

The Future... After Brexit

[Noémie Merleau-Ponty](#), July '16



« What is the EU? »

« What is the EU? », was the second question that was typed on Google from the UK... just after Brexit was announced. This is not a joke. It seems that a lot of people did not know what they were saying "Leave" or "Remain" to, when they took the time to go to the poll and vote. This is the cruel reality that the UK democracy is facing. What kind of failure does it express?

TOP QUESTIONS ON THE EUROPEAN UNION Google Trends
in the UK since Brexit result officially announced

- 1 What does it mean to leave the EU?
- 2 What is the EU?
- 3 Which countries are in the EU?
- 4 What will happen now we've left the EU?
- 5 How many countries are in the EU?

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"What is the EU?" is the second top UK question on the EU since the #EURefResults were officially announced
12:25 PM - 24 Jun 2016

  27,527  16,653

A closer look at the first five questions leaves a clear idea of the situation: Brexit is also the consequence of a lack of information. When unhelpful minds analyse it as being driven by an emotional hateful political campaign, the philosopher Jacques Rancière interprets these analyses as "populism", a way of thinking that imposes a right way of understanding a socio-economical context on the base that "if science cannot impose its legitimacy, it is because of ignorance. If progress does not progress, it is because of the latecomers"[1]. A populist approach holds the risk to silence the mechanisms and claims through which votes were chosen. The philosopher wrote after the French referendum in 2005, when the "no" to the European constitution won by nearly 55%[2], even if the political renegotiations bypassed this result, silencing the claims of the voting majority. A more helpful analysis of the questions asked to Google on the 24th of June could be found by reversing the perspective. This so-called lack of understanding can be seen as a bitter failure of the rulers in outreaching the public.

So to what did so many citizens say "leave"? This question cannot be answered easily, and certainly not in this text. But, it is most likely that they have asked to leave an EU that has failed them on a basic level: inform them on what it is and what opportunities it provides.

"The future of"

"Be informed, get involved", this is the motto of the Erasmus Programme, a cross-border cooperation between EU states. It has been created in the late 1980's to "aid the growth of international studying, and with over 4000 students involved in the program at any one time it offers an excellent chance of experience abroad." [3] It is funded by the EU [4] which provides grant to students for exchanges of three to twelve months in a European university.

On the 27th of June, this is what you could find on the program home page:

Announcement: United Kingdom has voted to no longer remain a member of the European Union

We are getting many questions about the future of the Erasmus Programme.

It is not clear at this early stage what the impact of the recent UK vote to leave the EU will have on the Erasmus Programme. We appreciate your concern for the programme but unfortunately you may have to be patient as definitive answers on the programmes future, particularly in relation to UK Students and Universities, may take time. Thanks.

Welcome to the World of Erasmus Exchange!

Rose is one of my dearest friends. When we were 22, I thought she was very bold to leave France for Berlin in order to pursue a Master in Philosophy at the Humboldt University. I did not have the courage or the imagination necessary to embrace this tremendous opportunity that is an Erasmus Programme. One cold Saturday evening in the German winter, the kind of evenings when Erasmus students from all over the EU gather to drink beers, play ping pong and debate on cultural habits, it was getting late. Rose was not very close from her flat, but Emilio, an Italian Ph.D. candidate in Physics, offered to take her back, on his bike. Thanks to an auspicious brake, that night, they kissed.

Unhelpful minds could tell that this program is built for the privileged who gets romantic adventures abroad. But, even if Rose was amongst the few to cross borders with books and dreams of a better world, to conclude by a privilege based logic would mean that another fundamental democratic responsibility has been betrayed: access to education for all. Beyond lack of information may rumble a gap between the educated elites and the ones who cannot have access to academic travelling.

Rose and Emilio now have beautiful daughters who entered this world with two invaluable gifts in their cradles: an EU passport and three languages, as they will be raised in Berlin. And, because it

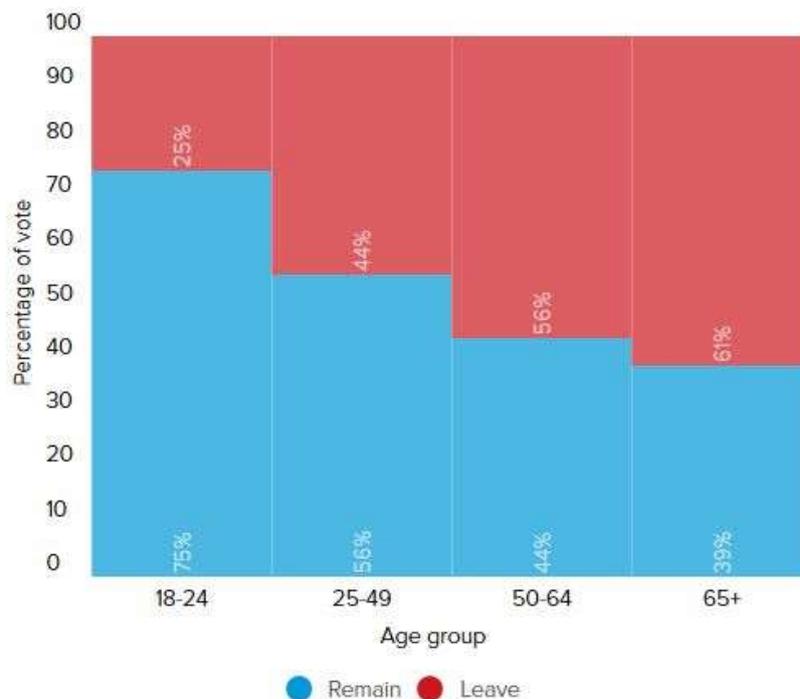
is so easy to be exposed to English, they will probably learn a fourth one very fast. One year abroad, two quadrilinguals. This is the kind of wealth that cannot be counted in numbers, even more when they are falsely agitated. Indeed, the 350 millions of pounds supposedly immediately available for NHS, are suddenly a distant and blurred promise[5].

Moreover, this story is not only about two of my friends who are not even British, but it is a story about generations across Europe.

#WhatHaveWeDone?

Voting is also about talking, on a massive scale. What does the referendum tell us about generations? "What have we done?" was one of the most popular hashtags on Twitter after Brexit. It stems from youngsters who are wondering, in strong affected ways, about their future, chosen by an older generation.[6]

EU REFERENDUM VOTE BY AGE GROUPS



SOURCE: YouGov exit poll

The 16-18 years old did not have a word to say, as the pledge to open the referendum to them was not accepted for economic reasons, and apparently they would have voted "Remain". This is why NBC news underlined "How Baby Boomers Defeated Millennials in Historic Vote"[7]. Here the topic of unequal access to education crosses that generational relationships. The ones who did not have access to academic education said no to an EU that failed them, and said no for their children too.

Our parents, the Baby Boomers, were born just after the Second World War. The Erasmus Programme is one beautiful consequence of the European reunification and the hope that we can talk to and collaborate with each other, however different we might seem[8]. The political challenge of our generation is not a war fought with tanks, but a war against terrorism and a war against xenophobia. So, when President Hollande says that the European challenge after Brexit is

security[9], one can fear that borders closing will be a spreading idea, not only in between the EU and the UK.

Responsible

Obviously, Brexit is not only about the future of the Erasmus Programme. But looking at this program and looking at what the referendum results tell about generations and education, it sounds like it is the future of wealth that needs to be cared for, unless unhelpful minds keep on being irresponsible. To be responsible is to be able to answer for one's own acts. Indeed Brexit is about challenging dialogue across UK society and underlining that too many questions are left unanswered by the ones who are the driving forces.

What shall British citizens of all domains do, after Brexit, to ensure that social reproduction is less about nurturing many inequalities and more about spreading opportunities? What shall they ask to and of each other for a responsible future? How shall politicians embrace this responsibility? Even if borders close, how do we keep minds open?

Acknowledgment: I would like to thank [Marcin Smietana](#) for his helpful comments when I was writing this text.

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[1] Jacques Rancière, *La haine de la démocratie*, La Fabrique Editions, 2005. Ebook Kindle, location1173, my translation from the French. "si la science n'arrive pas à imposer sa légitimité, c'est en raison de l'ignorance. Si le progrès ne progresse pas, c'est en raison des retardataires. »

[2] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4592243.stm>

[3] http://www.erasmusprogramme.com/the_erasmus.php

[4] http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-12-785_en.htm

[5] <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/brexit-vote-leave-wipes-nhs-350m-claim-and-rest-of-its-website-after-eu-referendum-a7105546.html>

[6] <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-36625800>

[7] <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/brexit-referendum/britain-s-brexit-how-baby-boomers-defeated-millennials-historic-vote-n598481>

[8] For statements stemming from UK Academia, which has secured 22 % of European Research Council grant-holders :

<http://www.cambridgeforeurope.co.uk/letterofsupport/>

<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/statement-on-eu-referendum-outcome.aspx>

[9] <http://www.politico.eu/article/francois-hollande-eu-needs-to-understand-its-shortcomings-leave-vote-brexit-crisis-meeting/>