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## Summary

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This study on affiliation processes produced a vast number of sometimes highly varied lessons. This summary seeks to provide a cross-section of the results by giving a brief overview of the trends observed, identifying the most significant findings and, lastly, by revealing certain themes that require more specific attention.

### 1. Overview of the forms of affiliation

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It is essential to first assess the significant role played by formal organisations in the affiliation processes that take place within this age group. Overall, it is estimated that approximately two out of three young people currently attend formal groups: clubs, associations, academies, youth movements, youth centres, etc. Looking at sports clubs and art academies alone, one out of two young people are currently involved in these types of activities.

Involvement in formal groups is less common among young people from families with financial problems. Likewise, young people who have experienced difficulty or recurring difficulties at school join formal affiliation groups less often than others.

While some young people who attended formal groups in the past have now left those groups, it should also be noted that one in six young people have never participated in this type of group in their entire lives. The majority cannot, however, be considered unaffiliated. This illustrates the crucial importance of taking into consideration informal affiliations when assessing the affiliation processes of young people.

These affiliations which take place outside of any formal framework take a variety of forms. They can involve a group of friends who meet regularly to go out (walks, fairs, cinema, etc.), board game enthusiasts, childhood friends who ride around the neighbourhood on their bikes or a group of friends who spend their time at each other's' houses playing video games. Aside from this diversity, it is clear that sports activities hold a prominent place along with, and to a greater extent, the times when young people have simply stopped somewhere to talk among themselves. More than one in two young people state that they experience such situations at least once a week.

More generally, it can be noted that, alongside the various circles of affiliation that develop around activities or shared interests, many young people spend time and energy in groups that have no other shared objective than the pleasure of being together. Looking at the motives – the reasons that drive young people to attend certain affiliated groups that are important to them – the desire to have fulfilling, quality social relationships with other young people is much more frequently cited than the pursuit of a project or the practice of an activity. These interpersonal motives are more evident among girls than among boys. They

are also more often cited by young people whose parents are separated, those who have few siblings, and young people living in institutes.

As they get older, the social activities of adolescents gradually change in nature. Going out with friends, which concerns only a small percentage of young people under the age of thirteen, becomes increasingly important as they grow older. The same generally goes for all affiliations centred around relationships, the importance of which increases significantly between the ages of twelve and fifteen.

## **2. Cross analysis**

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### **▪ Civic engagement**

The vast majority of young people have a positive view of voluntary activities. They are generally enthusiastic concerning examples of people who are committed to advocating causes that are important to them. Their desire to change the world is sometimes passionate and their attachment to certain values very deep. However, when this idealistic and somewhat abstract enthusiasm is faced with more tangible forms of application, things change considerably. Anticipating the difficulties linked with carrying out activism, younger people are fairly lucid concerning the limited resources and abilities at their disposal to promote the causes they deem worthy. As they get older, they are increasingly ready to take action for a cause.

Of the various possible methods of engagement, the least difficult, those that require the least sacrifice and energy, are the ones that young people consider realistically. Similarly, more demanding forms of activism are clearly less attractive to young people. This confirms the rise in new forms of 'soft' engagement, which are increasingly replacing traditional forms of engagement, the potentially enriching and fulfilling aspects of which are not as appealing given the difficulties they involve. This general trend reflects a shorter-term form of engagement involving one-off activities, more in line with the trend among young people to retain some reversibility in their social relations.

### **▪ IT tools**

More than the nature of the IT equipment or software used, it is the way young people use those tools that conditions the affiliation process that may or may not result. For example, passive, solitary use of YouTube or Facebook will not lead to any kind of affiliation, unlike configurations in which people regularly share moments in their lives, such as watching videos together on YouTube or sharing links and comments on a daily basis with a group of acquaintances on Facebook. Likewise, multi-player video games only lead to true affiliation processes when accompanied by active, regular communication between the same groups of adolescents.

The various connections offered by the Internet make it possible to extend the affiliations that exist elsewhere as well as create new ones. Affiliations that exist purely because of the Internet, and which bring together young people who are sometimes very far apart, are generally seen by those young people as less significant, as being less important in their lives.

### ▪ **Opportunities for and barriers to affiliation**

Affiliation processes are dependent on opportunities and barriers which determine the practical possibilities that a young person has of affiliating with different groups. In this respect, the school environment plays a central role in shaping the field of possible affiliations. On the one hand, it is a place to meet other young people who are potential sources of invitations to attend various groups and, on the other, the conflict between the time needed to affiliate and that required for school work seems to be one of the main difficulties encountered by young people in attending their chosen group of affiliation.

Beyond school, family may also have a decisive influence on a young person's affiliation opportunities, particularly if family members disapprove of their joining certain groups.

Other potential barriers can also be identified, such as financial problems, those concerning relations with the other members of the group, or even the lack of self-confidence experienced by some adolescents. Young people living far from urban centres also cite the lack of infrastructure and public transport as an obstacle to affiliation. On this latter point, it generally seems that young people with access to many forms of transport are also more often affiliated than those who do not have this opportunity.

### ▪ **Influence of socio-demographic variables on affiliation profiles**

- *According to gender*

Girls differ from boys of the same age in that they place particular emphasis on the interpersonal dimension of their affiliations. This is the prevailing criterion in their reasons for joining and/or moving within a circle of young people. This tendency is borne out by their greater involvement than boys in informal groups with no specific objective, the primary interest of which lies in the fact of being and interacting together. Likewise, adolescent girls opt more for groups involving outings with girl/boyfriends simply to have fun and hang out together, than adolescent boys do.

As for boys, they are more willing to get involved in groups organised around a specific activity, such as a sport or artistic practice, sharing around common interests or play. More so than in the case of girls, it is often a 'consistent' motive or a defined parameter (place, activity, etc.) that drives them to get together with other young people.

Gender, however, influences neither their affiliation practices in terms of quantity or frequency, nor the formal or informal aspect of the affiliations they make.

- *According to age*

As regards the affiliation process, there are two phenomena at work as the adolescent grows older. On the one hand, between 12 and 16 years old, there is a gradual increase in involvement in peer groups. The move outside family and school circles is visibly at play during this period in which the young person tends to increasingly seek out the company of other adolescents outside of these two 'formative' environments. On the other hand, this tendency results in an increase in informal, flexible and even changeable methods of being together. This is explained by an increasing desire to go out with others, to devote time to friendly relations. This process does not necessarily take the place of structured activities. Certainly, beyond the age of twelve, a transitional year, there is a downward trend in formal types of affiliation, but there is no real abandonment of these more structured, organised activities.

- *According to socio-economic status*

It is clear that the two indicators selected to test the influence of young people's economic situations on their affiliations reveals trends that are worth highlighting. These variables are: i) the presence or otherwise of at least one working parent in the young person's household, and ii) the possibility or otherwise for the person concerned of having at least one week of holiday per year. Taking it that disparities in these areas adequately reflect economic disparities, it seems that young people with a lower standard of material comfort affiliate less. This disparity (in frequency and number) in relation to financially better off adolescents is singularly due to their proportionally lower involvement in organised groups (clubs, academies, etc.).

However, this particular segment of adolescents does not differ significantly from the wealthier segment as concerns the motives for getting involved in a group or the spirit of integrating within a group (seeing each other, doing things together, getting together). The reasons for less affiliation, particularly formal affiliation, in certain categories of young people within the same age group are therefore worthwhile researching, probably at the level of their socio-economic and socio-cultural position in French-speaking Belgian society and the range of affiliation opportunities that are consequently open to them.

- *According to the school experience*

The more an adolescent has experienced problems at school, the further removed from formal approaches their affiliation practices are. This is either because organised, or even institutionalised, settings do not easily integrate this category of young people, or because the latter rejects this model which reminds them of school. It is probable that this alienation actually works both ways.

The type of schooling also correlates with certain affiliation behaviours. As such, 12-16 year olds following differentiated, additional or certificate-based programmes demonstrate greater interest than others in groups focused more on fun and entertaining activities rather than in groups involving a group activity or inter-relational exchanges.

These observations demonstrate the extent to which the school experience is interlinked with the other facets of adolescent life, including social relations.

- **Effects of affiliation**

Affiliation processes have a number of positive effects. It seems that the more a young person is involved in affiliated groups, the more confidence they have in themselves and in their abilities. Positive correlations can be highlighted between a young person's affiliation and their confidence in their abilities to be informed, know their rights, give their opinion, influence the opinions of the adults close to them and influence society.

In terms of the effects of affiliation on young people's social capital, the findings of this study did not make it possible to make a general assessment. One can highlight, at most, the fact that there is probably a positive link between the number of affiliations by a young person and the number of friends he or she gets together with.

The feeling of recognition also seems to be linked with the level of affiliation. The less an adolescent is affiliated, the greater tendency he or she has to feel discriminated against and to have a personality that is not highly respected by others.