's "Wir schaffen das". On top of this, the sentiment has to be stronger among the population of the former GDR because socio-economic statistics show that the wall still exists (see chart 1).

Chart 1: Development of GNP per capita in comparison (in €)



Source: Koschkar/Nestler 2016, S 178.

Within the East German population there is a clear division between age cohorts under 35 years old and the group as a whole (see table 2). By and large, the outlook of the younger generation is more positive than that of the older one.

Table 2: Personal situation since 1990 as seen by all East Germans compared to the cohort of

under 35 year olds (in %)

Item	East		East (>35)	
	worsened	improved	worsened	improved
Chance of personal advancement	-	69	-	57
Acknowledgement of personal accomplishment	-	35	-	47
Social equity	50	-	-	44
Social security	46	-	-	51
Protection against crime	50	-	-	50
Child care	57	-	-	59
Solidarity among people	70	-	33	-
Education	57	-	-	54
Healthcare	-	46	-	62
Wellbeing in society	-	46	-	50
Genderequality	-	34	-	81

Source: Holtmann et al. 2014, S. 168f.

Through the influence of recent events – especially the polarization through “Wir schaffen das” vs. the public discontent due to the rise of a right-wing populist party (AfD) as a catalyst for the “Wutbürger” – Germany, and even more so the Eastern states, is further divided. This time, across all age cohorts, we see the difference between those who want to circle the wagons and protect the nation and the German national identity (see Mader 2016) – whatever that is –, and the more cosmopolitically inclined. The split puts the well-educated and financially-well off in the latter group, and everyone who is in fear of social downward mobility (see Köcher 2016) in the first group. Using a recent Länder election in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, this development can be illustrated (see table 3).

Table. 3: Electoral behaviour in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 2016 (in %)

	SPD		CDU		LINKE		B90/Grüne		NPD		AfD	
	%	Diff.	%	Diff.	%	Diff.	%	Diff.	%	Diff.	%	Diff.
MV total	30,6	-5,0	23,0	-4,0	13,2	-5,2	4,8	-3,9	3,0	-3,0	20,8	+20,8
18-24 years	21	-3	15	-1	14	0	10	-2	6	-8	15	+15
25-34 years	24	-3	16	-7	11	-1	7	-5	7	-5	21	+21
35-44 years	25	-5	20	-5	10	-3	6	-6	4	-4	24	+24
45-59 years	29	-5	20	-3	12	-8	5	-4	2	-4	23	+23
60-69 years	35	-	19	-	15	-	3	-	2	-	21	+21
70 and years	43	-	20	-	17	-	2	-	1	-	14	+14
Women	34	-6	20	-3	14	-4	5	-4	2	-2	16	+16
Man	27	-5	19	-5	13	-6	4	-4	3	-5	25	+25
<i>Education</i>												
“Hauptschule”	35	-9	20	-4	11	-4	3	0	7	-1	18	+18
“Mittlere Reife”	29	-4	19	-6	12	-5	3	-4	3	-6	26	+26
“Abitur”	31	-3	19	-2	14	-4	7	-4	2	-3	15	+15
“Hochschule”	33	+1	20	-5	17	-5	10	-4	1	0	13	+13
<i>Occupation</i>												
Worker	27	-8	14	-7	10	-6	3	-2	5	-8	33	+33
Employee	30	-3	21	-1	13	-6	7	-4	2	-3	17	+17
Clerk	29	-11	29	-4	11	+3	5	-4	1	-2	17	+17
Self-employed	19	+1	24	-11	9	-4	7	-10	4	-1	27	+27
Pensioners	39	-6	19	-4	16	-7	2	-3	2	0	19	+19

Unemployed	22	-10	13	–	15	-4	4	-2	10	-8	29	+29
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Source: Own representation with data from Infratest dimap.

4. Summary and perspectives

Within the limits of this paper we were able to confirm our theses (see 2), at least in an eclectic manner. Therefore, it can be said that the diversity of the Wendekinder within Germany is a reality. It is an educated guess to say that the same age cohorts within other transformation states are quite similar when compared to their older peers. Despite this the recent developments in Europe and the very different reactions to the refugee and migration crisis, it is evident that the European project towards an ever inclusive integration is not as sound as many hoped. Since the Euro crisis, the positive perception of the EU within the member states has taken a serious dump in opinion polls and nowadays national solutions, or “Sonderwege”, are the rule and no longer the – British – exception. Nevertheless, the “Generation of Transition” still has the potential to influence the future in an open minded way through demographics and their rise within national and European elites.

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