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The Aftermath of Crises: The Political Perception of Portuguese Millennials

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Master in Sociology

Supervisor:  
PhD, Renato do Carmo, Associate Professor,  
Iscte - University Institute of Lisbon

October, 2022



SOCIOLOGIA  
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

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Department of Sociology

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*Para os inquietos,*



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## Resumo

Em Portugal, a introdução da *Geração Milénio* no discurso público tem sido feita de mãos dadas com a ideia da(s) crise(s). Os estudos existentes sobre a crise de 2011 destacam consequências decorrentes da conjuntura austeritária, sublinhando a definição de um regime social de existência precária entre os grupos populacionais vulneráveis – onde se incluem os indivíduos identificados como *Millennials* –, e uma cidadania política fraca, traduzida em baixos níveis de participação e desconfiança face ao sistema político. No entanto, após o deflagrar da crise pandémica e consequente crise económica em 2019, estas premissas carecem de atualização. Por um lado, é necessário revisitatar os efeitos da crise de 2011 à luz da possível perpetuação dessas desigualdades socioeconómicas por exercício da crise de 2019. Por outro lado, a importância destas crises no contexto em que os Millennials se inserem implica um olhar compreensivo da relação crises-geração, nomeadamente ao nível da dimensão política. A presente dissertação visa contribuir parcialmente para a resolução destas ausências na literatura, sugerindo uma primeira definição do conceito de *perceção política*, e propondo analisar o efeito combinado das crises sobre a perceção política dos Millennials Portugueses. Esta investigação conta com 15 entrevistas semiestruturadas, analisadas de acordo com uma estratégia de análise de conteúdo mista suportada pelo software MAXQDA. A análise dos resultados sugere que a experimentação das duas crises se traduz na perpetuação da condição precária inaugurada em 2011, atuando como *marcador geracional* (1), e que essa mesma condição influencia a perceção política dos indivíduos (2).

## Palavras-chave

Gerações – Geração Milénio – Perceção Política – Crises – Precariedade





## Abstract

In Portugal, the introduction of the *Millennial Generation* within public discourse has gone hand in hand with the idea of crisis. Existing studies on the 2011 crisis highlight consequences arising from the austere conjuncture, underlining the definition of a social regime of precarious existence among vulnerable population groups – including individuals identified as Millennials –, and a weak political citizenship, translated into low levels of participation and distrust towards the political system. However, after the outbreak of the pandemic and consequent economic crisis in 2019, these premises need updating. On the one hand, it is necessary to revisit the effects of the 2011 crisis in light of the possible perpetuation of these socioeconomic inequalities due to the 2019 crisis. On the other hand, the importance of these crises in the context in which Millennials are inserted implies a comprehensive look at the crisis-generation relationship, particularly within the political dimension. The present dissertation aims to partially contribute to the resolution of these absences in the literature, suggesting a definition of the concept of *political perception*, and proposing to analyze the combined effect of crises on the political perception of Portuguese Millennials. This investigation presents 15 semi-structured interviews, analyzed according to a mixed content analysis strategy supported by the MAXQDA software. The analysis of the results suggests that the experimentation of the two crises translates into the perpetuation of the precarious condition inaugurated in 2011, acting as a *generational marker* (1), and that this same condition influences the political perception of individuals (2).

## Keywords

Generations – Millennials – Political Perception – Crises – Precariousness



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Chapter 1:  
**Introduction**

Passages such as "*Geração à Rasca* (again)" (Silva, 2020), "Millennials are preparing for the second crisis of their lives" (Monteiro, 2020), "The crisis changes, a new generation is born" (Monteiro, 2021), or "Another crisis, the same generation" (ENSP, s.d.) translate more than the tendency towards *generationism* (White, 2013) or the generalization of discourses about generations in the public sphere (Ferreira, 2017). On the one hand, these media titles reflect the conception of a new generation, that of young people born after 1980, under the label of *Millennials* (Howe and Strauss, 2000). On the other hand, these narratives seem to propose an inseparable link between this recent generation and a context of permanent crisis, with two very clear peak moments. However, none of these premises was properly accompanied by social research, in particular regarding the Portuguese case. As such, it is precisely this gap in the literature that we intend to partially respond to by proposing to assess the influence of the two crises on the political perception of Portuguese Millennials.

In recent decades, the field of generational theories has been expanding and developing. Even if it remains unquestionable that the undisputed promoter of classical generational theories is Karl Mannheim (Feixa & Leccardi, 2010), other perspectives have appeared, sometimes criticizing certain weaknesses and looking for complementary or different theoretical proposals to those of the author (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014). Among these, *generationist theories* strongly emphasize the issue of intergenerational inequalities while discussing the Millennial Generation (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017: 22). Authors such as Bessant, Farthing and Watts (2017) argue that the generation born after 1980 was confronted with worsening living conditions, such as the decrease in wages and increase of job precariousness, with real repercussions on individual life trajectories (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017). At the national level, studies have proposed a *precarious social regime* resulting from the austerity measures implemented during the 2011 crisis (Carmo & Barata, 2017), as well as the possibility of these measures having worked as a *generational marker*, insofar as they intensified and accelerated economic and social processes that defined a structurally different context from the one that preceded it (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017).

Recognizing the relevance of these arguments also involves, in our view, assuming that they need to be updated. The 2019 pandemic and associated economic crisis take place less than a decade after the 2011 crisis. In this sense, the temporal proximity of the two crises suggests that the generation most exposed to its consequences is the same. As such, this seems to indicate an extension in time of the vulnerabilities and inequalities inaugurated during the first period of crisis, instead of the occurrence of two completely independent and demarcated periods. Hence, a first research objective arises here as we propose a horizontal analysis of the individual effects of the two crises – taking them as distinct but complementary moments of the same structural framework – while also trying to assess if the 2019 crisis perpetuates the precarious social regime inaugurated earlier, and if the experience of such regime acts as a generational marker.

However, we do not stop here. It would be greedy and counterproductive to assume as an object of study for this dissertation the influence of the two crises on all spheres of individual and collective life of Portuguese Millennials. As such, we decided to restrict our analysis to the political dimension.

Both in Portugal and throughout the western world is consensual that youth electoral participation is decreasing, motivating the spread of the idea that young people are not interested in politics (O'Toole *et al.*, 2003; Pais, 2005; Augusto, 2008; Lobo & Sanches, 2017; Sloam & Henn, 2019). Here two narratives seem to compete with each other: on the one hand, the idea that young people have withdrew themselves from political involvement out of disinterest and alienation (Augusto, 2008); on the other hand, in turn, the idea that young people have distanced themselves from the political machine and conventional forms of participation (Sloam & Henn, 2019), whereby they continue to engage in politics, but from other spheres and modalities of participation (Della Porta & Mosca, 2009; Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Menezes, 2011).

Although we tend to subscribe to the latter, we suggest that there is more to it. We hypothesize that the way individuals decide whether to act politically or not, and how, may depend on how they collect and interpret political information and the context in which this process takes place. As such, a second research axis emerges here, which translates into the main focus of this dissertation: as we consider that studying the influence of the two crises on the political participation of individuals would tell us less, we suggest a first formal conceptualization of *political perception* and propose ourselves to assess whether the experience of these two crises influences the political perception of Portuguese Millennials.

Finally, in order to respond to the proposed research objectives, we decided to carry out a set of interviews with Portuguese women and men aged between 26 and 41 years old and with higher education degrees. We later defined a content analysis mixed strategy supported by the MAXQDA analysis software.

This dissertation is structured as follows. In the next chapter the reader will find a brief literature review on generational theories and Millennials; on the relation of young people with politics, and the particularities of the Portuguese case; on theories of perception, followed by our conceptualization of political perception; and also a brief review of the two crises. The literature review chapter ends with a summary subchapter that clarifies the relationship between the topics presented, seeking to prepare the analysis and clarify any doubts. The third chapter presents a detailed clarification of the methodology used and due justification. The fourth chapter, in turn, presents the reader with the main body of this dissertation with the analysis and interpretation of results, divided into two moments according to the research objectives already presented. Finally, the fifth chapter concludes this work by presenting the main conclusions regarding the study of Portuguese Millennials and the empirical application of the concept of political perception, as well as the influence of the two crises on the latter, while also presenting potential limitations of this study and future research suggestions.



Chapter 2:  
**Literature Review**

**2.1. Generational theories**

The concept of generation is often based on the construction of age groups (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017). However, sociologically, generations do not emerge naturally through the succession of “biological or demographic rhythms translated into the ages of individuals” (Ferreira, 2019: 37). The generational approach therefore implies more than the identification of the chronological structure of births, demanding the analysis of ongoing changing social structures.

Seen as the founder of the generational approach (Feixa & Leccardi, 2010), Mannheim conceives generations as “cultural constructs that involve historical participation guided by individuals’ self-awareness” (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014: 166), establishing a tripartite conceptual definition: location (I), actuality (II) and generation units (III). The first element allows to distance Mannheim from the naturalistic conceptions that define generations as the location of individuals in a given time, insofar as the author claims the concept depends on both time and space (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014). In other words, it is implied the sharing of a common position in the historical and social process, which limits a certain group of individuals to a specific range of potential experiences (Mannheim, 1969). In this sense, as mentioned, Mannheim clearly assumes the *potential* disposition of that location (I): “the location as such only contains potentialities, which may materialize, or be suppressed, or become embedded in other social forces and manifest themselves in modified form” (Mannheim, 1969: 182). As such, more than a location, the generation is assumed as an actuality (II), insofar as the later implies an “integrated combination of historical responses” to the former (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014: 168). The location provides individuals with a structure of opportunities which may or may not be “translated into an actuality sharing a similar ‘mental order’, that is, a common culture or worldview” (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014: 168). As Aboim and Vasconcelos (2014) argue, for Mannheim the non-formation of this *generational consciousness* sends the location to a mere passive category that does not allow characterizing a generation. That said, the actuality results from the substantiation of the potential of said location, insofar a particular bond is established due to the exposure “to the social and intellectual symptoms of a process of dynamic destabilization” (Mannheim, 1969: 183).

Finally, within an actuality we may find generational units (III) (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014: 168). That is, groups that share a *generational consciousness* – a social identity defined by certain developments at a certain age (Nugin, 2010), that makes it possible to identify differences regarding other generations and build a foundation for self-recognition (Feixa & Leccardi, 2010: 192) – but whose social and intellectual response to the same historical stimulus is different (Mannheim, 1969: 183). Right away, this allows to counteract the criticism posing that the concept of generation implies the homogenization of individuals’ experiences in certain spatiotemporal contexts (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017).

Nevertheless, we know that Mannheim's theoretical line is not the only within the study of generations and, even more, according to Aboim and Vasconcelos, “the conceptual ground for studying generations remains a problematic domain” (2014: 166, *in* Eyerman and Turner, 1998). As such, while recognizing the centrality of Mannheim’s perspective (1969), we also subscribe the idea proposed by Aboim and Vasconcelos that “there is a theoretical need to move from a strictly political or intellectual to an enlarged social and cultural understanding of generations” (2014: 167). Hereupon, we also review the *generationist approach* (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017: 18), which defines the concept of generation as a *discursive reality* (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014: 176). For the authors, generations are: “constructed and kept alive through the narrative reiteration of inter-generational differences about the formative years of youth. In other words, generations only exist if, sitting in a given structural location, discourses about one’s own time are mobilized for self-identification. In our view, individuals in a given historical time–space may share mental and practical dispositions, but most importantly they must always position themselves in face of the narratives that have become dominant to describe that generation location. In this sense, rather than forged by a materially-based historical ground, a generation is a cultural construct mainly because of its discursive reality.” (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014: 176).

This means that this perspective takes generations “as symbolic categories used in social interaction” (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017: 18). Moreover, these are defined as discursive formations once we are dealing with “symbolic constructions embodied in cultural narratives that integrate codes and terminologies that intend to express differences in tastes, values, representations and ethics of life, based on age principles” (Ferreira, 2019: 39), thus creating “historically located fields of cultural meanings, which translate into discursive practices as proposed by Foucault” (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014: 176).

This definition of generations as discursive formations raises the question of how these discourses are and by whom they are architected, and what meanings they carry – it is in fact here that we distinguish the relevance of this perspective. Even more, the dominance of a given discourse or label implies a specific meaning, insofar “generational discourses must be seen as being produced through competition processes in which some labels and cultural contents gain priority over others regardless of how many people were indeed involved in the specific dynamics or events ‘chosen’ to name the generation” (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014: 178). In this sense, and to conclude, we recognize that certain generational labels – of which are examples “the sixties generation”, or the “post-communist generation” – depended to a large extent on the meanings attributed to the historical events said labels report to. As such, rather “than just describe historical experiences (whether of the majority or of a particular minority), we need to comprehend why certain labels emphasize different aspects of social life as well as different groupings” (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014: 177).

### **2.1.1 The Millennials?**

With the development of generational theories, it was expected that generations would become more common objects of study. This increased theoretical interest is particularly visible with *Millennials*. This

is not only due to the proliferation of the use of generational categories (White, 2013), but also due to the appealing sociological characteristics of the structural changes that marked the period of socialization of these individuals (Bogosian & Rousseau, 2017).

The Millennium label is inaugurated by Howe and Strauss (2000) with the aim of identifying young people born after 1980 and who, therefore, lived the "transition to adulthood in the social, economic and political conditions characteristic of the turn of the millennium or after" (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017: 19). In addition to this label, many others have become popular, such as: Precarious Generation (Bessant *et al.*, 2017); Austerity Generation (Cairns *et al.*, 2016); Lost Generation (Allen & Ainley, 2010); Global Generation (Edmunds & Turner, 2005); or Digital Generation (Feixa & Fernández-Planells, 2014). Regarding the Portuguese case, it is essential to mention the tag *Geração à Rasca* (Pais, 2014).

Despite being a "popular" generation within the literature, existing studies on Millennials do not present total consensus about the correspondent age cohort (Miranda & Duarte, 2020): for Milkman, Millennials are "born after 1980" (2017: 2); Miranda and Duarte, on the other hand, consider the cohort of individuals born "between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s to 2000" (2020: 58); as for Bogosian and Rousseau, "Millennials are those typically born between 1980 and before 1995" (2017: 387). This way, and before an inconsistent end date among researchers, for the purposes of the present research, we will follow the time limits as defined by Dimock and the Pew Research Center, so that "anyone born between 1981 and 1996" shall be considered a Millennial (Dimock, 2019: 2).

With regard to the characteristic traits attributed to Millennials, these result from the structural context in which the individuals socialize (Abramson & Inglehart, 1987; Bogosian & Rousseau, 2017). A few scholars suggest apparently consensual traits, such as family orientation and closeness (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Rainer & Rainer, 2011); appreciation of well-being, education and happiness (Monaco & Martin, 2007; Bogosian & Rousseau, 2017); and the possession of savvy technological knowledge (Rainer & Rainer, 2011; Serazio, 2015). Among these, we clearly highlight the later due to the preponderance – and sometimes dependence – of the digital world within the lives of these individuals.

Even more, according to Ferreira *et al.* (2017), intergenerational inequalities constitute one of the main axes within the generationist discourse on Millennials, more specifically, structural changes within the spheres of work and employment (Ferreira, 2017: 39) – as it may also be deduced by the mentioned labels. The baby boomer generation was the first generation to know (and be aware) of more favorable living conditions in terms of income and social rights (Roberts, 2012). However, these favorable structural conditions – which sedimented feelings of confidence and trust in the future – began to change. From the 1990s onwards, the volume of employment began to decrease, with the consequent increase in general and youth unemployment and decrease in wages (Ferreira, 2017). Furthermore, the valorization of education known in the previous generation was intensified, so young people in the 90s shared long-term school aspirations (Alves, 1998), believing in the employability value of the diploma, understood as a tool to combat the difficulties of integration into the labor market (Ferreira, 2017).

In fact, this imbalance between the qualifications of young people and the growing saturation of the labor market ended up having profound consequences in the socialization processes and transition phases of these individuals: the difficulty of integrating into the labor market made it more arduous for individuals to emancipate socially and economically, thus promoting changes within the transitions to adulthood, as the juvenile condition extended over the course of life (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017: 22-23, 44). As such, in addition to the ambiguity regarding the age limits of this generation, the doubt also emerges around the concept of *youth* (Barbosa, 2020). On the one hand, in view of the delay of transition processes, "such as leaving the parents' home and housing autonomy, conjugality and the experience of parenting" (Ferreira, 2017: 42), public policies seem to accompany, insofar as they promote support programs for young people, such as *Porta 65* or *Jovens Agricultores*, that mark the ages of eligible candidates up to 35 or 40 years old. On the other hand, youth unemployment statistics only consider individuals under the age of 34 years old (Barbosa, 2020: 8).

In view of the aforementioned, it is argued that the profound changes in the spheres of work and employment had defined a "social regime of precarious existence" with "profound and difficult to reverse consequences, at least in the medium term" (Carmo & Barata, 2017: 322-323). In Portugal, this handholding between the Millennials' conception and the regime of precarious existence translates into the labels of *Geração à Rasca* and, more recently, of *The Most Qualified Generation Ever*. Here is common for political rulers, media channels and other entities to designate the current generation of young adults as the most qualified generation ever (Ação Socialista, 2021; Peralta, 2021; Carvalho da Silva, 2022; Lopes, 2022). According to media reports, politicians highlight the increase in qualifications among young people, and the political commitment to combat precariousness and focus on youth (Ação Socialista, 2021; Pinto Miguel, 2021). However, this seems to be one side of it.

Contrary to the operationalization of the expression in political and institutional discourses, academics highlight the frustration of qualified young people in the face of job expectations (Stein, 2013) that do not materialize in reality (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017); the government inability to take advantage of the potential of young people in the labor market and to consider this problem as a public policy priority (Lopes, 2022); the perpetuation of productive structures based on low added value sectors (Carvalho da Silva, 2022); high youth unemployment rates (Ferreira, 2017); emigration of skilled professionals; commodification of higher education; and work instability and unbalanced work relationships (Carvalho da Silva, 2022). More important, this skeptical view seems to be shared by Millennials themselves: Poppe Figueiredo (2022), in an article published by *Jornal Observador*, asserts the adequacy of the expression with data, but questions the materialization of this investment in education, stating that his generation "is professionally stagnant and, worse than everything, is sad".

## **2.2. Young people meet Politics**

The existing studies on youth's political participation present a consensual position regarding the decrease in electoral participation of young people in several contemporary democracies, albeit at

different rates and times (Cruz, 1985; Putnam, 2000; O'Toole et al., 2003; Pais, 2005; Augusto, 2008; Lobo & Sanches, 2017; Sloam & Henn, 2019). This *apparent* distancing of young people from politics "has been one of the fundamental concerns associated with the intergenerational functioning and sustainability of Western democracies" (Augusto, 2008: 155). Hence, this almost controversial relationship has been the protagonist of a diversity of interpretations, giving space to the formulation of two different positions, one more pejorative and the other more romantic (Augusto, 2008).

The portrait of a disinterested and depoliticized youth appears coupled with the generalized electoral decline in the Western world after the 1970s. According to Augusto, the "responsibility for this political alienation" somewhat recurrently falls "on the psychosocial characteristics of youth, commonly understood as "futile, indigent, not very hardworking, inefficient, incompetent, threatening, depraved, hedonistic, etc" (2008: 156 *in* Mizen, 2002). As such, the author here criticizes the way in which the social conception of youth is considered: the interpretation of youth as a "time vacuum" in the lifecycle favors the association of these individuals with a passive political position with no real capacity to potentiate changes in society – the idea of "able but not allowed" (Augusto, 2008: 158). Moreover, Jorge Benedicto also argues that "the redefinition of youth also affects the inclusion within the political community", insofar as citizenship was for a long time identified with the attributes of being an adult (2011: 353).

In any case, this position was quickly confronted with solid arguments in defense of the political value of younger generations (O'Toole, 2003; Pais, 2005; Augusto, 2008; Menezes, 2011; Sloam & Henn, 2019). The optimism regarding the political involvement of youth is based on the belief that they continue to engage in politics – in its broadest sense – even if there is a departure from formal institutions, as is the case, for instance, of political parties (Sloam & Henn, 2019). In practice, it is argued that processes of individualization and de-institutionalization took place, having translated into the distance between these individuals and the democratic machine (and not between them and democracy itself) (Augusto, 2008: 162; Sloam & Henn, 2019: 17). Moreover, as for how young people continue to get politically involved, in parallel to moving away from the institutional sphere, it is contended that there was a simultaneous approach to non-institutional domains and politicization of spheres associated with the private dimension of individuals' lives (Della Porta & Mosca, 2009). As such, the argument emerges here that younger people tend to prefer unconventional forms of participation (Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Menezes, 2011), examples of which are "signing petitions, blocking traffic, participating in (lawful) demonstrations and (un)official strikes, boycotting products, using physical force, damaging property, occupying buildings, painting slogans, and engaging in rent/tax strikes" (Pitti, 2018: 11).

This second position calls for some further clarification. Understanding that young people remain politically involved, albeit in different ways, is one thing, understanding why that is, is something else entirely. As Lobo and Sanches (2017) point out, there are two hypotheses for understanding the attitudes and behaviors of young people at a given time. The lifecycle hypothesis (I) proposes that attitudes and behaviors change throughout life and, therefore, as individuals move into adulthood, the behavioral and

attitudinal specifics of the juvenile condition – of which are examples the "greater precariousness of employment, of income, of housing situation, and of marital status" – will fade, freeing space for other behavioral frameworks (Lobo & Sanches, 2017: 124). Thus, according to this hypothesis, the distance from institutional schemes and the option for unconventional forms of involvement would be directly related to a specific stage of life and would change with the transition to adulthood and progressive social integration (Lobo & Sanches, 2017). On the other hand, the second hypothesis suggests that attitudinal frames may be specific to a certain generation (II), and hence maintained throughout life (Lobo & Sanches, 2017: 124). The latter is further divided into two distinct assumptions: according to the authors, generational effects may be the result of socialization processes occurring in certain historical-political contexts. Here, in order to support their argument, Lobo and Sanches use the example of the generation that came of age between the 60s and 70s and, therefore, at the height of unconventional participation, and describe it as a very participatory generation at this level, "even more than today's youth, socialized in more depoliticized contexts" (2017: 124). The second theoretical line, in turn, justifies this behavioral change with the post-materialist wave that exerted influence on the values and priorities of younger people (Inglehart, 1990), motivating less conventional forms of political involvement (Lobo & Sanches, 2017: 124).

### **2.2.1. The Political Involvement of Portuguese Youth**

The study of Portuguese youth's political participation is not new nor recent and, even so, the existing studies on the subject are somewhat still deficient (Viegas *et al.*, 2010). Among the existing studies, the majority indicates that political involvement of Portuguese youth is low (Ferreira, 2006; Azevedo 2009). However, caution is needed, insofar as the political participation of Portuguese society, regardless of age, is also reduced (Magalhães & Moral, 2008; Magalhães, 2009; Costa *et al.*, 2022), especially when compared to other European countries (Augusto, 2008; Baumgarten, 2013; Viegas *et al.*, 2010). It will therefore be careless to argue for the political disinterest of young people based solely on these data.

Recently, Costa *et al.* (2022) argued that the evolutionary trend of political participation within Portuguese youth is not entirely clear and may vary according to sources. In the study carried out by Braga da Cruz, the author begins his analysis by referring to the revolutionary period and highlighting the strong involvement of young people (1985: 1068). However, he quickly moves on to describe their disillusionment with the new democracy, turning to the decrease in electoral participation and suggesting that there was indeed a dynamic of depoliticization (Cruz, 1985: 1083). Agreeing or not with this last concept, it is relatively consensual among academics that in the years following the Carnation Revolution Portuguese political participation remained low, including among young people (Augusto, 2008; Magalhães & Moral, 2008; Viegas *et al.*, 2010). Later on, and similar to the theories reviewed above, some arguments emerged suggesting the occurrence of de-institutionalization processes on the part of young people (Magalhães & Moral, 2008; Viegas *et al.*, 2010), with the approximation to other spheres, such as the associative one (Augusto, 2008: 168-174).

This moment of political calm remains until the 2011 financial crisis unfolds. The passage of the crisis in Portugal, as we will see in more detail, is essentially known for the harsh period of austerity and popular demonstrations. It is during this period that the protagonism of young people in the political sphere emerges again. As one of the groups most affected by budget cuts, they often took on relevant roles in the demonstrations (Pais, 2014; Accornero & Pinto, 2015). Even so, this moment of political unrest was ephemeral, insofar as it did not define a trend of greater constant political involvement, neither among the youth nor among the Portuguese population in general (Accornero & Pinto, 2015).

Complementing this description of the historical evolution of Portuguese youth participation, in 2008 Magalhães and Moral summarized the results of a survey carried out the previous year, with the purpose of collect information regarding the political attitudes and behavior of young people in Portugal. The analysis of the authors suggest that: although within the low levels of effectiveness attributed by Portuguese citizens to political participation, young people show the highest levels (I); they also have higher levels of membership than the rest of the population, although generally low (II); young Portuguese people attribute less effectiveness to the vote than their older fellow citizens, practicing it less (III); they too appear to be more predisposed to cause-oriented participation (IV); they are the least politically informed and least exposed to conventional forms of political information (V); and, finally, they tend to be more to the right than the general population, being mainly distinguished by a lower operationalization of the left and right categories and by a greater partisan misalignment (VI) (Magalhães & Moral, 2008). In this follow-up, Moral addresses the issue again in 2011 – based on the same survey – and adds other relevant considerations, such as: young dependent individuals demonstrate greater political ignorance and less predisposition to vote than independents; and, regarding the referendum on the voluntary termination of pregnancy in Portugal, young people seem to have been the ones who mobilized most intensely (2011: 386).

Although the comparison of participation modalities among groups of individuals in different life stages and the study of less conventional forms of participation as well as its popularity among young people are relevant and indispensable to carry our study to safe harbor, they do not satisfy our research goals entirely. As mentioned, we aim to understand how a specific generation relates to politics, the meanings they attribute to the various elements and the way they decide to act accordingly. Thereby, we do not need a deeper scrutiny of political participation theories, but rather an understanding of how individuals *perceive* politics.

### **2.3. Understanding the concept of *Perception***

The conceptualization of perception sends the reader to an extensive and multidisciplinary set of studies, which include, for example, philosophical approaches. Descartes' Theory of Vision, for instance, "exposes the points at which Cartesian dualism encounters difficulties with explaining perception" (Wolf-Devine, 1993: 1). According to Wolf-Devine, Descartes intended to explain visual perception mechanistically in order to improve our powers of vision (1993: 3). In general, his conclusions suggest

that the senses could betray us whereby perceptions of “distance, situation, size and shape” may be “fallible” (Wolf-Devine, 1993: 2). As for David Hume, in one of his most important works – *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Hume, 2003) – the author starts with “a conceptual proposition which distinguishes the perceptions of the human mind into two fundamental classes”, namely “impressions and ideas” (Valadares, 2009: 252). The firsts are the “original perceptions”, the most vivid and strong, “such as colours, sounds, figures, and feelings” (Hume, 1999: 17). As for ideas, it is argued that they stem and “derived from impressions”, insofar as they “become stored resources for remembering, imagining, thinking, reflecting, and symbolizing” (Hume, 1999: 17). Hence, for the philosopher, “all the images or representations that come before the mind (...) are perceptions” (Hume, 1999: 57), whereby existence itself is related to the idea of perception (Valadares, 2009).

These two philosophers focus on the concept of perception from two different epistemological positions, seeking to discuss reality and the way in which individuals can experience and perceive it, as well as the distortions that may occur during such processes. It thus becomes clear that the concept falls within the interdisciplinary field of cognitive sciences. Nonetheless, we argue that the operationalization of perception within sociological studies – and here we turn specifically to political sociology themes and, therefore, to the *perception of politics* – can go further. It is precisely in this sense that we intend to offer our theoretical contribution by scrutinizing existing studies and proposing a conceptual discussion.

Within the field of psychology, specifically organizational behavior, Johns and Saks define perception as “the process of interpreting the messages of our senses to provide order and meaning to the environment. Perception helps us sort out and organize the complex and varied input received by our senses of sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing” (2020: 370). Moreover, for the authors, the concept is composed by three elements, namely “a perceiver” (I), “a target that is being perceived” (II), and “some situational context in which the perception is occurring” (III), all of each influence “the perceiver’s impression or interpretation of the target” (Johns & Saks, 2020: 372). Here, Mira Marody goes even further and argues that “the choice and undertaking of a certain action is determined primarily by the way the actor perceives reality” (1990: 258). Within the same logic and from an interdisciplinary bridge between social psychology and political science, Lance Bennett argues that a “substantial amount of research on political behavior is grounded in theories of perception and cognition”, recognizing, however, the ambiguity and vague formulation of concepts and assumptions (Bennett, 1981: 69). Hence, the author defines perception as “the selection and transmission of information”, and cognition as “the subsequent coding and use of perceived information” (Bennett, 1981: 83).

Regarding the theoretical review of these studies, the mention of research on cross-cultural perception was one of the contributions we found more relevant. Authors such as Segall *et al.* (1966) or Deregowski (1973) demonstrated that populational samples drawn from different cultures had different perceptions of a same set of optical illusions, thus arguing that “as a result of living in similar environments and behaving in similar ways, members of a culture learn to use common perceptual cues



and they acquire shared cognitive schemas for interpreting those cues” (Bennett, 1981: 87). Hence, we battle that this argument defines perception as a context-dependent and cultural-dependent concept (Nisbett & Miyamoto, 2005; Segall *et al.*, 1966), therefore subject to the influence of other variables. These may be physiological factors and/or factors of natural order external to individuals (Bouffard-Bouchard, 1990) or even emotional factors (Bennett, 1981), among others. In fact, we argue that extensively discriminating all the variables that affect the perceptual processes would not only be a complex task but should also depend on the type of perception considered – which would allow such list of variables to be as reliable as possible. Likewise, although we consider a general initial approach to be relevant, namely to discuss the existent definitions of perception, we now turn to the study of *political perception*.

### **2.3.1. Towards a definition of Political Perception**

The definitions and theories of perception reviewed here do not exhaust the theoretical contributions on the subject. Hereupon, Bennett draws attention to the fact that even though these theories possess an “intuitive appeal”, it does not make them candidates “for a general theory of political perception” (1981: 110-111). Thus, for the author, not only is the concept of perception relatively absent from “general discussions (...) in the political-behavior literature” but has also “acquired ambiguous usages in political analysis” (Bennett, 1981: 107-110). Even so, it is possible to identify a few theories suited to explain complex perceptual processes within this field, such as voter’s perceptions of political candidates, parties and/or other relevant actors.

Within the political perception theories that focus “the impressions citizens form of where political candidates and political parties stand on current issues and on ideology” is possible to underline both displacement theory and political cue theory (Granberg *et al.*, 1988: 29). For Ana Maria Belchior, the first has dominated the existing body of research on political perception and reports to a psychology tendency of individuals to distort their perceptions by positioning closer to them parties and candidates they support, and further away the ones they don’t (2015: 736). As such, the operationalization of this approach implies understanding assimilation effects, grasped as in “perceptual distortion of the position of the communication in the direction of the person's own attitude”; and contrast effects, defined as “perceptual distortion of the position of the communication away from the person's own attitude” (Granberg *et al.*, 1988: 29). Based on other studies, Belchior highlights political consequences of this distortion – in whatever direction –, such as “the introduction of errors in the process of opinion formation”, as well as the promotion of stability and maintenance of *status quo*, here as a specific consequence of assimilation effects, insofar as voters' maintain their voting habits and the political elite doesn’t feel the need to change behaviors (2015: 738-739).

On the other hand, the political cue theory emerges as an alternative (Granberg *et al.*, 1988) and interrelated theoretical approach with the first one (Belchior, 2015). In turn, this emerges from an assumption of Gestalt psychology (see Wertheimer, 1938) and emphasizes “cognition, information

processing, and the drawing of inferences" (Granberg *et al.*, 1988: 30), explaining perceptions from the relevant cues available to individuals and that allow them to estimate the position of a particular political actor (Belchior, 2015). Moreover, it seems consensual that political parties play an important role in this process, as they act as reliable anchors which serve as cues for deriving political perceptions (Granberg *et al.*, 1988; Belchior, 2015). For Bartels (2002), this means that party ties and affinities shape how individuals perceive the political world. As stated by Belchior (2015), in this stage is also relevant to mention other individual characteristics included in explanations of individual political perceptions: besides party and ideological links, some scholars argue that the political cues used tend to be more sophisticated – and thus more reliable and likely to deliver trustworthy perceptions – when individuals have higher levels of education (Popkin, 1994; Koch, 2001) and of information and political interest, as they are better able to process information (Zaller, 1992).

The premises regarding the concept and operationalization of political perception discussed so far emerge mainly from two different articles. Both Belchior (2015) and Granberg *et al.* (1988) propose specific objectives. In the case of the first, the author intends to study "the ideological perceptions of the electorates about political parties in Portugal, testing the effects of the theory of displacement (of assimilation and contrast) and the importance that the outbreak of the economic crisis in 2010 had in maintaining or altering those same perceptions" (Belchior, 2015: 736). As for Granberg *et al.*, the authors defend that displacement theory and political cue theory are the leading theories within the topic, so they purpose to describe and analyzed "their robustness by deriving and testing distinctive hypotheses from each theory" (1988: 29).

These theoretical contributions – as well as others referenced – offer relevant theoretical and conceptual tools and fundamental reflections. Even so, unlike the authors, it is not our aim to scrutinize the way in which individuals perceive, with or without distortions, the political position or ideology of third parties. Rather, we intend to understand the way in which individuals conceive and understand the political sphere, the meaning they attribute to its various dimensions and elements, and the influence of the context in which these processes occur; ultimately how they *perceive politics*. Having said that, in accordance with the conceptual tools available and the existing theoretical basis, we propose a comprehensive definition of political perception according to three distinct phases.

Firstly, we recognize that the process of perceiving something implies the creation of an image related to a certain reality, from the selection, transmission and interpretation of our senses' inputs (Johns & Saks, 2020; Bennett; 1981). As such, this process translates into the raw and practical knowledge, information and/or ideas held about the political sphere (I). Next, we argue that this process does not exist independently. On the contrary, we subscribe the arguments that dictate that the "situational context in which the perception is occurring" (Johns & Saks, 2020: 372) and similar environments and behavioral schemas (Segall *et al.*, 1966; Deregowski, 1973) influence the way the target is perceived. Likewise, the same is true of the attribution of meaning. Schmitt and Grupp (1976), for instance, show that the perceived scarcity of a resource actually depends on the symbolic meaning

of that same resource, and not only on its objective properties (*in* Bennett, 1981: 122). More, we had also previously reviewed that, for Johns and Saks, beyond the organization of senses' inputs, perception provides "order and meaning to the environment" (2020: 370). Hence, this second phase dictates that political perception is context- and meaning-dependent, while also allowing the attribution of meaning (II). Finally, theories explored by Belchior (2015) and Granberg *et al.* (1988) shed light on the consequences that perceptions may have on the formation of individuals' political opinion. Similarly, Bennett argues that "thought and action are not disjointed abstractions; they are practical tools that people use to make sense of and deal effectively with their worlds" (1981: 174), while Marody poses that "the choice and undertaking of a certain action is determined primarily by the way the actor perceives reality" (1990: 258). Therefore, the perception of the political sphere, or its parts, may influence the formation of individual opinions, and motivate or constrain the taking of a certain type of action (III). Briefly put, we suggest the following:

Political perception consists in the 1) practical knowledge, information and/or ideas held about the political sphere, according to a 2) specific context and attributed meaning, which may 3) influence the formation of individual political opinions, and motivate or constrain the taking of a certain type of action.

#### **2.3.1.1. The Portuguese Case**

Since we highlight the dependence of political perception vis-a-vis the context and our research objectives are related to the understanding of this perception of a particular group of individuals, it is necessary to refer to that particular case. As such, within the study of Portuguese's political perceptions, we find that research "has sometimes been neglected", with the Portuguese case being "systematically absent, both from descriptive and explanatory studies" (Belchior, 2015: 736). Even so, we revisited two studies that we consider worthy.

The study carried out by Belchior (2015) analyzes the Portuguese ideological perceptions regarding national political parties, aiming to assess the effects of the displacement theory and the importance of the economic crisis of 2010 on the maintenance or alteration of these perceptions. According to the author, it is known that voters' perceptions change according to shifts within the political field – mainly in what refers to the behavior of political parties and candidates – and contextual information. As such, Belchior (2015) assumes that the economic crisis exerted influence on the perceptions about political parties. To respond to her objectives, the author uses data obtained through a questionnaire applied to deputies and Portuguese voters in 2008 and again in 2012/2013 (Belchior, 2015: 743). Finally, the research findings indicate the likely influence of the crisis period on the reconfiguration of voters' perceptions of political parties and their respective biases, insofar as national parties were perceived as more central in 2009, later registering a polarization in perceptions about party ideologies after 2012, especially relevant in relation to right-wing parties (Belchior, 2015: 755). The author goes even further

and highlights the tendency towards the formation of a contrast effect vis-à-vis the main parties, on the right with *Partido Social Democrata* and on the left with *Partido Socialista* (Belchior, 2015: 755).

Somewhat distant from Belchior's (2015) purpose, Lobo and Sanches focus on the attitudes and political behavior of young Portuguese people, addressing in particular their perceptions of democracy, patterns of cognitive mobilization and party identification, and levels of civic and political participation (2017: 123). According to the authors, the most recent studies indicate that "the Portuguese evaluate the real performance of the democratic regime in the country in a very negative way" and "most respondents feel little or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Portugal" (Lobo & Sanches, 2017: 126- 127). Like Belchior's study, the crisis that broke out in 2010 also serves as a temporal reference in this research: Lobo and Sanches refer that since 2011 perceptions have evolved quite negatively, with 65% of Portuguese people being dissatisfied with democracy in that year, which increased to 74% in 2014 (2017: 127). Moreover, by focusing two questionnaires whose dates allow to determine similar indicators in two different time frames, the period before (2007) and after the crisis (2015), the authors analyze the evolution of interest in politics, party identification, and civic and political participation by age cohort. As such, according to Lobo and Sanches, between 2007 and 2015 young adults<sup>1</sup> recorded a 19.8% percentage point decline in interest in politics (2017: 132). This declining trend also seems to be registered in values of party identification and electoral participation (Lobo & Sanches, 2017: 135-136) within the Portuguese population in general. Regarding the latter, the authors also suggest that the "consensus around the value of the vote was much wider than it is today" (Lobo & Sanches, 2017: 137). Finally, in what refers to political participation, it is stated that the age group of young adults stands out from others in activities such as signing petitions, boycotting products, and donating or collecting funds for social or political activities. As such, contrary to the conclusions drawn for indicators such as interest in politics or voting frequency, the authors suggest that there seems to be a generational difference in the way of getting politically involved (Lobo & Sanches, 2017: 141).

These two studies are relevant in building the theoretical basis of our study as, in the first place, they consolidate the idea that the 2010 crisis had consequences in terms of political perceptions. Regarding the conclusions suggested by Belchior (2015), we consider them to be significant in the sense that they affirm the influence of context on individual perceptions regarding elements of the political sphere (in this case political parties), since there is a change in perceptions before and after the 2010 crisis. However, we consider that the operationalization of the concept is restricted to an ideological perception rather than a political one, besides the almost exclusive focus on formal political elements (e.g., voters; political parties). Furthermore, the comparative study carried out by Lobo and Sanches (2017) encompasses a greater number of indicators. Unlike Belchior, the concept of perception is used as closer to that of opinion. However, it is still relevant, insofar as it introduces the evolution of

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<sup>1</sup> To compare these data, the authors consider the following age cohorts: 15/24 (referred to as "young people"); 25/34 (referred to as "young adults" and the cohort we discuss here); 35/44; 45/54; 55/64; and 65/+ (referred to as "the elder ones") (Lobo & Sanches, 2017: 131).

individuals' perceptions regarding the Portuguese democratic system and the possible influence of the 2010 crisis on said evolution. Here we consider that it will be productive to explore in greater depth the reason behind these changes registered in terms of democratic perceptions and the influence they exert on political involvement. Still regarding this 2017 study, which is included in a book whose objective is to portray the Millennial Generation socially and politically (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017), the considerations that we highlight as the most relevant are the change in the value attributed to voting by the Portuguese population in general and the suggestion of a possible generational effect regarding preferences of political participation modalities. These premises seem to be close to our conceptualization of political perception, insofar as it seems plausible that the information collected about the political sphere, in that context, implied the devaluation of the meaning attributed to the vote, which resulted not only in the generalized decrease in electoral participation, but also in the option for other forms of participation among young adults.

## **2.4. The Portuguese Crises – a vicious cycle?**

### **2.4.1. The International Crisis and the *Geração à Rasca***

“The 2008 financial crisis was the biggest in the history of capitalism since the Great Depression of 1929” (Oreiro, 2011: 1). The crisis emerged in the United States as consequence of the collapse of the speculative bubble in the housing market and easily spread throughout the world (Oreiro, 2011). In Europe, the crisis accelerated and accentuated the emerging public debts, giving rise to divergent perceptions according to a dichotomous narrative between abiding and spending countries, making its political management difficult (Lourtie, 2011). In fact, as would be expected, the economic performance of European countries proved to be very different (Engelhardt, 2017), resulting in specific strategies for each case (Lourtie, 2011).

Portugal, unlike other European peers, had already registered low growth since 2001 (Lourtie, 2011; Carmo & Cantante, 2015). The country was facing changes in the global and European economy, presenting difficulties in adjusting to the enlargement of the EU to Eastern European countries and the entry into the game of low-cost emerging economies such as China or India (Lourtie, 2011). In this sense, when the subprime crisis began to spread to the rest of the world, converging with the outbreak of the eurozone crisis, Portugal, Greece and Ireland "saw their situations described consecutively as very different from the countries that were seen as "Mr. to follow"" (Lourtie, 2011: 64). As such, the first turning point for Portugal took place at the beginning of 2010 due to the deterioration of the Greek situation. Faced with this, the Portuguese government announced austerity measures to assess the international pressure (Accornero & Pinto, 2015). However, a second turning point appeared when the Anglo-Irish Bank was rescued in September of the same year (Lourtie, 2011).

Hence, the following economic period in Portugal was marked by a strategy of resistance to the international bailout based on strong austerity policies. In November 2010, "the toughest austerity budget in about thirty years" was approved, which included measures such as reduction of public sector

wages by five percent; blocking of new hires in the public administration; prohibition of career promotions and salary progressions; reduction of subsidies and social support; pension freeze; and cuts in the National Health Service and other public programs (Lourtie, 2011; Stoleroff, 2013). Even so, the general international belief remained convinced of the inevitability of Portugal's request for financial assistance. In fact, on the 22nd of March 2011, the then in power socialist government saw not only its proposals to restrict public spending and limit the increase in budget deficit defeated in parliament, but also the symbolic vote of political non-confidence, translated into the inevitability of its resignation and external intervention (Accornero & Pinto, 2015: 405; Englehardt, 2017: 2). In May 2011, the Portuguese take notice of the *Memorandum of Understanding on Specific Economic Policy Conditionality* for financial assistance worth 78 billion euros (Stoleroff, 2013).

On citizen's side, Troika's austerity measures attacked Portuguese pockets by simultaneously increasing the cost of living and decreasing income: for instance, an extraordinary income tax was applied (equivalent to 50% of the Christmas allowance); VAT on gas and electricity increased from 6% to 13%; holiday and Christmas subsidies were suspended; VAT increased on various products (such as bottled water or soft drinks); there was also a general increase in other taxes such as Vehicle Tax or Municipal Property Tax; an increase in the costs of urban public transports in Lisbon and Porto was also verified; as well as an increase in health expenditures (Público, 2012), among others. Moreover, the increase in financial difficulties coexisted with the liberalization of the labor market, the perpetuation of temporary work contracts, and the growth of the informal economy and thus unprotected work (Soeiro, 2014). As such, the Portuguese population experienced a general massification of the precarious condition, particularly stark among young people (Soeiro, 2014; Ferreira, 2017).

Consequently, the Portuguese political response generated widespread discontent and social disenchantment, leading to a crisis of legitimacy among political agents (Soeiro, 2014). As underlined by Gorbunova and Raimundo, in 2011 65% of the Portuguese considered themselves little or not at all satisfied with the way democracy worked, an almost half of the adult population was convinced that the functioning of democracy had worsened in the last 5 years (2013: 163). Overall, the deterioration of the material conditions of the Portuguese population, combined with the crisis of legitimacy of political institutions, triggered a change in political attitudes and behaviors of Portuguese individuals (Ferreira, 2017), whereby Portugal became part of the new cycle of international mobilizations (Soeiro, 2014).

In Portugal, this cycle finds its "foundational moment" on the protest of March 12, 2011 (Soeiro, 2014). The mobilization overran the streets marking the contemporary Portuguese history as the biggest demonstration of civil society actors since the Democratic Revolution (Baumgarten, 2013: 457). This was a non-partisan movement that sought to promptly reject the link with national parties (Accornero & Pinto, 2015: 411), showing that "potentially active citizenship goes far beyond the most classical forms of organizing interests in contemporary societies" (Soeiro, 2014: 56). The name of the protest – the so-called *Geração à Rasca* (Soeiro, 2014: 62) – derived from (at the same time it materialized) the consciousness of "common condition associated with precariousness among young people" (Soeiro,

2014: 62). In that regard, although there was a broad scope of claims, issues of work and employment – namely under the flags of “generation” and “precariousness” (Accornero & Pinto, 2015: 415) occupied great prominence and protagonism (Soeiro, 2014; Pais, 2014; Accornero & Pinto, 2015).

The Demonstration of *Geração à Rasca* was, therefore, a representative moment of a new participatory splendor, according to a logic of *us against them*, but also a symbol of the awareness of the precarious social condition of the qualified and “online” youth, based on the complexification of juvenile transitions (Soeiro, 2014). The following period met at least two more high points of protests – on the 15th of September 2012, and on the 2nd of March, 2013 –, both organized by the social movement *Que se Lixe a Troika* (Accornero & Ramos Pinto, 2015). However, and even though this period did in fact introduce a new dynamism of political and civic involvement, it is important to recognize that its duration was more ephemeral than would be expected. Even in the presence of large demonstrations and collective feelings of disillusionment and insurgency, there was no apparent definitive change within the Portuguese political participation culture. By the summer of 2013, the pace of the demonstrations had already slowed down considerably, and the majority of Portuguese Population did not “believe in the efficacy of political participation” (Baumgartner, 2013: 460).

#### **2.4.2. The Pandemic Crisis – A Misfortune Never Comes Alone**

Less than a decade later, at the end of 2019, a “severe acute respiratory syndrome” was identified in China (Vieira & Meirinhos, 2021: 355). It was quickly understood that it was a contagious virus, which would come to be commonly known as Covid-19. It spread rapidly throughout the world, reaching Portugal in early March (da Silva *et al.*, 2022). Like other governments, the national executive was quick to build a public response (Carmo *et al.*, 2022). In fact, and contrary to the opinion of the National Council of Public Health, the Portuguese Government ordered the closure of educational establishments on March 16, 2020 (Peixoto *et al.*, 2020). A few days later, on the 18th of March, the State of Emergency and the country’s general confinement were decreed, with comprehensive containment measures (Peixoto *et al.*, 2020), aiming to prevent the spread of the virus and the responsiveness of the national health system (Vieira & Meirinhos, 2021). Even so, if the first 2 cases of infected people were confirmed on the 2nd of March, this number quickly rose to 7443 infected individuals at the end of the same month (da Silva *et al.*, 2022).

Bluntly, the pandemic situation radically transformed the ways of life and the organization and functioning of States and societies throughout the world. In Portugal’s specific case, the immediate impacts occurred not only in the sanitary and public health sphere, but also in the economy and, in particular, within the labor market (Carmo *et al.*, 2022). The confinement of the population forced the interruption of several productive activities, causing an almost immediate contraction of the economy with consequences in terms of employment and loss of income (Caldas, Silva & Cantante, 2020). Similar to what happened between 2010 and 2014, the most affected employees turned out to be those who were already in a vulnerable situation, both contractual and salary wise: many contracts were not renewed,

the ones who had temporary contracts, provided services or exercised informal work were discarded from their professional activities and lost any type of social protection they may had, "falling into more or less accentuated situations of impoverishment" (Carmo *et al.*, 2020: 23). Even more, Portugal stood out among the European Union members as one of the countries in which youth employment fell the most (Lopes, 2022). As such, it seems that the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent economic crisis have exacerbated "a set of social vulnerabilities not completely resolved in the previous recovery period" (Carmo *et al.*, 2022: 38), for what we suggest that there could be a perpetuation of the precarious social system that started earlier.

## **2.5. Generations, political perceptions, and crises. What?**

The purpose of this dissertation is complex insofar as it assumes the relation between several themes, which are not only theoretical robust but also nonconsensual within the literature. Nonetheless, it is our opinion that the discussion of generations, political perceptions and crises is indeed relevant, even more in the Portuguese case and before a context of changes in the World and European political scenario, which, somehow, raised a narrative of both responsibility and hope towards youth involvement.

In this sense, the hypothesis that we put to the test defines the possibility that the two Portuguese crises influence the political perception of Portuguese Millennials. Here emerges a first objective, although secondary, that is perhaps more immediate and therefore easier to comprehend its relevancy. The period of crisis and austerity policies that marked Portugal between 2010 and 2014 has already been the subject of many relevant theoretical contributions. In fact, it has already been discussed and hypothesized that the implementation of austerity policies in this period worked as a generational marker, insofar as it intensified and accelerated economic and social processes that defined a structurally different context from the one that preceded it (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017). Nonetheless, the review of both crises presented here allows the reader to identify similarities within the social and economic consequences faced by Portuguese citizens in both periods: for instance, the work sphere is highlighted in studies that focus one of the crises individually, highlighting the increase in general and youth unemployment; the perpetuation or termination of temporary contracts; and the increase of employees inserted within the informal economy and, therefore, without any type of social protection. Therefore, we argue that there is a line of perpetuation of the precarious condition known by the most vulnerable groups, including young people, inaugurated in 2010. Hereupon, this first aim intends to present the joint effect of the two crises, taking them as distinct but complementary moments of the same structural framework, proposing that this second crisis and, mainly, the perpetuation of the precarious condition, also acts as a generational marker.

The second aim presented here – which we take as the ultimate objective of this dissertation – is not independent of this first one. We consider the study of the accumulated consequences of the two crises to be very relevant; however, it would be hardly credible to define its exhaustive analysis in the present work. As such, and motivated not only by personal thematic interests, but also by the somewhat



still controversial discussion regarding the political involvement of young people, we decided to restrict this analysis to the political sphere. Thereby, we reflected on the reason for the apparent distance of individuals from the modalities considered "conventional". In addition to the common responses linked to the disenchantment and discredit of institutions – that we tend to subscribe –, we considered that it would be possible that the way individuals understand and interpret politics, the context, and the meaning they attribute to it could influence the opinions and actions they decide to take out. It is in this sense that the suggestion of a formal concept of political perception arises.

Having said that, we believe the connecting line between the three major thematic blocks becomes clearer. As reviewed, the precarious condition motivated by the austerity period – which we propose here is being perpetuated by the 2019 crisis – was thought as having deep and difficult to reverse consequences on several dimensions of individuals' lives (Carmo & Barata, 2017). As such, it is only plausible to assume they did so on the political sphere – which also seems to be the case, at least regarding the 2010 crisis, according to the studies of Belchior (2015) and Lobo and Sanches (2017). Hereupon, it is now our objective to understand if the experimentation of the two crises – situational context as posed by Johns and Saks (2020) – motivated a particular understanding and interpretation of the political sphere – the target (Johns & Saks, 2020) – among individuals of the Millennial Generation – the perceiver (Johns & Saks, 2020) –, subsequently inducing specific frames of opinion and action.

### Chapter 3

#### **Methodology**

In accordance with the theoretical arguments previously reviewed, this dissertation is guided by the following research question: “have the Portuguese economic crises influenced the political perception of Portuguese Millennials?”. The later, in turn, is broken down into two research objectives: to assess how Portuguese Millennials perceive politics and if the economic crises exerted influence on that perception, and if so, how (1); and to assess whether in fact the experimentation of the two crises acts as a generational marker (2).

Thus, if the aim of the present exploratory study is to understand how young Portuguese people perceive the political sphere, “the social world must be interpreted from the perspective of the people being studied” (Bryman, 2012: 399), therefore implying an interpretative epistemological position. Hence, this strategy translates into 15 semi-structured interviews, insofar as they allow a flexible structuring but nonetheless oriented to understanding the way in which the interviewee comprehends certain events, subjects and behaviors (Bryman, 2012).

In 2021 Portugal had 1.775.384 individuals aged between 25 and 39 years old, representing 17,24% of the total population (Pordata, s.d.)<sup>2</sup>. It is therefore logical that inquiring the total universe of

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<sup>2</sup> We emphasize the discrepancy between the age limits that we previously defined as guides – all individuals born between 1981 and 1996 – compared to the ages expressed here – equivalent to individuals born between 1983 and

Portuguese individuals whose ages suggest their inclusion in the Millennial Generation was impossible. That said, we further restricted the population universe according to the generational characteristics previously reviewed, imposing that individuals should be aged between 26 and 41 years old and have a higher education degree. We also focused on individuals residing in Lisbon due to the ease of logistics and because we believed that theoretical conclusions would be more reliable with a smaller geographical dispersion. That said, it was necessary to collect a sample to conduct the interviews. The type of sampling initially applied was convenience sampling. However, we considered the dependence of this method on accessibility (Bryman, 2012: 201) and availability (Naderifar *et al.*, 2017: 2) of the individuals vis-à-vis the researcher, possibly calling into question not only the independence of the respondents' answers, but also the close alignment of ideas, according to the possible proximity of the selected individuals to the researcher's personal circle. For this very reason, and aiming to avoid all possible bias, a second sampling strategy was applied: snowball sampling. Both strategies constitute non-probabilistic types of sampling, which implies that this is a non-representative study, insofar as it doesn't allow definitive findings or generalizations (Naderifar *et al.*, 2017: 2). Nonetheless, the relevance of this research should not be underestimated, as its conclusions may not only motivate the construction of an argumentative line regarding the influence of the two economic crises on national political culture, but also constitute a springboard for future investigations on political perception.

In total, 15 individuals were interviewed. Initially, we made use of close contacts, either through personal relationships or contacts available in digital platforms and social media (personal Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn). Subsequently, we asked the individuals contacted first to ask their acquaintances if they would be available for an interview, aiming to broaden the degree of relationship between the interviewee and the researcher. Of the 15 interviews, 7 individuals are personal contacts who made themselves available, while the remaining 8 result from the snowball logic applied later.

Just as the application of the second sampling method aimed to increase the distance between the interviewees and the researcher – to avoid any bias in the response line –, this wariness was also maintained during the interviews. Knowing that is not possible to be entirely objective in the treatment of sociological problematics and recognizing that knowledge may come from a reflexive position thus sensitive to the researcher's context (Bryman, 2012), we tried to intervene as little as possible, formulate questions in a neutral way and without presenting reactions to the given answers.

Regarding the interviewees profile, among the 15 interviewees, 8 are female and 7 are male. As for the level of academic qualification, the majority detains a master's degree (n=8), 4 have doctorates and 3 have bachelor's degrees (Table 3.1.).

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1997. However, the statistical platform *Pordata* presents the data regarding the resident population by age group according to cohorts of 4 years (25-29; 20-34; 35-39; etc). As such, we added the three groups between 25 and 39 years old, aiming to obtain an approach to the population universe of Portuguese Millennials.

**Table 3.1.** Sample Characterization. Source: Own production.

<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Academic Degree</b>	<b>Sex</b>
Interviewee 1	32	PhD Degree	Female
Interviewee 2	33	Bachelor's degree	Female
Interviewee 3	29	Master's degree	Female
Interviewee 4	34	Master's degree	Male
Interviewee 5	38	Master's degree	Male
Interviewee 6	33	Bachelor's degree	Male
Interviewee 7	35	Bachelor's degree	Male
Interviewee 8	33	Master's degree	Female
Interviewee 9	39	PhD Degree	Female
Interviewee 10	31	PhD Degree	Male
Interviewee 11	36	Master's degree	Female
Interviewee 12	36	Master's degree	Female
Interviewee 13	33	PhD Degree	Male
Interviewee 14	40	Master's degree	Male
Interviewee 15	32	Master's degree	Female

The interviews took place between June and August 2022. Since we were still in an enigmatic situation regarding social contacts, resulting from the covid-19 pandemic, the interviews took on a hybrid format between face-to-face and via zoom, according to the interviewee's preference. Out of the 15, only 5 took place face-to-face. All interviews were recorded with permission of the interviewees and lasted between 10 and 40 minutes. The interviews were later transcribed *ipsis verbis*, respecting nonetheless the anonymity of the interviewees, eliminating any discursive marks that referred individual characteristics. Furthermore, individuals were informed and consented to the possible use of some variables in the construction of the analysis, such as academic qualifications or age. Finally, once the interviews took place in Portuguese, the excerpts considered relevant were translated to English.

To Krippendorff “[c]ontent analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.” (2004: 18). For Drisko and Maschi, this means that this technique allows researchers to identify and document “attitudes, views and interests of individuals” (2016: 2). Thus, to answer our research questions and objectives, we developed a content analysis strategy, applied with the software MAXQDA. The purpose of the employed technique is dichotomous: on the one hand, we propose to identify the presence of certain themes in the discourses of the interviewees, to establish comparisons between them; on the other hand, we intend to ascertain the meanings that the same individuals attribute to certain elements (Dantas, 2016). That said, to fulfill these aims it was necessary to apply a mixed research framework, resulting from a content analysis both quantitative and qualitative (Dantas, 2016). Let's see in more detail.

To identify the presence of relevant themes, we applied a quantitative strategy (Bardin, 1994). We defined categories of analysis (Dantas, 2016) within a specific coding scheme (Bardin, 1994; White & Marsh, 2006). The MAXQDA software allows the researcher to define his/hers own coding process, to create and organize the categories as he/she wishes, with the possibility of later resorting to visual analysis tools (Nodari *et al.*, 2014). These categories were constructed according to the literature review,

the established research aims (White & Marsh, 2006), and to the material, whereas the latter refers to an inductive logic (Dantas, 2016). Hence, this process results in the following categories: *generational awareness* (I), in turn divided into two subcategories *age cohort* (Ia) and *common narratives* (Ib); *political knowledge* (II), also with two underlying subcategories *2011* (IIa) and *2019* (IIb); *crisis experimentation* (III), too divided according to the relevant periods *2011* (IIIa) and *2019* (IIIb); *political participation 2011* (IV), divided into *institutional* (IVa) and *extra-institutional* (IVb); and *political participation 2019* (V), again divided into *institutional* (Va) and *extra-institutional* (Vb).

We recall that this methodological strategy is part of a research project with an established research question and two main goals. Thus, the analysis categories that support this strategy have as their primary purpose to assist in the construction of an answer (White & Marsh, 2006). At this point, we reverse the order and first recall the second objective mentioned, which sets out to assess whether the experience of the mentioned crises acts as a generational marker. To do that, we briefly overview the existence (or not) of a generational consciousness among interviewees. Accordingly, as we reviewed earlier, the identification of generations is commonly done according to age groups, but it can also arise from the mobilization of dominant cultural narratives. That said, the edification of the first category (I) stems both from the theoretical framework and the established research purposes and makes it possible to identify whether the interviewees share a generational consciousness and on what basis. Hence, the two subcategories (Ia and Ib) emerge from different theoretical arguments, allowing us to ascertain the way in which individuals themselves evoke the concept of generation, whether by age cohort (Mannheim, 1969) or according to a specific set of narratives (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014). The second subcategory is complex in itself. We considered that it would be counterproductive to create subcodes for all discursive constructions that could work as tools to operationalize the concept of generation. As such, this subcategory is the result of an initial comprehensive reading of the interviews that allowed us to familiarize ourselves with the mobilized narratives, in order to later identify them as relevant, when applicable. In turn, the *crisis experimentation* category (III) enables us to assess if the experimentation of the two crises (IIIa and IIIb) works as generational marker, insofar as it allows to identify whether the interviewees mention a marked individual experience. Moreover, this set of categories also aims to facilitate the study of the possible influence of both periods on the interviewees' political perception (1).

The following categories of analysis were built mostly with the purpose of meeting the first objective, to remember: to assess how Portuguese Millennials perceive politics and if the economic crises exerted influence on that perception. Here, we previously looked at the concept of political perception, which we considered more relevant than that of political participation, insofar as the former allows us to study the knowledge and information held about the political sphere (i); the influence of context and attributed meaning (ii); and the way these may act as mechanisms that influence how one decides to take action politically (iii). Like so, the category *political knowledge* (II) arises directly from the definition of political perception and aims to assess the level and type of information interviewees possess regarding the two moments of crisis (IIa and IIb). Finally, categories IV and V, which concern

*political participation* within the two periods, emerge from the literature, specifically from the conceptual discussion of political perception and the arguments focusing Portuguese participation.

The quantitative strategy also implies the definition of a coding scheme. As such, we determined that the categories of analysis correspond to the recording units and the interviews to the context units (Dantas, 2016). Regarding the counting unit, we opted for the presence/absence dichotomy of the recording units – categories of analysis – within the 15 context units – interviews. This coding scheme makes it possible to treat the analysis categories as nominal variables (Dantas, 2016: 273), making the data easier to read. To identify their presence or absence within the various interviews, we made use of the visual tools of the MAXQDA software<sup>3</sup>. The Code Matrix Browser shows the frequency of categories across the selected documents. Thus, we sought in the interviews for references to the topics covered by the categories. When these occurred, the respective code was assigned to the textual segment where the information was present.

- I. Generational awareness: does the interviewee include himself/herself in the Millennial generation and distance from others?
  - a. Age cohort: does the interviewee refer to inclusion or distance from a certain generation based on the mention of age groups?
  - b. Common narratives: does the interviewee operationalize the concept of generation by referring to specific themes, discourses, codes or terminologies?
- II. Political knowledge: does the interviewee have information and knowledge about phenomena, events, actors, measures or other elements relating to the political sphere?
  - a. 2010: does the interviewee have and mobilize information and political knowledge about the specific moment of the 2010-2014 crisis?
  - b. 2019: does the interviewee have and mobilize information and political knowledge about the specific moment of the 2019- crisis?
- III. Crisis experimentation:
  - a. 2010: does the interviewee address his/her particular experience of the 2010-2014 crisis, mentioning direct consequences and effects?
  - b. 2019: does the interviewee address his/her particular experience of the 2019- crisis, mentioning direct consequences and effects?
- IV. Political participation 2010:
  - a. Institutional: does the interviewee report to have had an active institutional political participation during the period between 2010 and 2014?

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<sup>3</sup> Here it is necessary to draw the reader's attention to the conceptual designations, so that confusion does not arise in the reading of the analysis. The MAXQDA software allows the researcher to analyze written supports from *codes* and *notes*. This means, therefore, that there is a direct correspondence between what we call *analysis categories* and the *codes* in the MAXQDA interface. Hence, they shall be read as if they were the same.

- b. Extra-institutional: does the interviewee report to have had an active extra-institutional political participation during the period between 2010 and 2014?

V. Political participation 2019:

- a. Institutional: does the interviewee report to have had an active institutional political participation during the period between 2019 and nowadays?
- b. Extra-institutional: does the interviewee report to have had an active extra-institutional political participation during the period between 2019 and nowadays?

Here, is still necessary to clarify the different operationalization of mother categories. Regarding the two first sets of categories (I, Ia and Ib; II, IIa and IIb) we argue that the mother category does not only list the subcategories, so its operationalization has its own empirical value. About the first set, it is possible that the *age cohort* and *common narratives* may be operationalized to deny the existence of a *generational consciousness*, for instance. In the second case, we argue that it would be relevant to highlight the voluntary operationalization of *political knowledge* (II), even when it was not directed to one of the periods under study (IIa and IIb). On the contrary, regarding the remaining three sets, the main categories only serve as an indication of the general theme, for what we decided they would not be considered in the codification of the textual segments.

After this first phase, we move on to qualitative content analysis. At this point, it is important to look beyond the presence or absence of the themes, in order to understand the way interviewees comprehend the various subjects, their points of view and meanings they attribute. To this end, we turned again to the MAXQDA software to analyze the interviewees' discourses in depth. This software makes it possible to easily locate the categories of analysis within the transcripts – using the Segment Matrix and the Encoding List –, isolating them for a more rigorous analysis. In practice, we adopted a logic of horizontal and comprehensive analysis (Dantas, 2016), which allowed us to ascertain how each of the units was approached by the different interviewees.

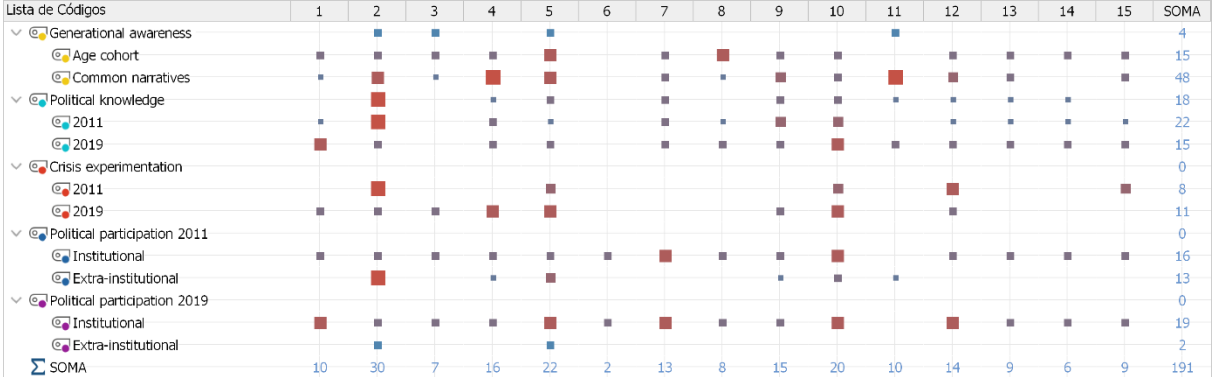
## Chapter 4

### **Analysis and Interpretation of Results**

In this chapter we will proceed to the analysis and discussion of the results obtained through the codification of interviewees, guiding the discussion towards the established objectives and research question.

In this first moment, Figure 4.1. and Table 4.1. provide information on the presence or absence of the categories of analysis within the interviewees' speeches. In specific, Figure 4.1. results from the operationalization of the Code Matrix Browser tool. This visual tool demonstrates how many textual segments from each document – each interview (numbered from 1 to 15) – have been assigned a specific code – category of analysis. Thus, the larger the square, the greater the number of coded segments with a certain code in a given document. Table 4.1., in turn, simplifies this information, demonstrating the

absolute and relative frequency of each category. We treated Figure 4.1. and Table 4.1. as complementary tools. Let's see in more detail.



**Figure 4.1.** Code Matrix Browser. The Matrix demonstrates which codes (lines) have been assigned to which interviews (columns). This tool provides an overview of how many textual segments from each interview have been assigned a specific code, whereby the squares are as large as the number of coded segments.

**Table 4.1.** Absolute and relative frequency of analysis units. Source: Own elaboration.

	Present		Absent	
	N	%	N	%
<b>Generational awareness</b>	4	27%	11	73%
<b>Age cohort</b>	13	87%	2	13%
<b>Common narratives</b>	13	87%	2	13%
<b>Political knowledge</b>	10	67%	5	33%
<b>P.K. 2011</b>	12	80%	3	20%
<b>P.K. 2019</b>	13	87%	2	13%
<b>Crisis Experimentation</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>C.E. 2011</b>	5	33%	10	67%
<b>C.E. 2019</b>	8	53%	7	47%
<b>Political participation 2011</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>P.P.11 Institutional</b>	14	93%	1	7%
<b>P.P.11 Extra-institutional</b>	6	40%	9	60%
<b>Political participation 2019</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>P.P.19 Institutional</b>	14	93%	1	7%
<b>P.P.19 Extra-Institutional</b>	2	13%	13	87%

Firstly, by looking at Table 4.1. is important to note that the categories record levels of presence and absence that are distinct from each other – even between main categories and its subcategories. The first category (I) immediately draws attention because of the low levels of presence (27%) compared to the high levels of its subcategories (Ia and Ib) (87% for both). Regarding the former, it seems to suggest that only 4 individuals openly include themselves in the Millennial Generation and, as shown in Figure 4.1., that only 1 does so without mobilizing the *age cohort* subcategory.

Regarding the category of *political knowledge* (II) and its subcategories (IIa and IIb), the levels of presence of the later seem to indicate that the mobilization of knowledge regarding elements of the political sphere seems more accessible when these are framed in one of the two crisis periods and the interviewees are directly questioned about the subject. In other words, the voluntary mobilization of

general political knowledge is less frequent (level of absence of 73%), whereby it appears to be a more demanding task. Furthermore, of the 12 individuals perceived as possessing political knowledge in relation to both periods (see Figure 4.1., interviews 1; 2; 4; 5; 7; 8; 9; 10; 12; 13; 14; 15), 8 register a greater number of coded segments in the subcategory referring to the second crisis (2019). In light of the hypothesis of lifecycle effects and, therefore, of the change in individuals' attitudes and behaviors according to the transitions to adulthood, we will analyze this difference closely.

The third set, which refers to the *experimentation of the crisis* (III), also reveals low levels of presence: 33% in 2011 (IIIa) and 53% in 2019 (IIIb). In any case, these values must also be considered: it is not only necessary to determine whether these low levels of presence result from the little effect of the crisis on these individuals' lives or from the low perception they hold about that period, but also understand whether the increase in the number of individuals who expose a clear experimentation of the 2019 crisis – compared to those who did in relation to the 2011 crisis – is due to a *de facto* change in the socioeconomic condition, or if, on the other hand, there is a change in the way individuals perceive the period of crisis, being more aware of its experimentation.

Finally, the analysis categories that refer to *political participation* (IV and V) indicate a large presence of *institutional participation* (IVa and Va) (93% in both periods). In light of the theories that propose processes of individualization and de-institutionalization among young people, the decrease in *extra-institutional participation* between 2011 (IVb) (40% presence) and 2019 (Vb) (13% presence) might be even more relevant. In view of these results is mandatory to understand in-depth the motivations that support these individuals' political involvement.

#### **4.1. Generational Consciousness and Generational Marker**

After assessing the presence or absence of each category in the various interviews and constructing some initial considerations, it is necessary to send the analysis to a horizontal, comprehensive, and in-depth examination of the discourses. We remind the reader that to do this we also use the MAXQDA software: from the selection of interviews and codes of interest, the encoding list presents all the textual segments of said interviews coded with said codes.

First, we focus briefly on the existence (or not) of a generational consciousness among the interviewees. For such, we recall that we took generational consciousness as a social identity defined by certain developments at a certain age, that makes possible to identify differences regarding other generations and build a foundation for self-recognition. The argument mobilized here, dependent on the conceptual definition, is that, to verify the existence of a generational consciousness, individuals must clearly recognize their belonging to the Millennial Generation, either by referencing the age cohort or mobilizing narratives that they use for self-recognition (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014). As such, the categories analyzed here are *generational awareness* (I), *age cohort* (Ia) and *common narratives* (Ib).

Among the 15 interviewees only 4 clearly included themselves in the Millennial Generation. Thus, the selection of these interviews (2; 3; 5; 11) and of the first set of codes (I, Ia and Ib) resulted in 26



encodings. Here we argue that the low number of individuals who consider themselves Millennials, by itself, indicates the non-existence of a shared generational awareness among the total group of interviewees; but beyond that, it is also possible to identify different levels of belonging and certainty among the 4/15 individuals, which, we argue, reinforces the non-existence of shared generational bonds.

Nonetheless, among the respondents is possible to find discourses that translate high levels of belonging while resorting to both subcategories. Interviewees' 2 and 5 immediate responses are not only determined – “Yes.” (interview 2) and “Yes, an Elder Millennial.” (interview 5) – but they also explore their inclusion more deeply. As for interviewee 2, she resorts both to the *age cohort* and *common narratives*, namely the turn of the millennium and massification of technology. Moreover, regarding these two narratives, she also refers she “became aware of “a series of cultural phenomena”” (interview 2), which sends to the potentiality of the location. However, the practical realization of these phenomena – of which the massification of technology is an example – suggests that it may have “translated into an actuality sharing a similar ‘mental order’, that is, a common culture or worldview” (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014: 168). As for interviewee 5, the mobilization of the *age cohort* to refer to his inclusion as an Elder Millennial suggests a higher level of belonging as it mobilizes not only the generation label, but also a generational unit (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014) to identify himself. Moreover, the interviewee mobilizes both narratives identified in interview 2: the turn of the millennium, where he mentions the generation before him, that believed “everything was going to be better, of hope for the future”; and the “transition from analog to digital” (interview 5). Both passages show how the interviewee distances himself from other generations, specifically from the one that precedes him.

At this point is undeniable that the analysis seems to indicate the non-existence of a generational consciousness. Even so, we argue that is first necessary to consider all the data and, thus, assess the 41 encodings between the interviews of individuals who did not assume an obvious generational inclusion (11/15), namely to assess the reasons they mobilized for such. Here, two main reasons emerge: firstly, we found that is quite common (7/11) for individuals to consider themselves too old to be Millennials:

*“I already feel a little older or something like that and that I'm not so much part of this generation anymore (laughs)”* (interview 1).

*“Perhaps I already consider myself older than the Millennial generation.”* (interview 4).

*“Maybe I would included me in an older generation”* (interview 7).

*“I don't think I'm included in the Millennial's age, from what I remember from the description of the generations”* (interview 8).

*"I've heard a lot about it lately, but I don't think so. I don't know... I associate Millennials with younger people (laughs). I think it's from a generation... I don't think it's mine. I think it's the generation after mine."* (interview 12).

In this sense, we draw the reader's attention to the fact that, when asked if they identified with this generation, no definition of such generation was offered, in order to seek the most genuine and reliable answer possible. As such, we highlight our perplexity at this mobilization of the *age cohort* subcategory, considering the arguments that define the change within the juvenile condition and the complexity of transitions to adulthood. However, it seems plausible to argue that these phenomena do not occur among the group of interviewees, as at least 4/11 individuals mention that they were parents before the pandemic, while the vast majority also shares that they became independent before that period, mentioning, for instance, that they moved in with their partner.

As for the second reason, and as can be seen in Figure 4.1., among the individuals who do not share generational awareness 9/11 mobilize the subcategory *common narratives*, resulting in 30 coded excerpts. Among these, we highlight 4/9 interviews in which the narratives are clearly mobilized to support the non-identification of individuals with Millennials. Interviewee 4, for example, not only clearly distances himself from the generation by referring to the individuals as they/them, but also describes them as *"more concerned"* and *"wanting to participate"* more than he is. The discourse of interviewee 7 is also quite relevant since the individual recognizes himself as wanting to *"start a family, buying a house and so on and therefore not so much in the idea of traveling and being more detached"* – idea that he asserts is not characteristic of Millennials. Interviewee 9, in turn, mobilizes narratives already mentioned here, namely the dependence on social networks and technology, but in the opposite direction, insofar as she does not recognize herself in *"a more digital, more virtual way of life"*. Finally, the discourse of interviewee 13 resembles that of interviewee 4, in that he also establishes a distance between himself and the Millennials: *"they engage in things that are more recent"* or *"we are having a brain drain, we have kids finishing college and they don't stay here because they have offers for double or triple their salary in Germany"*.

Let us remind the reader that the conception of generations as discursive practices refers not only to the mobilization of "discourses about one's own time" for self-identification, but also to labels whose objective is to identify and distinguish a particular generation (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014: 176). As such, and as the present research focuses on the Portuguese case, we underlined two labels that play a leading role in this particular case: the *Geração à Rasca* and the *Most Qualified Generation Ever*. In this way, we surveyed individuals not only about Millennials, but also about these labels. The horizontal set of responses – namely the different positions taken towards the Millennials label and the Portuguese labels – raise doubts and require in-depth scrutiny.

Regarding Portuguese labels, they were presented within the following questions: *"Do you remember the demonstrations of Geração à Rasca?"* and *"Are you familiar with the expression "The Most Qualified Generation Ever?"*. To identify how individuals responded to said labels, we

analyzed the *generational awareness* category and both subcategories, as well as the *extra-institutional* subcategory (IVb), according to the nature of the question that introduces the first label. Hence, 11/15 individuals recognize the *Geração à Rasca*. However, the levels of identification are different, since only 3/11 did participate in the demonstrations or explored in depth the meaning of the label. Regarding *The Most Qualified Generation Ever* the case is quite different. At least 13/15 individuals identified with the expression and further explored its meaning.

Let us start with *Geração à Rasca*. Only interviewees 5 and 9 (2/15) participated in the demonstrations of 2012. Both refer their participation regarding the collective sense of revindications against the financial conditions that the Portuguese faced during that period, highlighting both the labor market and its precariousness, as well as the financial difficulties faced by families. Regarding these two cases, interviewee 5 is included among the group of interviewees who recognize themselves as Millennials, whereby we argue that this reinforces his generational awareness. Interviewee 9, on the other hand, did not identify with the generation, and hence we thought the recognition of the *Geração à Rasca* label would be undoubtedly relevant. However, we note that the interviewee's position appears to be exclusively in a sense of active political mobilization and perhaps not as much in accordance with a specific generational belonging. Moreover, here a third relevant case arises: interviewee 12 does not self-identified as a Millennial nor does she participate in the demonstrations; nonetheless, she perfectly recognizes the label *Geração à Rasca* and associates it with yet another that she uses to describe her transition from college to the labor market:

*“Yes... I remember at the time talking about the 1000 euros generation. In other words, all of us who went out to the labor market, nobody earned more than 1000 euros. And so... and I remember that at the time we commented among ourselves that the fault was on the first person who had accepted the 1000 euros.”*

Turning to the label *The Most Qualified Generation Ever*, we underline that among the 13/15 individuals who recognize the label, two narratives seem to prevail. At least 3 (3/13) individuals argue that, although they belong to the generation with more and higher levels of education – namely higher education degrees –, that does not mean that all these people are qualified:

*“And therefore, are we more qualified academically? We are. Are we better qualified to do anything? I don't know. People have always worked. I feel qualified in my field, my mother, who has no education and sells fish in the market, is much more qualified in what she does than I am”* (interview 10).

On the other hand, at least 6 (6/13) individuals identify with the label not only because of their level of qualification, but by the discrepancy between that qualification and the offers of the labor market:

*“But there is also the feeling that there are many people with degrees, with masters or doctorates, but at the same time it seems that the work situation does not correspond to what people are investing in their training”* (interview 1).

*“It's that question... it's great that our population is increasingly literate and qualified, but I look at it a little suspicious because I don't see a significant and corresponding increase in opportunities for all these people” (interview 4).*

*“There is a concern in saying that we have the highest rate of graduates in Europe, but where are we licensed? And do we have work? And do we earn decently for what we do? And do we have an employment relationship? And do we have a normal life? Can we aspire to have a home? A family? A car? Can we live in the city where we work or do we have to live in the countryside and drive two hours each way?” (interview 11).*

Contrary to what might be expected, the individuals that make up our sample do not identify with the Millennial generation, suggesting that there is no shared generational awareness. Furthermore, when asked directly about their belonging, the interviewees who see themselves in this generation (4/15) mostly mention the *age cohort* (3/4); the turn of the millennium (2/4) and contact with technologies (3/4). However, when the questions are oriented to the Portuguese labels, the situation changes. Here at least 13/15 individuals recognize one or both labels, mobilizing narratives such as the disagreement with austerity policies (3/13), having participated in the demonstrations and claimed for better living conditions (2/13); the inclusion in the *1000 euros generation* (1/13); the economic needs felt by students in face of blockages to scholarships (3/13); and, mostly, the discrepancy between individuals' qualifications and labor market opportunities (6/13). Hence, regarding the labels *Geração à Rasca* and *The Most Qualified Generation Ever* it seems plausible to suggest that these individuals share a common social identity, insofar as they mobilize a set of discursive narratives to self-identify that, although flexible, fit under the flag of precariousness (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014). Moreover, it is necessary to highlight this difference between the positions towards the two types of labels: that is, the lack of generational awareness when faced with the Millennial label, sustained by two global narratives, and the apparent sharing of a common bond, sustained by the precarious social condition and national narratives, when questioned about Portuguese labels. Inspired by the argument posed by Ferreira (2019), we argue that this might be the result of an intergenerational recognition based on the precarious experience rooted and understood within the national context. As such, and faced with these conclusions, understanding whether the experience of crises acts as a generational marker makes even more sense.

Proposing the study of crises experimentation as a generational marker implies recovering what we understand by the latter. Although the concept is dubious, we chose to follow the description proposed by Ferreira (*et al.*, 2017; 2019). Thus, the argument here is that the periods of crises, and consequent set of policies applied, may have enhanced the intensifying and accelerating of economic and social processes with strength to generate a context that is structurally different from the past (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017: 25), defining a specific precarious social condition for Millennials, vastly different from that of their parents (Ferreira, 2019). We also recall that the first quantitative view suggested low levels of

presence of the III category of analysis among the discourses of interviewees, with only 5/15 individuals clearly exposing their experience of the 2011 crisis, a number that increases to 8/15 in 2019.

If we look first at the 2011 crisis, when asked about their situation at the time – *"Can you tell me a little about your situation at the time? Did you work? Did you study?"* –, the 5 individuals whose speeches are coded with the category IIIa immediately mobilize the flags of precariousness. Interviewee 2 mentions that she was still studying and remembers her *"difficulty in accessing the scholarship because [her] mother had to make a series of payment plans"* and even states that she was almost *"to give up the degree"* (interview 2). Still under the great plague of students' economic deficiencies, we also include the discourses of interviewees 10 and 12. The response of the former states that he was *"still studying, doing [his] degree and living in a student residence, which in economic terms... just the fact of living in that residence was not very favorable"* (interview 10). Moreover, he also remembers that *"there began to be tighter control over who received scholarships"* (interview 10). Interviewee 12, on the other hand, moves the tonic from scholarships to tuition fees:

*"I was in college and thus there were tuition fees to pay, right? And, therefore... my parents are people who don't have many economic possibilities... but they were never considered poor enough to be entitled to some benefit, like scholarships and so on. And so, I remember it being a topic at the time... I remember that my college had the cheapest tuition fees, but even so, a year of classes was still like a thousand euros. It was still a bit difficult for those who do not have very high salaries."* (interview 12).

Under a different banner, that of precarious work, interviewee 5 states that during that period he was finishing his master's degree and quickly advances that he was already working, even though it was not a "fixed work" nor in his area, but *"periodical jobs, to earn some money"*, *"prestações de serviço"*.

Although it is possible to identify the design of a precarious social condition in these passages, it is important to recognize that we only mention 5 individuals out of a total of 15, and that the argument regarding the implementation of austerity policies in 2010-2014 as a generational marker already exists (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, it is important to compare these statements with those that refer to the 2019 crisis and assess whether there is a line of continuity.

Right away, we recall that the category IIIb presents a frequency of presence (53%) higher than IIIa (33%), with at least 8/15 respondents exposing their experimentation of the 2019 crisis. Nonetheless, we highlight that, among these, at least 3/8 individuals address their experience and consequences of the pandemic crisis on a psychological level and not in terms of socioeconomic difficulties. Among the remaining 5/8, all responses send to the sphere of work: interviewee 3 was fired from one of the places she worked in; interviewee 5 saw his own business lose its revenues, whereby he was forced to look for another job; interviewee 10 had just finished his doctoral degree whereby he was also looking for a job at the time – task that we found extremely difficult –, having found one with a fixed term contract; interviewee 1 also worked in more than one place, having a fixed term contract in one and *recibos verdes*

in the other, having seen the salary decrease in the latter; finally, interviewee 12 describes a difficult socioeconomic situation, insofar as her father saw his salary decrease and she had to help him.

When comparing these discourses, it is important to mention that 6/15 individuals do not report marked experiences in any of the two periods. Although the number is small, it represents more than a third of the sample, so is important to reflect on its meaning. Among the 6 respondents there seems to be possible to find common ground: in what refers to 2011, 3/6 interviewees (interviewee 6; 7; and 8) still lived with their parents and were finishing their degrees, masters, internships and/or started working at the time. The remaining 3/6 (interviewee 11; 13 and 14) already lived alone or with their partners and had their own livelihood. None of them shows total alienation from the context in which they were inserted, but there is also no revealing marked financial difficulties.

In order to understand more deeply the differences between these and the other cases, we looked at the qualifications of these individuals' parents (n=12). Here we found that the majority have degrees (11/12), and only 1 individual refers that his mother holds the 12th grade. As for the others 9/15 cases – in which the respondents reveal at least one crisis experience –, the academic qualification of parents (n=18) varies more. Even though there is also a high frequency of academic qualifications (8/18 bachelors and 1/18 master), there is at least 2/18 parents with 12th grade; 4/18 with the 9th grade; and 3/18 with qualifications below that (7th, 6th and 4th grade). Hence, we suggest that there might be some effect of social reproduction and that the interviewees who do not mention any crisis experience may come from more favorable socioeconomic backgrounds, for what they might have been less affected by the austerity measures.

Even though the sample is small, and therefore dangerous to fall into generalizations and hasty conclusions, we draw some concluding remarks. Starting with the more specific results, we conclude that the increase in individuals who exposed the experimentation of the crisis in 2019 (8/15), compared to the number that did so for 2011 (5/15), should be due to two main factors: first, it may result from the lifecycle effect, as there is a greater number of individuals with their own jobs and independent lives in 2019, whereby the socioeconomic effects may be more marked, insofar as it directly affects them; secondly, and possibly also related to a change in values and priorities, we argue that the perception that individuals hold of these periods and its consequences changed, insofar as they do not mention only socioeconomic aspects, but consequences of other dimensions, namely greater anxiety or change in the concept of job satisfaction. Moving on to the ultimate purpose of the analysis, we reinforce that, even with a small sample, it is impossible to ignore the fact that more than half of the individuals (9/15) expose, at least once, an own experimentation of one of the crises, mobilizing narratives included in the precariousness drawer. As such, we suggest that the experimentation of these crises seems to define a structurally different context from the past, by perpetuating a social condition of precarious existence, to which this generation is apparently bound to. In other words, the proximity of the two crises, not only in time but also regarding the reproduction of inequalities, seems to act as a generational marker.

## 4.2. The Crises and the Political perception of Millennials

As announced, we focus secondly on the ultimate objective of this dissertation, seeking to assess the political perception of Millennials and the possible influence of the experimentation of crises on it (1). Hence, it seems clear to us that the answer to this objective is bipartite: it implies, firstly, assessing the political perception of Millennials and, secondly, assessing whether, in fact, the crises exert any influence on it. To attend the first task, we recall the definition we suggested: political perception consists in the 1) practical knowledge, information and/or ideas held about the political sphere, according to a 2) specific context and attributed meaning, which may 3) influence the formation of individual political opinions, and motivate or constrain the taking of a certain type of action. Accordingly, we will focus on the political information individuals possess, later moving on to the analysis of political involvement. As such, the categories mobilized here are *political knowledge* (II, IIa and IIb) and *political participation* (IVa and IVb; Va and Vb). Thirdly, this first part ends with the analysis of the context and meaning individuals attach to the various elements they bring to their discourse. This examination will be carried out not only horizontally throughout the analysis, but by recovering the category of analysis *crisis experimentation* (IIIa and IIIb). Lastly, this final but essential attention to context and meaning – and respective category of analysis – will allow us to move on to our second task, evaluating the exercise that the crises may exert on the political perception of Millennials.

As announced, firstly we draw our attention on the type of knowledge and information individuals hold about the political sphere. The first look at the MAXQDA tools (Figure 4.1.) and the presence/absence dichotomy (Table 4.1.) indicates that a great number of individuals (13/15) mobilizes political information of some kind<sup>4</sup>. Here we argue that it is relevant to understand the *type* of information mobilized, in order to discern how individuals interpret politics and the type of knowledge they consider most relevant both to remember themselves and share with others. Thus, among the 13/15 individuals who present some type of political information, we found mentions to political actors (8/13); specific policy measures (11/13); particular phenomena or events (8/13); and direct mentions of specific political themes (8/13). As for the firsts – and taking into account the periods under review and about which respondents are asked – some of the political actors mentioned are *Troika*; *Partido Socialista*; *Sócrates* and *Passos Coelho*. Regarding specific policy measures, it is possible to highlight *increase in working hours*; *freeze of Christmas subsidies*; *golden visa*; *lay-off measures*; *mandatory confinement*; or the *implementation of teleworking*. Thirdly, interviewees mentioned political phenomena such as the *subprime crisis*; *fall of the Socialist Government*; *demonstrations related to the fall of Novo Banco*; *the Democratic Revolution*; *Trump's election*; or *student protests*. Finally, among the themes most addressed by interviewees, we once again highlight the *precariousness of work* and *difficulties faced by students*, with *economic issues* emerging more markedly, as well as the *lack of representation and political trust*.

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<sup>4</sup> We recall that at least 10/15 respondents spontaneously mobilize political knowledge (67% presence); 12/15 use political information to recall the 2011 crisis period (80% presence); and, finally, 13/15 respondents mobilize specific political knowledge of the 2019 crisis (87% presence).

Here we point out two considerations: the similarity in the number of mentions between the various types of information does not seem to suggest any specific trend in this sense; on the other hand, the mobilization of knowledge – of whatever type – seems to be associated with both periods of crises for two distinct reasons. Firstly, we identified a group of respondents that seems more capable of presenting concrete, practical and in-depth discourses regarding the political scenario of 2019 compared to the answers offered in relation to the first period (at least 5/13) – and they too are aware of this change. Here, it seems possible that a lifecycle effect took place, in the sense that these individuals mobilize more specific measures – instead of superficial mentions – related to the sphere of work, taxes and/or other spheres implied within the adult condition that, in 2011, would not have affect them so directly because they were still dependent on third parties. Secondly, the set of interviewees identified with the highest level of political knowledge (n=7) seems to be composed specially of individuals who assumed a marked experimentation of at least one of the crises (6/7). We highlight this last finding – to which we will return – as indicative of the context importance regarding how Millennials collect information and interpret knowledge about politics and, more, the possible influence of these two specific crisis periods.

We now move on to the analysis of political participation and involvement. The description of presence frequency for categories IV (IVa and IVb) and V (Va and Vb) indicates a strong presence of institutional participation in both periods (93% presence) – with only 1/15 respondent denying any form of involvement in this regard –, as opposed to the absence of extra-institutional participation, which also increases between 2011 and 2019 (from 60% absence to 87% absence) (see Table 4.1.). This first reading indicates the deconstruction of arguments that dictate the departure of young people from formal institutions, supported by processes of individualization and de-institutionalization (Sloam & Henn, 2019), and their approximation to non-institutional domains and politicization of spheres of individual life (Della Porta & Mosca, 2009). However, there are several dangers in these hasty inferences: first, the sample size undermines any definitive conclusions; secondly, the pandemic nature of the second crisis, from which it is impossible to dissociate fears of social proximity and large accumulations of people as well as the legal limitations of confinement periods, must be taken into account when studying political participation in this period. Thus, we argue that is possible that there is more to it than just the simple preference for one of the two types of political participation. Not only is it possible that the recent Portuguese democracy, less than 50 years old, does not have as strong a repulsion effect as other older Western democracies, but we should also consider the hypothesis that individuals opt for a dual participation, choosing one or both modalities according to what they feel must appropriate, focusing on the value of the democratic conquest, but also recognizing other channels of involvement. As such, our aim here is understand the motivation that sustains the political participation of respondents, recognizing the different weight attributed to the two forms of participation, but calling into question their mutual exclusivity.

Out of the 15 interviewees, only 1/15 does not mention any form of institutional participation, even stating that she does not vote:



*“Oh, and I think this opinion actually makes sense, I myself am registered and I don't vote... for logistical reasons, but ok...”* (interview 11).

As for other respondents, 14/15 assume to have voted in elections regarding both periods of crises, what supports the strong presence of institutional participation among our sample, as shown in Table 4.1. However, it would not only be careless to build conclusions on top of so little information, as our research objectives also imply a deeper understanding of this political involvement. As such, we looked at the 35 encodings that result from the selection of categories IVa and Va – regarding *institutional participation* in both periods – and of the 14 interviews, to assess the meaning respondents attribute to their participation. Among the 14/15 who vote, one of the respondents devalues electoral participation:

*“Yes, I voted a few times... I think I was voting at the time.”* (interview 6).

Even so, he seems to be the exception and not the rule. All other respondents apparently attribute specific meaning and value to the vote, which is not only visible within the certainty of their answers, but also for how they construct their speeches, frequently using the adverb "always" (see Satriano, 2000).

*“I'm sure I always voted, yes.”* (interview 1).

*“I always voted. In fact, I registered myself on the day I turned 18 and I always insisted on voting.”* (interview 2).

*“I always vote”* (interview 3).

*“I vote, I've always voted, I've never missed an election”* (interview 4).

These quotes refer to both periods, so it does not seem to be a difference in the value attributed to this type of participation in-between crises.

Moreover, institutional political participation presupposes more than just voting. It also includes involvement with political parties, contact with candidates or campaigns, participation in partisan youths, attending local political assemblies, making financial contributions (Milbrath, 1981), or any other activity directly oriented to political institutions. Accordingly, we also took these actions in consideration: at least 2/14 individuals joined a political party, 1/14 participated in open party meetings, 1/14 is involved in local politics and 1/14 was member of a partisan youth. Here, the relevance seems to reside in the fact that 3 of these 4 activities arise between crises and, therefore, at a more advanced stage of the respondents' lives. Both interviewee 2 and 5 mention joining a party when asked if they consider themselves politically active in the current period:

*“R<sup>5</sup>: Would you currently describe yourself as a politically active citizen?”*

*I<sup>6</sup>: Yes, yes, I describe. In addition to voting and everything we've talked about so far, I'm affiliated in a political party and I actively contribute.”* (interview 2).

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<sup>5</sup> Researcher.

<sup>6</sup> Interviewee.

*“R: Would you currently describe yourself as a politically active citizen?”*

*I: Yes, a lot, because I am part of a political party, I hold positions in that party, I have been very active at least since 2018. I have a lot of political activity.”* (interview 5).

The importance that the two interviewees attribute to their affiliation to the party – visible since both consider themselves politically active precisely because of that affiliation and active contribution – is inseparable from the moment in their lives when they decide to take part in this type of activity. In fact, interviewee 2 recognizes this as she argues that the reason for her affiliation was motivated both by the sociopolitical context:

*“The biggest trigger for me was Trump’s election. (...) But for me, personally, here in Europe, it made me realize that nothing was guaranteed... setbacks are possible, in fact as we are seeing now. I used to say that the US are always 20 years ahead of us and I see that too in this withdrawal of rights... anyway, I always think we should see it as a warning sign and that’s what I saw in Trump’s election, I thought it would spread here.”* (interview 2).

and the phase of life she was in:

*“Undoubtedly it also had to do with me being more stable at a professional level, there was a period of stability. The fact that a transition phase ended made me look at other things because I had my profession guaranteed. And then I thought that I had also been an observer for so long that maybe that gave me confidence. The fact that I was already in another office gave me more confidence in myself and in my abilities. I think that me having more confidence in myself at a professional level and being more stable at a financial level were decisive and therefore it has nothing to do with... that is, Trump’s election ended up being framed in a set of personal circumstances that allowed me to start think about acting politically.”* (interview 2).

Likewise, both interviewee 10 – who participated in party meetings – and 12 – who is currently involved in local politics – use these activities to describe themselves as, at the very least, more politically active than they were in 2011:

*“R: Would you currently describe yourself as a politically active citizen?”*

*I: I’m a little more active, not because I belong to any party or anything, but basically... I had some problems with my parents’ house, specifically with the Odivelas City Council and therefore I felt obliged... It was not a choice, it was an obligation to become a little more active in City Council meetings to managed to follow the problem closely and to avoid what unfortunately happens in our country, which is people with fewer possibilities are often forgotten. And, therefore, I ended up having to do it, not so much at the national level, but in this case at the local level.”* (interview 12).

*“R: Would you currently describe yourself as a politically active citizen?”*

*I: Currently... I maintain certain characteristics, that is, I continue to vote, I continue to exercise certain rights for which we fought so hard... “we”. The fact of having meetings with parties to belong to lists, I think it made me a more politically active, even after not entering those lists, or not being elected, but I was part of the debate, of the ideas created and therefore, I think I consider myself more politically active.” (interview 10).*

As we mentioned, the exception here is the belonging to a partisan youth (interviewee 7), in the sense that it happens during the period of the first crisis and is progressively forgotten, which fits, however, with the temporal sense of the activity, insofar as it is precisely a *youth* political group. As such, in our understanding, the importance that the interviewees attribute to these forms of participation, and the context in which they arise, reinforce, firstly, the possibility of a lifecycle effect, insofar as personal and professional stability seems to influence the ability to perceive and interpret the political world and the existing readiness to act accordingly – not admitting, however, that this effect is independent of specific or punctual phenomena; and, on the other hand, they also reinforce the non-deinstitutionalization of individuals in relation to conventional politics, insofar as the conscious decision-making to take part implies the recognition and attribution of effectiveness to these activities.

In the set of the two periods of crisis, there are at least 6/15 individuals who engage in extra-institutional forms of political and civic participation. These include involvement in academic associations and protests (3/6), volunteering (2/6), civic associations (2/6), demonstrations (2/6) and online petitions (1/6). Apart from the interviewee who participated in an online petition (interview 11), all other respondents seem to attribute meaning to their involvement in these activities. When specifying these activities by period of crisis, all participations in student associations and protests and in demonstrations took place in 2011, which is justified by the end of university attendance and by the pandemic constraints, respectively – this being one of the reasons for the increase in the absence of extra-institutional participation between 2011 and 2019, visible in table 4.1.

Withal, what we found most relevant in the analysis of extra-institutional participation (categories IVb and Vb) was the relationship with both political knowledge and experimentation of crises, and the coincidence between this type of participation and the institutional one. Regarding the former, we have already mentioned that there is a group of individuals (n=7) that stands out from the rest for mobilizing more and more in-depth political knowledge (interviewee 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12). Among these, 6/7 reveal marked experiences of at least one of the crises (interviewee 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, 12). Now, we add to this that 5/7 engage in extra-institutional forms of participation (interviewee 2, 4, 5, 9, 10). Thus, this almost total coincidence within the interviewees who mobilize these 3 categories implies at least considering the hypothesis that, in fact, the political information that individuals collect and the way they interpret it is influenced by the context in which they are inserted – in this case, the crises – and can exert influence over their political involvement. Moreover, moving on to the coincidence between these forms of participation and institutional ones, we highlight that among those who participate in extra-institutional political activities (6/15), only 1/6 does not participate at an institutional level, and it is also the

respondent who seems to attribute less meaning to political involvement in general (interviewee 11). As such, we suggest that these conclusions seem to support the proposed argument that individuals may opt for a dual participation, recognizing the potentialities of both types of political activities.

The deconstruction of the suggested definition of political perception by phases – 1) political knowledge; 2) context and meaning; 3) political participation – allowed a more comprehensive analysis of the elements that compose it. The results of this analysis suggest that the political perception of these individuals is broad in the type of political information they encompass [1)], but apparently dependent on the context in which they are inserted, consequently also dependent on the meaning they attribute to political elements [2)], hence influencing their involvement [3)]. The marked influence of the context – visible throughout the analysis and mobilization of the category *crisis experimentation* (III) – seems to suggest the *de facto* influence of the two crises on the political perception of the respondents. Even so, and to end our analysis, we focus more clearly on this second task. The mobilization of the III category or of the crises as reference time periods took place during the analysis to record that:

- a. the *type* of political information individuals possess does not seem to change between crises, but clearly increases in a more recent period;
- b. individuals who have more political knowledge almost completely coincide with the group that assumes to have experienced at least one of the crises;
- c. there is a large voter turnout in both periods, with most respondents attaching great importance to voting, which does not seem to change in-between crises;
- d. other forms of institutional participation appear mostly on the eve of or during the last crisis;
- e. and those who engage in extra-institutional forms of participation have experienced, for the most part, at least one of the crises and tend to participate at the institutional level as well.

The lifecycle hypothesis proposes that attitudes and behaviors change throughout life and, therefore, as individuals move into adulthood and the behavioral and attitudinal specifics of the juvenile condition fade, they make room for other behavioral frameworks (Lobo & Sanches, 2017: 124). The increase in political knowledge among the majority of respondents since 2011 (a.) or the decision for greater institutional involvement in the face of greater stability in personal and professional life (d.) could likely be supported by this hypothesis alone. However, we argue that this is not the case. The fact that respondents with more political knowledge have experienced at least one crisis suggests that experiencing that precarious condition is – in the specific case of this group of individuals – closely linked with a greater awareness and perception of the world around them – here we have a first hint of the influence of crises on the political perception of individuals. If this argument is not enough, the political involvement of most interviewees is strongly rooted within its the context – visible in the mobilization of Trump’s election or of financial difficulties of interviewee’s 12 parents –, to which we add that the individuals who have experienced the crises are also the ones who are most politically involved – either institutionally or extra-institutionally. As such, we believe and suggest that the experience of the two crises, rooted in a social condition of precarious existence prolonged in time,

influences the political perception of these individuals, motivating a greater consumption of political information, namely related to the context they experience, potentiating a favorable position to act politically, as the individual feels most appropriate.

## Chapter 5:

### **Concluding remarks**

The present dissertation sought to assess the political perception of Millennials, framing it within the temporal continuum defined by the two crises, from which this generation is inseparable. As such, the definition of a theoretical line of continuity of the existing studies on the Millennial Generation and, in particular, of those that focus on the influence of the 2011 crisis in the inauguration of a precarious social condition – that, we argue, is perpetuated by the 2019 crisis – was articulated with the suggestion of a first conceptualization of political perception, insofar as we believe in its theoretical and empirical potential, by directing the focus of the researcher to the influence of context on the way individuals capture information about the political sphere, the meaning they attribute to it, and how both can work as mechanisms that enhance or restrain political involvement.

According to the contemporary debate within the field of generational theories and regarding the formalization (or not) of the Millennial Generation, we chose to deconstruct the ultimate research objective into subgoals: firstly, we tried to confirm the existence of a generational conscience among the individuals that made up our sample, later discussing the exercise of crises as generational markers; afterwards, we focused the political perception of Millennials, lastly assessing the possible influence of crises on it. For such, this research built up on 15 semi-structured interviews and a mixed content analysis supported by the MAXQDA software, from which we highlight the horizontal and comprehensive analysis that made possible for us to reach the final considerations.

The sometimes-controversial debate of the Millennial Generation is visible in this dissertation. By referring to this label is impossible to affirm the sharing of a generational consciousness among interviewees. Here, not only few respondents clearly identify with the label, but among the rest there are also justified non-inclusions and respondents who do not recognize the label. Nonetheless, our analysis also included the study of Portuguese labels, which allows us to highlight the difference between the positions that the interviewees defined towards the Millennial label and the labels *Geração à Rasca* and *The Most Qualified Generation Ever*. If the first one hardly suggests any shared bonds among respondents, the seconds seem to motivate a completely different position, as respondents mobilize a set of flexible narratives, that directly or indirectly refer to precariousness, to self-identify, thus defining a common social identity.

Furthermore, we conclude that the political perception of this group of individuals is broad in the type of political information they encompass, dependent on the context in which they are inserted and meaning they attribute to political elements, and may exercise influence in *how* and *if* they choose to

politically involve themselves. In keeping with the focus on context and meaning dependence, we moved on to scrutinize the influence of the two crises on this political perception. Here, we started by designing a lifecycle effect hypothesis, but quickly argued that more than that is true. Respondents that mobilize more political knowledge are mainly the ones who have experimented at least one crisis and get involved more – either institutionally or extra-institutionally –, suggesting that such experience enhances individuals' awareness of the context in which they are inserted, motivating a greater consumption of political information, thus potentiating a favorable position to act politically. In other words, we argue that the experience of the two crises, rooted in a social condition of precarious existence prolonged in time, influences the political perception of these individuals.

Despite the fact that the present dissertation discusses its objectives and provides answers to the questions raised – in the expected direction or not –, it is not exempt from weaknesses and possible criticisms. First, it is imperative to mention the limitation imposed by the size of the sample, as it does not allow the generalization of the considerations reached. On the other hand, we also mention a possible limitation resulting from the non-control of other variables on the analyzed phenomena, which may influence the conclusions obtained. Even so, we advise the reader to attach due importance to the drawn conclusions. This first suggestion of an initial conceptualization of political perception bears important theoretical and empirical value that must be discussed, scrutinized and improved, namely to discuss the hypothesis of dual political participation, according to what individuals consider most appropriate in a given context. More, this dissertation also gives continuity to the studies on the influence of crises in the perpetuation of a precarious social condition among this generation, materializing the line of continuity between the two crises.

Last but not least, we hope that this dissertation has contributed to the theoretical advance on the subject, encouraging other researchers to develop the conceptual tools used and to focus on the centrality of precariousness within the individual dimensions of this generation's life, alerting to its seriousness.

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**Attachment A. Interviews' informed consent** (Portuguese version)

Consentimento Informado

Bom dia/boa tarde.

O meu nome é Margarida Estêvão e sou mestranda em Sociologia pelo Iscte. A presente entrevista está enquadrada num projeto final de dissertação para conclusão do mesmo Mestrado.

Os dados obtidos através desta entrevista serão trabalhados exclusivamente por mim. Toda a informação resultante da mesma só será divulgada depois de tornada anónima, impedindo qualquer possibilidade de identificação do entrevistado.

Peço-lhe que autorize a gravação da entrevista, para facilitar a respetiva transcrição e trabalho sobre a mesma. A gravação será de acesso reservado à investigadora, sendo identificada através de um código e não pelo nome do entrevistado. Em qualquer momento pode interromper a entrevista e solicitar que os respetivos dados sejam apagados.

Concordo com os termos da realização da entrevista e dou o meu consentimento para a gravação da mesma e uso dos dados por parte da investigadora.

Nome:

Data:

Assinatura:

**Attachment B. Interviews' informed consent** (English version)

Informed consent

Good Morning Good Afternoon.

My name is Margarida Estêvão and I am a Master's student in Sociology at Iscte. This interview is part of a final dissertation project for the conclusion of the same Master's degree.

The data obtained through this interview will be worked exclusively by me. All information resulting from it will only be disclosed after it has been made anonymous, preventing any possibility of identifying the interviewee.

I ask you to authorize the recording of the interview, to facilitate its transcription and work on it. The recording will have access reserved for the researcher, being identified by a code and not by the name of the interviewee. You can interrupt the interview at any time and request that your data be deleted.

I agree with the terms of conducting the interview and give my consent for the recording of the interview and the use of the data by the researcher.

Name:

Date:

Signature:

**Attachment C. Interview guide** (Portuguese version)

1. Idade;
2. Habilitação académica;
3. Habilitação académica da mãe;
4. Habilitação académica do pai;
5. Profissão atual;
6. Lembra-se bem da crise financeira de 2011?
7. Pode falar-me um pouco da sua situação na altura? Trabalhava? Estudava?
8. Tem ideia da opinião que, na altura, formulou sobre a crise e as políticas de austeridade?
9. E lembra-se das Manifestações da Geração à Rasca? O que achou?
10. Participou em alguma? Porquê?
11. À data, considera que era um cidadão ativo politicamente? Porquê?
12. Votava?
13. Participou noutras manifestações antes da Geração à Rasca?
14. Era filiado em algum partido? E noutra organização política ou cívica?
15. Considera-se um *Millennial*? Porquê?
16. Pode descrever um pouco a sua situação no início da situação pandémica (2019)?
17. Quais as principais mudanças que ocorreram na sua vida?
18. Qual a sua opinião sobre a resposta política à pandemia?
19. Descrever-se-ia atualmente como um cidadão ativo politicamente? Porquê?
20. Votou nas últimas eleições?
21. Passou a fazer parte de algum partido ou de alguma organização política ou cívica?
22. Recentemente, participou em alguma manifestação?
23. Está familiarizado com a expressão “a geração mais qualificada de sempre”?
  - 23.1. Em que contextos costuma ouvi-la/lê-la?
  - 23.2. E o que pensa sobre esta expressão?
  - 23.3. Inclui-se nesta definição?

**Attachment D. Interview guide** (English version)

1. Age;
2. Academic qualification;
3. Mother's academic qualifications;
4. Father's academic qualifications;
5. Current profession;
6. Do you remember the 2011 financial crisis?
7. Can you tell me a little about your situation at the time? Did you work? Did you study?
8. Do you have any idea of your opinion at the time about the crisis and the austerity policies?
9. And do you remember the Demonstrations of *Geração à Rasca*? What did you think?
10. Did you participate? Why?
11. At the time, did you consider yourself to be a politically active citizen? Why?
12. Did you vote?
13. Did you participate in other demonstrations prior to *Geração à Rasca*?
14. Were you a member of any party? And of another political or civic organization?
15. Do you consider yourself a Millennial? Why?
16. Can tell me a little about your situation at the beginning of the pandemic (2019)?
17. What were the main changes that took place in your life?
18. What is your opinion on the political response to the pandemic?
19. Would you currently describe yourself as a politically active citizen? Why?
20. Did you vote in the last elections?
21. Did you join any political party or political or civic organization?
22. Have you recently participated in any demonstrations?
23. Are you familiar with the expression "the most qualified generation ever"?
  - 23.1. In what contexts do you usually hear/read it?
  - 23.2. And what do you think about this expression?
  - 23.3. Do you include yourself in this definition?