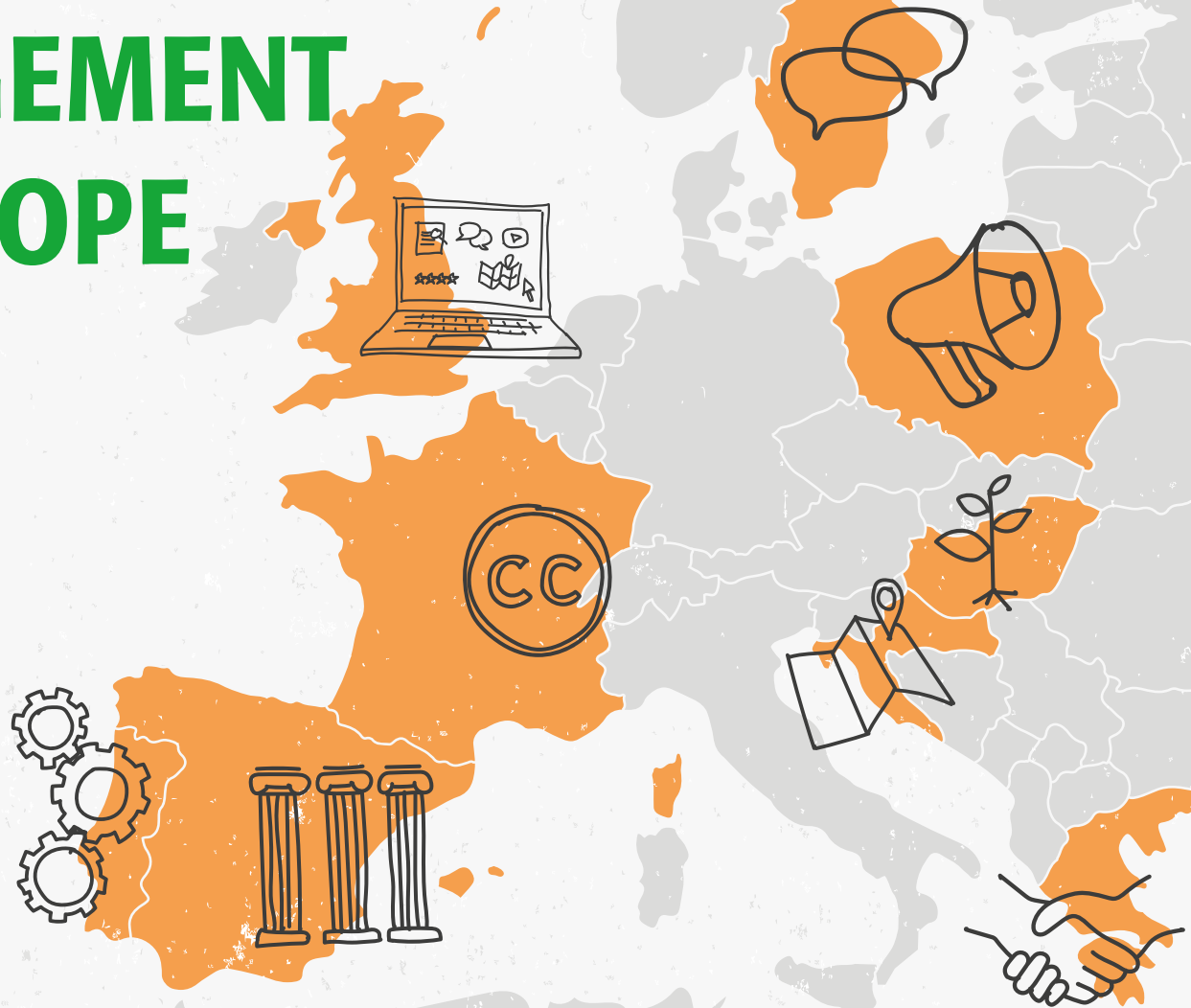


MAPPING NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN EUROPE



**CITIZENS
LAB**

MitOst
editions

PROLOGUE

CitizensLab is a participatory European network of local actors of change from different sectors and contexts. CitizensLab stands for: citizens, communication, cooperation, community, connection, experimenting, learning and experiencing together. Its members consider themselves a community of practice committed to changing the society in which we live to co-create a more participatory, transparent, inclusive, democratic and accountable Europe.

CitizensLab is a laboratory for testing how we can improve our quality of life in Europe. Its members are experimenters of new solutions and models that co-create a vibrant, unified and diverse Europe. In translocal initiatives they prototype alternative approaches to practicing change by developing a culture of sharing, collaboration and mutual learning. By collaborating on the European level they support each other to increase the impact of their local initiatives, which are dedicated to a wide range of issues around which citizen participation is needed. Members of CitizensLab are strengthening solidarity among citizens and communities within and across borders.

In the governance of the network, CitizensLab members experiment with new approaches to decision-making without the burden of established rules and conventions. They empower each other and take an active stance locally and on the European level on issues and decisions that are important not only for their work, but also for the lives of the citizens with which they are working and cooperating. Thus, CitizensLab members seek to connect in a joint movement for a more critical approach to political, social and civic development and the development of transnational narratives on civic engagement.

Informed and inspired by the diverse practices of CitizensLab members and its wider circle of friends, this publication aims at mapping new and innovative forms of civic engagement in Europe. By documenting contemporary perspectives on citizens' experiments with participation in shaping their societies, emerging trends and tendencies are portrayed. Moreover, this volume intends to showcase the diversity of initiatives, projects, movements, platforms and ideas for change in and of Europe.

CitizensLab is coordinated by MitOst with the support of Stiftung Mercator, Robert Bosch Stiftung and the European Cultural Foundation.

www.citizenslab.eu

ABOUT THE COORDINATING ORGANISATION

MitOst is an international non-profit NGO based in Berlin that promotes cultural exchange and active citizenship in Europe and its neighbouring regions, with a focus on Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe. MitOst organises international programmes and projects and serves as a platform for new forms of social engagement to support an active civil society, regardless of cultural, linguistic, and political limitations. With 1,400 members in 40 countries and various partners, MitOst is part of a dynamic European network.

ABOUT THE SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS

Stiftung Mercator is a private and independent foundation. Through its work it strives for a society characterized by openness to the world, solidarity and equal opportunities. In this context it concentrates on strengthening Europe; increasing the educational success of disadvantaged children and young people, especially those of migrant origin; driving forward climate change mitigation and promoting science and the humanities. Stiftung Mercator symbolizes the connection between academic expertise and practical project experience. One of Germany's leading foundations, it is active both nationally and internationally. Stiftung Mercator feels a strong sense of loyalty to the Ruhr region, the home of the founding family and the foundation's headquarters.

The **Robert Bosch Stiftung** is one of Europe's largest foundations associated with a private company. In its charitable work, it addresses social issues at an early stage and develops exemplary solutions. To this purpose, it develops and implements its own projects. Additionally, it supports third-party initiatives that have similar goals. The Robert Bosch Stiftung is active in the areas of health, science, society, education, and international relations. Moreover, in the coming years, the Foundation will increasingly direct its activities on three focus areas: Migration, Integration, and Inclusion; Social Cohesion in Germany and Europe; Sustainable Living Spaces. Since it was established in 1964, the Robert Bosch Stiftung has invested more than 1.4 billion euros in charitable work.

The **European Cultural Foundation (ECF)** bridges people and democratic institutions by connecting local cultural change-makers and communities across Europe. For 60 years, the foundation has been striving towards an open, democratic and inclusive Europe in which culture is a valued and key contributor. Informed by research and reflection, the foundation's current focus is Connecting Culture, Communities and Democracy.

www.mitost.org

www.stiftung-mercator.de

www.bosch-stiftung.de

www.culturalfoundation.eu

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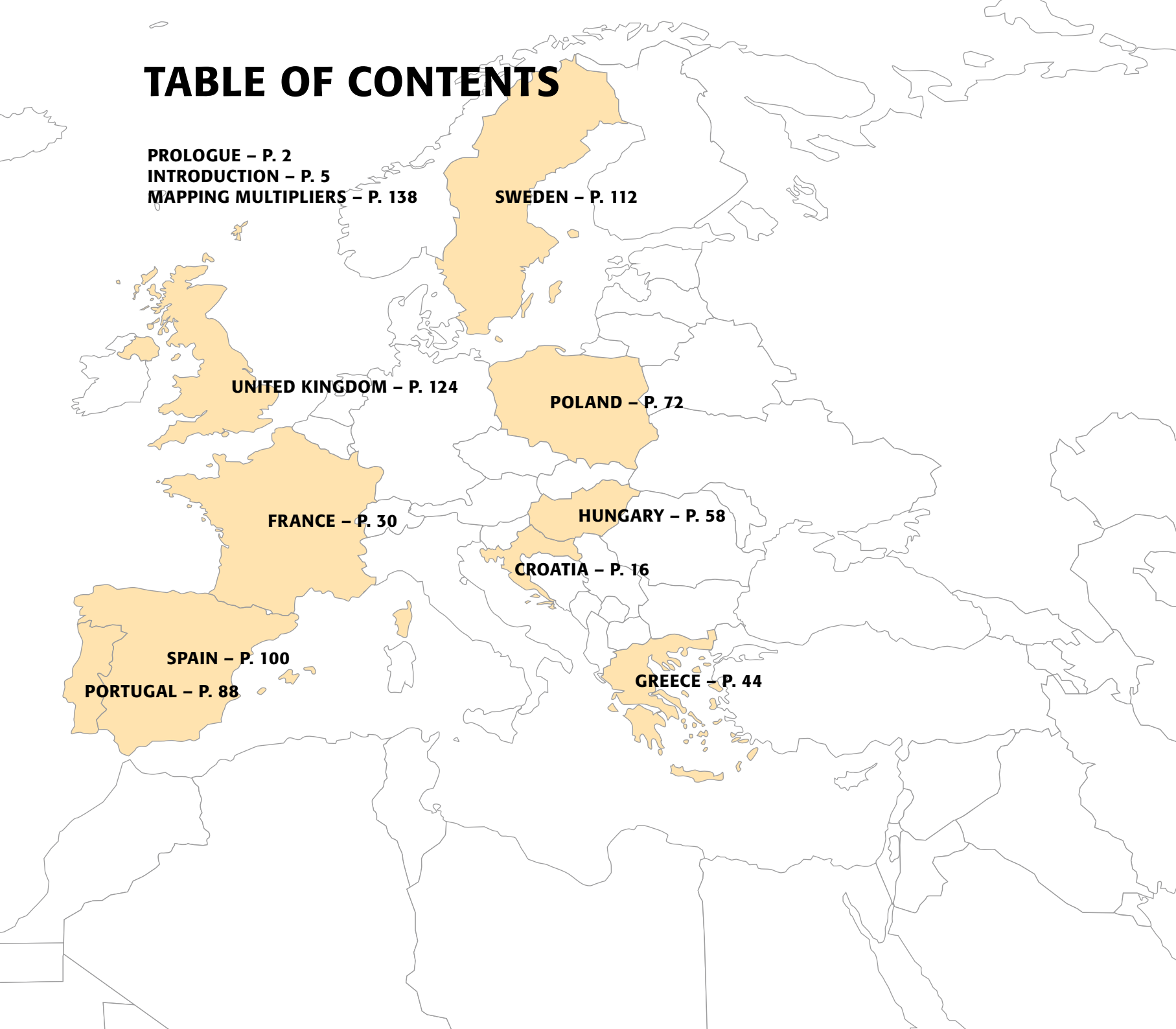
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NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN EUROPE 2016

Europe is at stake! These days, this rallying cry can be heard coming from the corridors of power in Brussels and from the capitals of EU member States. It is not uncommon among civic activists, either. Invoking subsiding solidarity, crumbling cohesion, evaporating enthusiasm and outrun optimism, the European Union is increasingly perceived as a technical and financial arrangement serving the interests of only the powerful few who promote it. The challenges Europe faces – from the perceived threat of migration to the financial crisis and the impacts of austerity – loom large in the face of piecemeal responses from political elites and established non-governmental organisations. ‘Project Europe’, the aspirational idea and practice of a community of values, has come to be tainted with a sullied brush.

Yet, all over Europe citizens of a variety of backgrounds are actively trying to initiate change in their local contexts, often with the idea of ‘Project Europe’ in mind. They are searching for and finding innovative solutions to everyday and not so everyday problems that resonate beyond their immediate contexts to wider European realities. They are challenging the established wisdom of citizen engagement and participation – voting, standing for election, participation through traditional and established systems of representation – and are seeking new ways to engage in decision-making that reflect the real concerns of humans in their habitats. In so doing, these ‘ordinary people’s’ personal commitment and passion for a cause are enhancing democracy. The practices they are developing constitute new forms of communication, participation and responsibility. Even when aware of such initiatives, the establishment looks on in wonder and asks what it would take to make ‘Project Europe’ work. Previous research on the situation and conditions of local democracy underlines this dynamic, stating that “... enormous democratic potential exists where citizens take direct



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www.frankly-speaking.org

and continuous action to influence the development of their communities.”¹

Against this backdrop, and with the aim of fostering local civic engagement and breathing new life into ‘Project Europe’, CitizensLab has been launched. The project, which is implemented by the Berlin-based association MitOst with the support of Stiftung Mercator, the Robert Bosch Stiftung and the European Cultural Foundation is committed to facilitating the emergence of innovative and participatory forms of civic action in and for Europe. An important dimension of CitizensLab is to develop a better understanding of what is actually happening with citizen participation and civic engagement in Europe. The creation of the CitizensLab network has provided a lot of information about the diversity of initiatives, projects, movements, platforms and ideas that are being pursued around Europe. For its part, this publication aims at documenting contemporary perspectives on civic engagement and citizen participation country by country, considering European tendencies and trends. It is a compilation of stories about new forms of civic engagement and how they are pushing the boundaries of democratic practice in different countries across Europe. Organised as country profiles, each of the chapters showcases innovative practices of civic engagement and citizen participation within its local and national context, and the discourses they are inspired by and are also producing. The authors of these country profiles occupy a variety of often overlapping roles in civil society, academia, media, culture, the arts and social work. They are from nine countries around Europe: Croatia, France, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. They were asked to describe and discuss the situation of civic engagement in their country, to identify key movements and activists engaged in the civic scene, and to point out how civic actors are adapting to their changing national and European circumstances.

Each author was asked to answer of the following questions:

- What kind of (new) tendencies in civic engagement do you see in your country?

- What is the context from which new civic actors / initiatives / movements emerge?
- What are the most relevant discourses for these new civic actors / initiatives / movements?
- What do these actors / initiatives / movements need to sustain their development?
- What is their relation to ‘old school’ civil society actors and existing institutions?
- What is their relation to Europe and European values?

The answers to these questions form the basis for the country profiles, which focus on three main areas of enquiry:

- current tendencies in civic engagement
- contemporary civic engagement discourses
- and the situation, needs and concerns of civic actors.

In addition, authors were asked to identify the main multipliers (persons, organisations, online platforms, etc) of new civic tendencies in their country. This information has been compiled into a directory of new and innovative civic actors, and is presented at the end of the publication.

Unsurprisingly, the historical and cultural contexts that determine the current situations, activities and concerns of actors of civic engagement and citizen participation in the nine countries included are highly diverse. However, a deeper reading shows the extent to which they are on the same page regarding many aspects of how society, politics or the economy in Europe are developing and affecting citizens. Indeed, the extent to which their responses to such overlap shows that they mirror each other considerably, irrespective of the level (local, national, European) at which their action is taking place. This demonstrates the extent to which some issues and concerns are generalisable and have a mobilising force. It also demonstrates that there are approaches and practices that can transcend the established wisdom about participation and representativeness and can engage and motivate ‘ordinary folk’ to be more active. These country profiles provide insight into specific local contexts and developments. Through the perspectives of the authors, for the most part activists themselves, readers can learn how broad and diverse civic engagement in Europe is today.

¹ [Joerg Forbrig for Central and Eastern European Citizens' Network, Learning for Local Democracy: A Study of Local Citizen Participation in Europe, 2011](#)

EUROPEAN TENDENCIES IN CIVIC INNOVATION: WHERE ARE WE AT?

In this introduction, I will present common key tendencies and issues I see emerging from the country chapters. This is not to say that all these issues are equally important for each of the countries or even for each of the civic actors mentioned. Nor is it to say that any initiative not addressing these issues is not relevant or is not making a contribution to the emergence of transnational discourses on citizen participation. In fact, I attach no judgement or evaluation whatsoever to highlighting these issues. Rather, I have noticed that they are recurrent in many different country chapters and appear to be significant for understanding 'where we are at now' in Europe regarding civic engagement as a phenomenon, but also as a value.

PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE

A people centred approach to civic engagement initiatives is recurrent in all country profiles. In fact, it is a key dimension of the contemporary discourse of civic engagement itself. At one and the same time it is a value to pursue through civic engagement, and characteristic of how civic engagement and citizen participation initiatives work. Such initiatives put the concerns of the people they work with front and centre, asking them what they feel strongly about and engaging them in participatory ways around the issues of their concern. This dimension of contemporary civic engagement is, however, not particularly new. Rather, it would appear that there has been a divergence between two different understandings of 'people' that are mobilising civic actors. On what might be termed the progressive side, the definition of 'who the people are' has become much more fluid. If in previous generations, the community, especially the national community, was defined by certain boundaries, these boundaries have blurred with the advent of social, cultural and lifestyle pluralism. The notion that there is one static, externally defined, identity to which one must conform, and that so doing entitles you to membership of the community, has been largely surpassed. Hence, in practically all of the country profiles, civic engagement around anti-racism, marriage equality, cultural, religious and political pluralism and multiculturalism (as a value) is very prominent. However, there is also the other side of the civic engage-

ment continuum. The country profiles also show the extent to which it would be misguided to imagine that such values and causes are uniformly considered positive throughout civil society in Europe. There has been an equally strong tendency towards the 're-traditionalisation' of who can legitimately claim to be part of the national community in many countries in Europe. Maybe only a vocal minority in most countries, but nevertheless, present and visibly engaged, civic actors on the right are pursuing a conservative agenda, including a more parochial approach, nationalism, racism and traditional 'family values'. In some prominent cases, these are aligned with political parties and governing coalitions and have developed a monopoly on legitimate public discourse.²

THE SOCIAL AS POLITICAL AND THE POLITICAL AS SOCIAL

The prominence of social issues and causes in the country profiles is striking. Whether housing, liveable urban solutions, concerns around food and energy self-sufficiency, care for the elderly and most vulnerable in society, youth unemployment, debt, the effects of austerity on people and their communities, failing social welfare systems or the rolling back of established social rights, the country profiles show the extent to which civil society is acutely aware that business as usual cannot go on. Many, if not the majority, of the change initiatives pointed out as new and innovative, therefore, are borne out of the felt need of individuals and collectives of ordinary people for more humane economic and social policies, and a strong critique of neoliberal economics and politics. And interestingly, the mobilising power of social issues is not in the least confined to those countries hardest hit by the financial crisis and austerity politics. Hence, the social has become re-politicised, and political action has become 'socialised' in the sense that civic action on such issues directly targets political change. Furthermore, what is understood as political has come to encompass issues which traditionally would not have been viewed that way (for example, gardening, cycling, food or barter). It is interesting to note from the country profiles the extent to which a blurring of traditional boundaries has taken place in this relation.

2 [*Carlo Ruzza, Populism and euroscepticism: Towards uncivil society?, Policy and Society 28 \(2009\) 87–98*](#)

PROXIMITY POLITICS

An extremely important dimension of citizen participation and civic engagement raised to some extent in all the country profiles is the role that proximity and closeness plays in motivating engagement and mobilisation. The embedding of an initiative in a living community and the sense of closeness that members of the community have to each other appears to be an important prerequisite for initiatives to flourish and grow. While this may seem obvious, and nothing new at all, what is interesting and possibly different to previous times, is that the living communities concerned are not always 'face to face' communities – for example, people living in the same space. Some are also virtual – for example, social media communities. And some are very large – although the bigger the size of a group the more likely for closeness to be dissolved. The country profiles tell a story of more differentiated forms of proximity and closeness where shared ideas, values and regular contact of many kinds, play just as important a role for the 'liveness' of the community as physical closeness, than were common in previous times. At the same time, physical proximity remains important. Local embedding appears in the country profiles as a strong factor sustaining civic initiative and citizen participation, even if it might no longer be an absolutely necessary one. The country profiles also highlight the extent to which communities are being formed around a diversity and plurality of issues that might not be traditionally have been considered community 'glue' – for example, care for a garden, biking, making and remaking things, food, energy, recycling, to name just a few common aspects raised by the authors. And, maybe most significant is the symbolic value of this proximity for the politics of the future. Innovative forms of civic engagement, founded on closeness and proximity starkly contrast with the reality of 'representative' democracy in Europe, whose democratic deficit is the result of (among other things) the distance between the elected and those who elect and the people at large, with all the implications this has for the relevance of policy, accountability and legitimacy. Thus, the question of proximity and local embedding has already become an important political issue.

THE COMMONS

The idea of the Commons and the practice of 'Commoning' appear to be extremely important dimensions of citizen participation and civic engagement as described in the country profiles. This idea refers to the resources and heritage of any given society that are or should be held in common rather than privately owned. The Commons covers everything from natural materials such as air, water, and the habitable earth, to cultural heritage and the digital space. Many people feel a strong sense of attachment to these (common) goods, considering it problematic when they are held in private ownership. There are also those who have issues with state ownership of Commons. The treatment of the Commons is considered an expression of a society's concept of the 'common good'. This idea is probably the only truly 'transnational' discourse we can discern from what has been described in the country profiles. The civic engagement practices associated with the Commons are incredibly diverse spanning a variety of sectors from media, computing, publishing, environmental sustainability, urban design and development to cultural production and having implications for economics, politics, social and cultural development. This transnational discourse is intimately bound up with the growth of a new global movement for the Commons that neither needs nor wishes for hierarchical leadership nor more recognition from mainstream politics. It is just happening. And more and more ordinary people are joining in on a voluntary basis all the time. And, that is its strength.³

FROM THE CRADLE BUT NOT UNTIL THE GRAVE

Certainly an interesting dimension of what has been highlighted in the country profiles is the 'free floating' nature of citizen participation and civic engagement in contemporary Europe. Historically, membership of a formal organisation of some kind was important to civic engagement. One's social and political commitment was expressed by associating from an early age and for your lifetime to a particular cause as

3 [*Hans Peter Hansen, Birger Steen Nielsen, Nadarajah Sriskandarajah, Ewa Gunnarsson \(eds.\), Commons, Sustainability, Democratization: Action Research and the Basic Renewal of Society, Routledge, 2016*](#)

mediated by some form of organisational structure, providing you and the cause with a certain legitimacy. Today, and while the desire to participate and for active civic engagement continues to be formed early on in life, it appears that it is neither necessary nor attractive to commit to membership in an organisation any longer. More and more established and mainstream civil society organisations complain that they have difficulty to attract and retain members, and that the ones they have are difficult to mobilise when it comes to specific campaigns or protests. The country profiles underline how many more people are participating punctually and temporarily on issues and in movements that they consider important at a particular stage of their lives, getting involved in many more issues and causes than previously would have been possible, and although for less time, not less intensively. Technology and modern communications have certainly contributed to making this possible. At the same time, ordinary people are better educated, have access to more information and are more mobile than ever before, and are making more choices about what they want to engage in. This less 'permanent' character of contemporary citizen participation has lowered the threshold to participation for many communities and individuals, who would otherwise never have considered getting involved. To some extent it is democratising participation. At the same time, there are objective challenges with not having a large pool of permanent members to draw on. To name just one such challenge raised in the country profiles, volunteering is not equally valued across Europe (in populations and by governments), and many initiatives have issues with mobilising the human resources they require to ensure the activities they undertake are properly staffed.⁴

VIRTUAL PARTICIPATION IS REAL PARTICIPATION

There has been a lot of controversy over whether 'clicktivism' is real activism.⁵ The fact that people like or dislike something on Facebook does not necessarily mean they are actually participating in change, even if they feel they are. At the same time, the country profiles show that technology has the

power to facilitate participation. In particular, new technologies have facilitated contact, cooperation, access to larger numbers of citizens than is possible with traditional communication methods and access to new sources of resources and support (c.f. crowdfunding). Decision-making processes have been made more participatory using technological tools. Cell phones, twitter and video have subverted power in conditions of repression. Social media are crucial for mobilising punctual large scale protests on issues people feel strongly about, including among others the defence of democracy, marriage equality, freedom of choice and reproductive rights and government economic policies to name just a few. Technological solutions have been empowering people who, in previous times, would have had serious participation access issues, for example, people with hearing or sight impairments, to name just a couple of examples. The country profiles testify to the fact that technology is helping to lower the threshold to citizen participation. Furthermore, key movements around the digital space, such as open source computing, open source publishing and open data, where the technology and knowledge produced are put at the disposal of anyone who needs it or wants to use it, are changing power relations. New transparency regulations and access to public information have been facilitated by technology. There are, however, some limits and challenges. Virtual participation, through social media especially, suffers from the 'echo chamber effect': You are more likely to receive and consume information that coincides with your own established opinion, than to be confronted with other and contrary opinions or ideas. And virtual modes of participation as proposed in the civic space are not yet integrated structurally into the established political systems and decision-making processes in the majority of European countries. Even if e-democracy continues to make gains in some countries, it is far from an accepted and desired approach for the political establishments in the majority.

REAL LIFE IS THE REAL ISSUE

One thing that is absolutely clear from the country profiles is that a key motivation for people to participate in any form of civic initiative today are the issues that form part of the actual real lives they are living. Irrespective of the issue and irrespective of the form of participation they choose to engage in, the

4 GHK Consulting, Volunteering in the European Union, 2010.

5 Alex Frame, Gilles Brachotte (eds.), Citizen Participation and Political Communication in a Digital World, Routledge, 2016.

underlying connection to the issue is at the level of experiences people have had or are having. This is most obvious where social and economic conditions are changing and ordinary people feel their (and others') acquired rights and privileges and the values that are dear to them (and others) are under threat. A key example prominent in the country profiles is that of unemployed young people. Of course, some countries have been harder hit by the economic crisis than others and the austerity measures that ensued have had devastating impact on the ability of people to keep their heads above water. However, young people have been particularly badly hit by the effects of the crisis, and the current generation of under-30s, many of whom invested heavily in education to improve their career prospects, is the first in many that does not have better life chances than their parents did when they were starting out. The disappointment, disaffection and disenfranchisement that these young people experience and feel, and their sense of something has got to change, is fuelling participation in large scale protest and solidarity movements only rarely seen in the recent past. Furthermore, it is fuelling participation in very concrete practices and initiatives of the 'self-help' kind. Ideas like autonomy, self-sufficiency, community solidarity, sharing, peer-to-peer or people-to-people, co-working, co-creating, making/doing and social enterprise are becoming ever more popular all over Europe.

PROTEST

Closely related to the above, protest is very much back on the European civic agenda, after something of a sabbatical. The contours of protest are certainly changing, but it remains a very important expression of civic engagement for a large and possibly growing number of people, even in places where street protest does not have a long-standing tradition.⁶ Certainly, the country profiles testify to the less 'ritualised' character of street protest in comparison to previous times, when these were associated with particular dates and the preserve of certain movements (for example, the workers' movement May Day parades in Western Europe). Protest

mobilisation appears to be, on the one hand, more spontaneous, in that new protest movements come into being fast, in response to some highly visible event (policy announcement, change of law, shocking acts of violence, etc) going viral. On the other hand, they also institutionalise faster, seeking a snowball effect and sourcing legitimisation from the regularity with which they are organised, a growth in numbers attending and the organisation of associated protests in other locations around the country and even abroad. In some countries, these protest movements have also shown that it is possible to influence the political process, by having explicitly political ambitions and by trying to change the system from the inside. Their success is reminiscent of the 'long march through the institutions' approach of the student movements of the 1960s, which sought to create a revolution from within by infiltrating the established institutions and professions with like-minded activists. However, the country profiles also allude to the pitfalls of movements transitioning into established politics – even at the local level – including that becoming part of the establishment can require impossible compromises, professionalisation and makes it difficult to maintain close contact with the community whose interests one seeks to represent.

MAKING A LIVING AS LIFE MAKING

All the country profiles allude to social enterprise as an important development in the field of civic engagement. The emergence of a commercial dimension to the activities of civic initiatives is a natural response to the absence of institutional funding and the relative weakness of crowdfunding and indigenous sources of financing for civic initiatives around Europe. Equally, in contexts where established civic actors demonstrate strong donor dependency, or where scandals over the financial rectitude of NGOs have erupted in the public sphere, social enterprise has become a way for civic initiatives to become more resource independent, enhancing their legitimacy and credibility among members of the public. Indeed, it has become more desirable to aspire to making one's living doing social business. Many emergent social businesses truly believe in what they are doing and that it can have a public benefit role and impact. They see this as their unique selling point. This development is challenging traditional ideas about 'opposition' between the private commercial and public social

⁶ Cristina Flesher Fominaya, Laurence Cox (eds.), *Understanding European Movements. New Social Movements, Global Justice Struggles, Anti-Austerity Protest*, Routledge 2013.

sectors. People now actively seek gainful employment that offers them opportunities to be socially engaged, or opportunities for social engagement in a field related to their profession, and this is contributing to the emergence of new forms of employment, community financing, participatory budgeting and decision-making around key needs of communities, users, even the beneficiaries of public services. The country profiles point out, of course, that social enterprise is more developed in some parts of Europe than others, and that this has something to do with the acceptance of social enterprise as a valid economic and social model, as well as with legislation and conditions for establishing social enterprises. Whatever the differences in scale may be across Europe, however, the practice is becoming increasingly popular and is seen as an important vehicle for the way both business and public benefit work are done. It is also making a contribution to the transformation of social relations along traditional lines of social conflict – ideas about the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’; the balance of power between ‘givers’ and ‘receivers’; notions of ‘production’ and ‘consumption’ are all changing.

CULTURE COUNTS

In all of the country profiles culture, cultural operators of different kinds (whether creators of culture or workers of the culture sector more broadly) and cultural projects are seen as key to efforts for mobilising and furthering civic engagement and citizen participation. This is equally the case for contemporary and more traditional or folkloristic approaches to culture. Civic actors point out that culture taps into people’s senses of identity, belonging and connection to the community, as well as being attractive and enjoyable, which makes it a good vehicle for mobilising people to get involved and an excellent public awareness raising tool. When combined with technology, it has a lot of power to get people thinking and activated.⁷ However, it is used in different ways and for different purposes by different parts of the civic sector. Those on the less progressive side of the civic initiative continuum are using culture as a way to justify exclusion. This is not new, neither can it be said to be mainstream in the majority of country profiles included here. However, the tendency is

established and in some countries, civil society actors that align themselves with ‘alternative’ ideas about culture are under increasing pressure from public authorities that wish to maintain a monopoly on the definition of culture in their context.

FURTHER AREAS OF CONVERGENCE

There are other dimensions of convergence that can be inferred from the country profiles. If the above demonstrates the newest trends pushing the field forward, the following relate to the context and conditions within which civic engagement can and does develop across Europe.

THE ‘ENABLING ENVIRONMENT’?

Among the most important relate to the ‘enabling environment’ for civic engagement and citizen participation. It is a well-researched fact that civil society can only flourish when certain conditions are in place. These conditions include everything from the availability of resources for the work of civic actors through the legislation in place to regulate the operation of civic initiatives to social attitudes towards citizen participation.⁸ While one might have hoped for it to be different, every single one of the country profiles points to the fact that the environments surrounding citizen participation and civic initiative/engagement in the countries of Europe are not enabling enough by a long shot. This is particularly the case regarding the resources available for civic initiatives from national and local authorities and the support structures that exist for civic initiative at the local level.

As regards resources and support, it is furthermore interesting to note that the existence of international / European funding opportunities is not seen as a remedy for the absence of in-country resources. Actors of citizen participation and engagement most often function at the local level, in loose coalitions and partnerships. It appears that even when they

7 European Cultural Foundation, *Another Europe*, 2016.

8 [Joerg Forbrig for Central and Eastern European Citizens' Network, *Learning for Local Democracy: A Study of Local Citizen Participation in Europe*, 2011](#)

are aware of the resources and support available, which is by far not the case for the majority, they are often ineligible or do not have the capacity to make the applications. These are notoriously complicated and time consuming, and more often than not come with the requirement of co-funding. As a result, the country profiles reveal that at least among those initiatives known by the authors, European funding mechanisms, such as the Erasmus+ programme, remain quite underused.

Furthermore, all the country profiles bear testimony to the fact that the relationship between civic actors and public authorities is a crucial dimension of the enabling environment for civic engagement and citizen participation. Where they actually happen, ad hoc and more institutionalised forms of cooperation between public authorities (national, local, etc.) and civic engagement initiatives are having interesting, penetrating and even lasting impacts on local situations and challenges. However, these examples of good practice remain rather few and far between. Too often such cooperation is not even possible. Mutual stereotypes and deep seated mistrust between civic actors and public authorities are inhibiting innovation, revealing the need for 'intercultural learning' between these two categories of actors. This is something some civic actors are beginning to engage with, within their own ranks and with like-minded public servants.

In a similar vein, it is informative to look at what might be called the somewhat 'schizophrenic' relationship of civil society to private business. In local contexts, many civic actors are also entrepreneurs because it is no longer possible to survive without generating some form of income beyond what can be fundraised and secured in project support. As discussed above, social business and the good economy are among the most prominent new tendencies in civic engagement field. In addition, in some countries it is several very large national and multi-national company foundations that are providing funds for innovation in the civic engagement field, because of their commitment to clean energy, urban renewal, technological innovation, education and so on. Furthermore, in certain contexts, where the space for democratic dialogue is continuously closing, business people can be a progressive force, demanding that democratic values, such as the rule of law and freedom of expression are

respected, as this has important effects on the business and investment climate. Yet, across Europe, civic actors are highly critical of 'big business', which is almost uniformly described in the negative terms of a lack of social responsibility and civic conscience. As in the case of cooperation with public authorities, the lack of dialogue between business and civil society, even in the most local contexts, remains one of the main factors inhibiting cooperation and innovation.

This links up to questions of empowerment. Civil society research of different kinds has also made it clear that the availability of support and the opportunity to access resources are rarely empowering of actually being able to use what is available to improve participation. There are two dimensions to this. One has a more educational focus. Often, opportunity without competence development to actually use it, is almost as ineffective as no opportunity at all. Hence, all the country profiles clearly point out that civic initiatives need not only resource support, but also training and education to be able to better use the support available to them. Initiatives like CitizensLab, other networking and exchange projects and actual training in key skills for making civic initiatives more effective in the work they do on citizen participation have all been mentioned as essential for the health of civic engagement. At the same time, the country profiles point clearly in the direction of the importance of the emotional dimension of empowerment, which is complex because it combines a sense ownership and a sense that one's work and cause is recognised and valued. When these two dimensions of empowerment are not adequately addressed, then no end of resource support is going to have its desired impact.

It should also be pointed out that there are an increasing number of contexts in Europe where it has become problematic or risky to use external funding as a result of government restrictions. Several governments have or are contemplating putting in place legislation regulating civil society with the aim of surveilling and controlling what organisations are doing. Many funding institutions are only allowed to have a presence in a given country at the invitation of the government, and we are seeing ever more cases of key funders being told they are no longer welcome, because their support for critical civil society is considered political interference. Subsequently,

there have been cases of organisations having a reputation for cooperation with external funding institutions being subjected to accusations of spying for foreign governments or of coercive actions on the part of the sitting government. At least two of the country profiles attest to the tendency towards interference in the affairs of civil society.⁹

The question of registration of organisations is also a controversial one. Most countries have legislation regulating the legal form civil society organisations can take. In theory this legislation is an important facilitator of civil society, as it allows informal initiatives to develop and institutionalise and to become more financially sustainable. However, legislation is also increasingly being used as a tool of control against civic initiatives taking a critical stance towards governments. Rather than going in with the water cannon which would damage their democratic credentials, many sitting governments use administrative regulations such as those around the registration of organisations to keep a lid on dissent. The typical approach involves organisations being required to register with a particular Ministry or institution in order to be eligible to function as legally recognised organisations, and to benefit from national funding schemes. Often the administrative conditions imposed can only be met by government loyal organisations or the procedures are complicated and are dragged out. While registering organisations can be subject to extraordinary auditing, administrative harassment and are often legally able to fundraise. Many organisations in such contexts simply cannot manage the procedures and end up shutting their official operations down. While only a few of the authors of the country profiles would claim that the situation in their country corresponds to this worst case scenario, this tendency has been developed upon by several, and manifestations of a closing of the civic space are to be observed all over Europe, even in established democracies.¹⁰

The Civic Space in Europe survey conducted by Civicus bears this out.¹¹ Civicus has postulated that this is because of the increasing trend among governments towards ‘illiberal

democracy’ even at the heart of the European Union. Many governments now regard civil society organisations and active citizens as unhelpful and have at times suggested that the basic freedoms of association, assembly and expression should be limited to preserve vaguely defined ‘national interests’.¹² The country profiles included here also point to the overriding power of neoliberal economic principles vis-a-vis the organisation and development of national and European politics as another cause for civic initiative not receiving adequate support (in the best case) or actively discouraged, forbidden and repressed (in the worst case). Fear of political instability, social conflict, political dissent and even revolution remain key to the attitude of national authorities towards civic engagement practices, especially when they espouse any form of more visible mobilisation of large numbers of people.

EUROPE AS THE GLUE?

Country profile authors were asked a specific question about Europe, European values and the European dimension of civic engagement in their countries. The convergence in their answers is noteworthy because it outlines the extent to which Europe can no longer be considered the glue binding European civil society together, if it ever was. Certainly, what emerges from the country profiles is a much more differentiated picture. On the one hand, for many the values professed to be European values are indeed close to their hearts: human rights, democracy, rule of law, ‘tolerance’, pluralism, openness, sharing and solidarity have all been explicitly mentioned as themes and motivating values of civic engagement in the countries concerned for a large part of the initiatives quoted and described, even if many would challenge the legitimacy of Europe claiming these values as its own. On the other hand, the European institutions, and European integration, especially European Union integration, have a really bad reputation for being the context within which some of the most draconian policies negatively affecting ordinary citizens’ lives have been made, in the most arrogant, technocratic, non-transparent, non-democratic and even corrupt manner.

In addition, the legitimacy and credibility of ‘established civil

⁹ <https://monitor.civicus.org>

¹⁰ <https://monitor.civicus.org>

¹¹ *Civicus, Civic Space in Europe Survey, Final Report, October 2016.*

¹² *Civicus, Civic Space in Europe Survey, Final Report, October 2016.*

society' has been significantly undermined by the perception that those playing the big league game on the European level have been coopted by unnamed powers that be are inherently corrupt. Indeed, there have been many corruption scandals and civil society has not been immune. Established actors of civil society must take their responsibility for their part in corruption scandals. However, the country profiles also allude to the extent to which incomplete and often 'biased' media coverage has helped to make this perception pervasive. The European Union's democratic deficit, and its distance from its citizens, is clearly undermining the development of something akin to a European civic identity, and actors of civic engagement across Europe are painfully aware of the risks they run when they invoke ideas around European values, which can be as serious as risking the loss of their credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of their citizen supporters.

It is becoming ever more obvious that not all manifestations of civic engagement and citizen participation are progressive – often referred to as 'uncivil society'. Several of the country profiles explicitly describe how right-wing, traditionalist and conservative political and religious mobilisation is gaining in strength. Research shows that at least when it comes to voting, such communities that espouse a more conservative set of values, are more disciplined and, therefore, politically effective than their progressive counterparts.¹³ The rise of populist regimes and political forces that have good chances to prevail in upcoming elections, not only at the periphery of the geographical Europe, but also at the heart of the European Union are truly putting the self-image of European civil society to the test. The country profiles allude to the fact that for many civic initiatives retreat into localism is the response to an unbearable wider national and European reality. Others are looking for other ways to package European values around which they would like to mobilise, but for fear of not being taken seriously by their constituencies cannot call European. Others again have taken a more offensive approach, successfully taking to the streets and barricades with messages of steadfastness in European values, and demands for more democracy in the European institutional and political

architecture.

Furthermore, and despite large scale programmes of both the European institutions and the European philanthropic community over 40 years of active engagement with the development of civil society, the country profiles almost unanimously point out that the vast majority of actors of civic engagement and citizen participation are not in the least bit aware of the potential of the European dimension to support their causes and practical work. They remain very much focused on what they see as their local concerns, without realising the extent to which these are concerns of similar actors in other places around Europe, and the extent to which there could be mutual benefit in cooperation, partnership, communication and common projects. In fact, it was pointed out in almost all the country profiles that civic actors working on the local level for citizen participation hardly ever meet European counterparts, not knowing that opportunities to do so exist and not having the capacity to engage with them, even if they did.

On the basis of these country profiles, then, we might conclude that even though European values certainly bind the progressive community of practice in the field of civic initiative together, the European institutional and political reality is inhibiting the emergence of a more tangible European civic identity among its members.

PERSPECTIVES

In a study about local democracy in Norway, Audun Offerdal points out that the nature of democracy requires the involvement and participation of virtually everyone.

"The first basis for a democratic form of governance is that people can indeed govern – that they can shape the society they live in. It is not blind forces that govern. Neither gods nor demons, neither fate nor coincidences decide. People can shape, and reshape, societies ... Secondly, and perhaps as self-evident but worth repeating: democracy is about a shared community of people. It

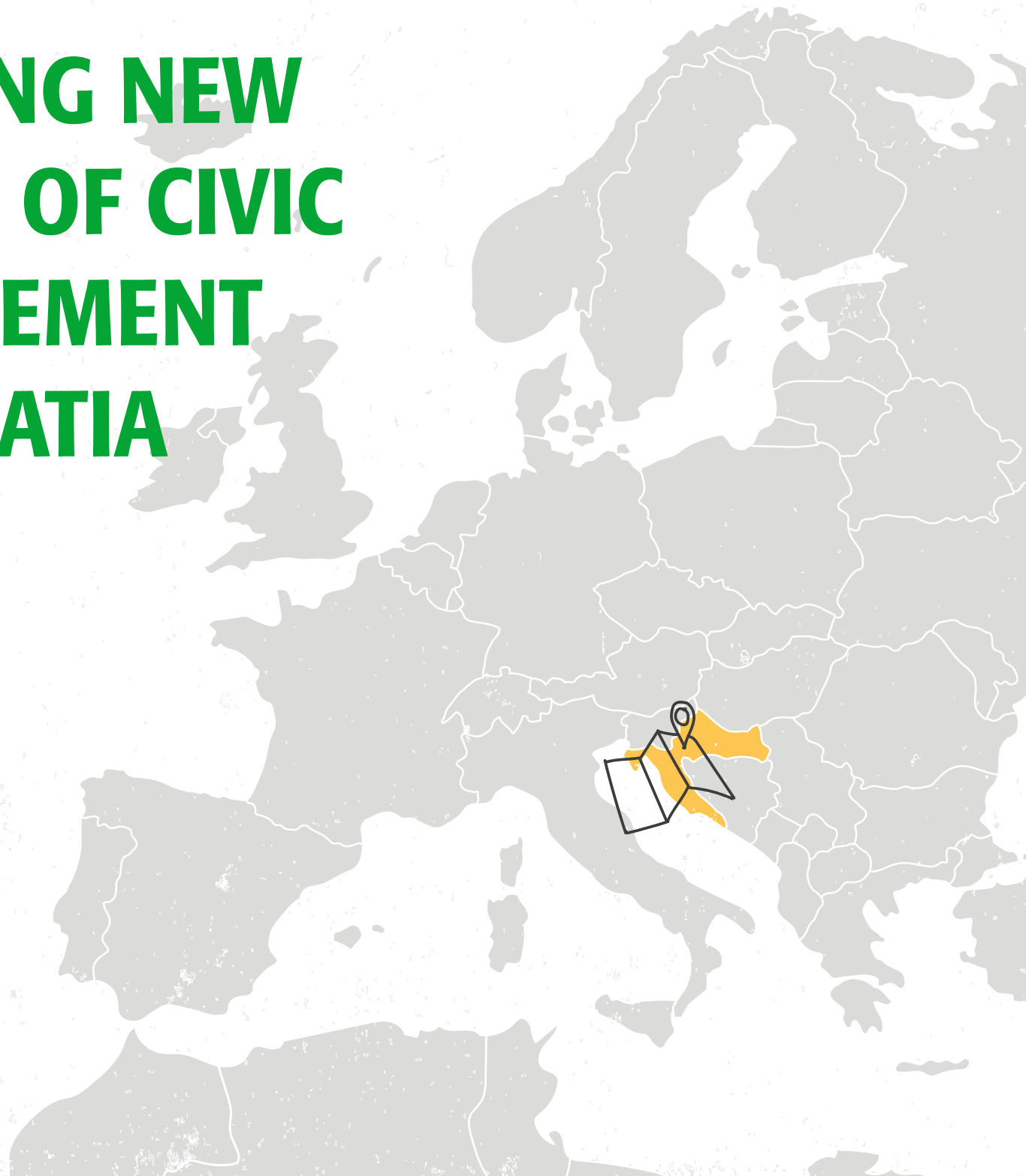
¹³ Marlies Glasius, *Uncivil Society*, International Encyclopedia of Civil Society, pp 1583-1588.

is about us and ours, not about me and mine ... Thirdly, and some people have trouble with this, the normative basis for a democratic system is that everyone is competent to participate in governing. No one is incompetent to have an opinion about how the community should be governed. There are no experts in democracy who can tell the others what the problems are and which solutions are right... Fourthly, ...politics is an important conflict solver in democratic systems. Politics is democracy's way of solving problems, or at least of living with them."¹⁴

The country profiles included in this publication point to the vibrancy of civic initiative all over Europe, and to the fact that many millions of 'people are doing it for themselves,' but together. It is indeed sobering that Europe appears to be losing ground as the glue holding the European civic community together. The European Union and its institutions should be playing an important role in changing that, and it can only be the hope of all civic initiatives that the concerns and challenges outlined in this publication are taken seriously by the powers that be. In the meantime, civic initiatives will keep on working to make those concerns and challenges more visible and to communicate them in more effective ways. Initiatives like CitizensLab are made for this purpose. They acknowledge the power of exchange and networking for making the vox populi heard and common concerns seen. As it develops, and as a community of practice, CitizensLab will contribute to the capacity of its members for solving the problems of democracy through a more participatory politics of proximity.

¹⁴ [Audun Offerdal, Norway country study, in Joerg Forbrig for Central and Eastern European Citizens' Network, Learning for Local Democracy: A Study of Local Citizen Participation in Europe, 2011.](#)

MAPPING NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN CROATIA



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper explores the complexity of the situations and the motivations of new civil society actors in Croatia, at the end of May 2016. Parliamentary elections in the Republic of Croatia in November 2015, after four years of a liberal government, resulted with no party or coalition receiving a majority. As it played out, a coalition of independent lists of city mayors, composed just before the elections, received enough votes to hold the balance of power between the two major parties. In January 2016, and after two months of negotiations, this group established a government coalition with the nationalist-oriented, Croatian Democratic Party, HDZ¹. In the aftermath of this political shift in January 2016, most civil society actors experienced a worsening of their situation. Not-for-profit actors and Croatian civil society experienced interference regarding what they could legitimately claim as the values they pursue, their organisational functioning and their resources. Today, instead of developing new models of co-use and co-governance of public infrastructure and common goods, civil society now has to fight to preserve any such cooperation models that already exist.² In research conducted on civil society in Croatia over recent years, the idea of three waves of activism has been proposed. The last of the three waves refers to a shift from liberal conceptions of human rights and conflict resolution to the deep structural deficiencies of the particular form of capitalism developed in Croatia.³ For the first time, issues of direct democracy, innovative democratic processes and structures, and democratisation of governance in the public sector have been put in the wider context of Croatian social development. This has resulted in the emergence of many new initiatives and organisations in Croatian civil society. It is against this backdrop that civic actors in Croatia are once again confronted with having to defend hard won rights and with having to build a strong popular social movement that respects the concerns of local



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www.kulturpunkt.hr

1 <http://hdz.hr>

2 <http://civic-forum.eu/en/civic-space/croatian-governments-triple-attack-on-autonomous-media-civil-society-and-culture>

3 Paul Stubbs, *Networks, Organizations, Movements: Narratives and Shapes of Three Waves of Activism in Croatia*, 2013, original scientific paper.

specificity and avoids preaching one model of social organisation, in the face of another illiberal onslaught.

INTRODUCTION

This study considers local initiatives, associations and cooperatives, civil society organisations, municipalities, social enterprises and national institutions, mostly in the fields of public and common goods, urban planning, workers' movements, culture, media, non- and in-formal education and social economy. The idea of three waves of activism in Croatian civil society has been proposed in the work of Paul Stubbs.⁴ The first wave refers to the emergence and actions of the network of individuals, groups and projects broadly associated with the anti-war campaign at the beginning of the 1990s. The second wave refers to the establishment and development of the more professionalised and technocratic NGOs in the 2000s, that continue to be well known as representative of Croatian civil society, especially among donors. Notable examples include the Centre for Peace Studies, Centre for Women's Studies, Human Rights House and GONG. The third wave refers to inter-linked activist initiatives and movements like the protests organised by students of the Zagreb Faculty of Philosophy beginning in 2009 and the movement against the construction of a shopping mall in Zagreb's city centre.⁵ In Stubbs view, this last wave represents a shift in the focus of civic actors towards the deep structural deficiencies of the specific form of capitalism developed in Croatia. This is the starting point of this paper, and an important starting point for understanding the complexity of situations and motivations of new civil society actors.

By way of further introduction, it is important to point out that there have been very few systematic studies of the state of civil society or of civic engagement in Croatia since the 2010s

began. One research study⁶ carried out on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the National Foundation for Civil Society Development (NZRCD)⁷, published in 2014, perhaps most fully reflects the state of institutionalised civil society. At the same time, civil society in Croatia and especially civic engagement initiatives, were much more diverse than the range of organisations that would be considered eligible for funding by the National Foundation for the Development of Civil Society (NZRCD), and the study only covers some of the main issues of concern for civil society actors in contemporary Croatia. For example, both sports associations and organisations dealing with economic activity are under-represented in the parts of the study addressing the quantity of associations existing in Croatia. NZRCD does not regularly fund associations working in those areas. It mostly funds activities addressing social and humanitarian activities, the protection of rights, child protection, youth and women, ecology, education and health services.

The absence of this type of research is not all that surprising, however, considering that concentration, networking and collaborations between different actors from all fields of civil society really only started to gain visibility with the concrete support initiated by NZRCD from 2014 onwards. The risk of the new government aborting this process is very real. After the political turn of 2016, Croatian civil society actors experienced interference as regards what they could legitimately claim as the values they pursue, their organisational functioning and their resources. Today, instead of developing new models of co-use and co-governance of public infrastructure and common goods, civil society has to fight to preserve any such cooperation models that already exist. Also, to sustain visibility and size, they need to establish connections with those loosely organised local collectives and activists and 'old school' civil society actors like trade unions that still boast large scale membership.

4 Paul Stubbs, *Networks, Organizations, Movements: Narratives and Shapes of Three Waves of Activism in Croatia*, 2013, original scientific paper.

5 <http://www.johnfeffer.com/challenging-gentrification>
<http://marcbousquet.net/pubs/The-Occupation-Cookbook.pdf>

6 Marija Brajdić Vuković, Branko Ančić, Mladen Domazet, *Podrška: trajni učinak ili poticajni trenutak? Društveni i gospodarski učinci podrški Nacionalne zaklade za razvoj civilnoga društva*, Znanstvena studija u povodu desetogodišnjice osnutka Nacionalne zaklade, 2014.

7 <http://zaklada.civilnodrustvo.hr/frontpage>

CONTEMPORARY TENDENCIES IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN CROATIA

The student occupation of the Zagreb Faculty of Philosophy started in the spring of 2009 and soon spread to twenty faculties and two universities across Croatia. The student occupations only lasted for 35 days, but left an indelible mark on civic engagement in Croatia, spawning a wide range and diversity of new movements, initiatives and organisations across the country that are influential still today. They are, most notably, the non-profit media [Slobodni filozofski](#), the first Croatian media cooperative (and publisher of the Croatian edition of *Le Monde diplomatique*) and Association for Media Democracy (publisher of the regional web-portal [Bilten](#)), the association [Baza za radničku inicijativu i demokratizaciju](#) (Organisation for Workers' Initiative and Democratisation – BRID, that also publishes a web-portal called *Workers rights* and a printed quarterly magazine entitled 'Work'), [Centar za radničke studije](#) (the Centre for Labour Studies), the political party [Radnička fronta](#) (Workers' Front), the higher education and science workers' union Akademska solidarnost (Academic Solidarity), and the initiative called 'Direct Democracy in Schools'. For the first time, issues of direct democracy and innovative democratic processes and structures were on the radar of wider Croatian society. These issues are at the core of civic engagement trends today.

One of the most visible societal effects of the student occupation of the Zagreb Faculty of Philosophy was the establishment of a plenum and its working groups as key organs of student self-government, open to all interested citizens with everyone having the right to speak and vote and all decisions being made by majority vote. The outcome was the protests of 2011, coordinated through Facebook, which gathered heterogeneous groups and combined demands for direct democracy and effective rule of law. This movement culminated in the campaign for a 'no' vote in the referendum on joining the EU in 2011, essentially because the consensus among the political elites was to restrict all debate on that subject to Parliament.

During the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and the ensuing war, Croatia's intellectual and academic spaces were, in part, cleansed of all remnants of their tradition of Marxist theory and of any practical socialist workers' movement. This created something of an intellectual void. Furthermore, the lack of civil society in the pre-war period, civic education during the war and during the post-war period, and a higher educational system that continues to reproduce that form of education today have all contributed to the current situation. Hence, the demand for free education for all and at all levels, raised for the first time in 2009 at the Faculty of Philosophy, remains as relevant as ever. Consistent with this particular discourse, is the demand for a democratic and critical civic education to be implemented at all levels of formal education.

Another key moment for the emergence of what might be considered contemporary tendencies in civic engagement was the protest movement initiated by [Zelena Akcija](#) (Green Action) and [Pravo na grad](#) (Right to the City) against the privatisation of public space. Protests in the Varšavska Street in Zagreb began in 2008, but culminated in the summer of 2010 as a permanent protest of dedicated activists joined by large numbers of ordinary citizens. The Varšavska Street protests were followed up by protests elsewhere in Croatia, most notably in Dubrovnik ([Srđ je naš](#)) and Pula ([Muzil](#)), but also in smaller local communities. After succeeding to mobilise concerns in the broad public over corruption and a lack of public participation in public sector decision-making, a campaign to ban the privatisation of the Croatian highways began. The biggest accomplishment of the campaign came in 2014, when it managed to mobilise a wider platform of civil society actors: two trade unions, two networks of civil society organisations, five associations, five union confederations and more than two thousand volunteers. It was the perfect starting point for the formation of a wider coalition to defend the country's natural resources, public goods and the Commons from privatisation. This process is on-going. This also led to the establishment of new models of governance and participation within trade unions. Most eminent are [Novi sindikat](#) (New Union), a trade union that represents employees in public, private and the civic sectors, [Tehnos](#), a trade union for workers employed in the biggest Croatian electricity company called HEP, and [Nova solidarnost](#) (New Solidarity), a newly formed

Protests in Varšavska
Street, Zagreb, Photo
by Lovro Orešković



trade union of workers in the biggest Croatian oil company, INA, that was sold in dubious circumstances to the Hungarian oil company, MOL.⁸

An important question in this relation is that of mainstream commercial and public media and how they inform the public on such struggles and controversies. Media are crucial to securing citizens' constitutional right to be fully, timely and impartially informed. Key social issues have all but vanished from commercial and even public service media (the Croatian Radio/Television HRT and the Croatian News Agency HINA), as have most critical media products including investigative journalism, research analyses and critical essays. Not-for-profit media in Croatia came into being at the moment when commercial, for-profit and public media did not fulfil their typical public interest functions. These new media include *H-alter*, *Lupiga*, *Forum*, *Kulturpunkt*, *Booksa*, *Voxfeminae*, *Libela*, *Fade In*, *Radio Student*. Diminishing public trust in media and the profession of journalism, along with the dissatisfaction experienced by media professionals unable to find gainful employment, have created demand for change in the legislation and rules governing public financing for not-for-profit/third-sector media. Such media serve the public interest by covering the issues that are absent. Indeed, not-for-profit media react to the demands and concerns of civil society, taking up their issues and giving them a platform for expressing and sharing real life concerns. There are few examples of mainstream media following or bringing issues raised by activists to the attention of the public. Issues like the privatisation of public infrastructure, including the highways, outsourcing in public services and oil drilling in the Adriatic Sea were covered by mainstream media, because they are indeed issues of national interest, but never analysed in depth, or over longer periods of time. A new model of support was developed by various media actors and the Ministry of Culture under the previous government. The budget allocated was approx. 6 million HRK (at the time of writing in 2016, approx. 800,000 euros) per year. The new government abolished this

not-for-profit media support model in January 2016.⁹ Public authorities at different levels of governance have responded to the emergence of new civic actors in Croatia in different ways. Some local authorities in smaller cities have demonstrated interest in citizen participation. Centralisation continues to be one of the biggest issues of concern regarding the formal territorial organisation of the country. Local authorities are dissatisfied with the fact that they are obliged to give up most of the local government's income to the national budget, and do not get enough back to meet local needs. *Udruga gradova* (Association of Towns), a national, non-partisan and independent community of 121 Croatian towns, was founded in 2002 to encourage cooperation of local governments and promote the common interests of towns in Croatia. Among interesting examples are the towns of Pazin and Labin in the region of Istria, which are known for their openness and transparency. They have conducted participatory budgeting for local expenditure, quite a novelty in the Croatian governance reality. However, even in such local contexts where authorities are receptive, civil society organisations have been at the forefront of promoting capacity building, advocacy, and the development of tools for participatory budgeting in local communities. After the Zagreb-based organisation *GONG*, Pula's *Zelena Istra* is the most prominent organisation in that field. It has initiated a *project* that involves the three towns of Karlovac, Pula and Mali Lošinj to enable citizens to create and monitor the local budgets of their towns. Even so, the importance of citizen participation often has to be pushed onto the agenda of local authorities.

An alliance of independent culture organisations and youth organisations *Operation City* did this in Zagreb before establishing *POGON* – the Zagreb Centre for Independent Culture and Youth in 2009, as a public not-for-profit institution for culture, based on a new model of partnership between public institutions and civic organisations. This model of governance is unique in the Croatian context and a role model for advocacy for socio-cultural (community) centres, among other institutions, in several Croatian cities. *POGON* provides space free of charge to culture and youth organisations to run their

8 <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/sanader-suspected-of-taking-10-million-euro-bribe-from-hungaria-s-mol>

9 <http://mediaobservatory.net/radar/funding-non-profit-media-croatia-what-next-step>

programmes in the city of Zagreb. POGON is the most visible example of civil society organisations in the field of culture as leaders of new tendencies in civic engagement. Culture is most certainly considered as a way out of the crisis by actors in the field, even if not from the top-down.¹⁰ Civic culture in all its figures, shapes and approaches, locally designed and carried out to respond to the needs and urgencies of the domestic population, has been a genuine tool of transformation in Croatia and the wider South East European region. Lacking sufficient local support for its development, it was backed-up from international donors like the Open Society Foundations, the Arts and Civil Society Programme of the Erste Bank Group in Central Europe, the Cooperating Netherlands Foundations, the European Cultural Foundation. The impulse for developing new institutions that are inclusive and open for participation of a wide range of social actors, directed towards strengthening democracy and the role of citizens, continued with the establishment of the *Kultura Nova* Foundation in 2011. From about 2004 onwards, the independent cultural scene, organisations active in contemporary arts and culture, began advocating for the establishment of a separate foundation to support civic culture. The process of founding Kultura Nova extended over several years and included representatives of civil society organisations, different parts of the state administration, public bodies and different government experts.

Croatia has not been spared the effects of the ecological, social and economic crises that the rest of the world is experiencing. These effects have been a strong impulse for people to get engaged in developing ideas and approaches for sustainable futures. The good economy is an interesting area of civic engagement in Croatia. Today there are many examples of local initiatives and movements, cooperatives, associations, small and medium enterprises, Local Action Groups (LAGs) and smallholder farms (OPGs). They are pioneers in organic food, environmentally friendly technologies, exchange of different kinds of resources (time, seeds), self-employment, recycling and re-use, vulnerable groups in society, especially homeless people, persons with disabilities, the unemployed,

war veterans and those living in rural, distant and inaccessible areas. Here are some examples: two social cooperatives that employ people with disabilities and other socially excluded groups: *Humana nova* (Čakovec) and *Hedona* (Križevci), *Banka vremena* – an initiative for exchange of free time and knowledge (Pula), *Solidarna eko grupa* – an informal initiative for the exchange of products and services (Osijek), *Biciklopopravljajona* – a DIY bike repair shop and informal education service (Zagreb), *Kamensko* – an association of textile workers that lost their jobs when the factory they worked for years was closed down¹¹ (Zagreb), *ITAS Prvomajska* – a private company that was taken over by its employees and saved from bankruptcy¹² (Ivanec), *Rodin let* – a social enterprise producing ecologically friendly nappies (Zagreb), *Energetska zadruga Otok Krk* – a cooperative for sustainable energy on Croatia's biggest island (Krk), *MoST* – an association providing support for homeless, impoverished and young people (Split), Eko-Gajna, a cooperative of war veterans (Oprošavci), which does not have its own website, and the social supermarket '*Saint Elisabeth Bread*', run by the Secular Franciscan Order (Rijeka).¹³

Croatian civil society has also witnessed an increase in alternative financing approaches, especially for the purposes of starting social enterprises. The main innovations relate to individual charity / donations and reward based crowdfunding. The most used crowdfunding platform is Indiegogo. Nevertheless, crowdfunding is still underused. The United Nations Development Programme (*UNDP*) in Croatia and non-profit marketing agency *BRODOTO* started a Crowdfunding Academy that organises training activities, seminars, conferences and before and after launching campaigns, providing non-profits, companies and individuals with support and mentorship to use crowdfunding more effectively.

Non-formal and informal education have always been important for Croatian civil society. From the end of 1990s,

11 <http://radnickaprava.org/tekstovi/clanci/andrea-milat-pobuna-radnica-kamenskog-i-kako-se-oduprijeti-kapitalizmu-ii>

12 <http://lupiga.com/reportaze/tvornice-radnicima-itas-prvomajska-iz-ivanca-kao-model-punokrvnog-radnickog-dionicarstva>

13 Most of the initiatives are represented in interviews published by ZMAG (Green Network of Activist Groups) in their publication *Dobra ekonomija u dobrim pri ama* (Good economy in good stories), 2015, 2016 editions.

10 Jerzy Hausner [2015], Culture as a Way Out of Crisis, [w:] Philipp Dietachmair, Milica Ilić (editors) Another Europe. 15 Years of Capacity Building with Cultural Initiatives in the EU Neighbourhood, European Cultural Foundation, Amsterdam.



Media freedom day, protest during the Croatian President's speech in Croatian Journalists Association, Photo by Vox Feminae

there was a struggle for the implementation of education for human rights and democratic citizenship in the Croatian formal educational system, but it lacked greater support from the authorities and wider society. At the end of 2015, the Croatian public was shocked by the results of research conducted among high school students. It stated that the formal system of education does not prevent elements of non-democratic, authoritarian orientation and negative views towards minority social groups.¹⁴ Most prominent in advo-

cating for the systematic and quality implementation of civic education is the [GOOD initiative](#), a platform consisting of more than 40 organisations and initiatives, individuals, academics and researchers from all over Croatia that work with teachers, principals, pupils, parents, students, professors, other local NGOs, public and private education institutions on implementing civic education methods and values in the Croatian formal educational system.

Although actors on the traditionalist or conservative front contribute to the pluralism of civil society, providing space for voices and attitudes not dominant in the public space in the last fifteen years, these voices nevertheless insist on only one

14 <http://goo.hr/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/ISTRA%C5%BDIVANJE-POLITI%C4%8CKE-PISMENOSTI-U%C4%8CENIKA-ZAVR%C5%A0NIH-RAZREDA-SREDNJIH-%C5%A0KOLA.pdf>;
<http://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/croatian-ghosts-from-the-past-in-the-eu/>

legitimate experience of Croatian society – that of one nation, one religion, one skin colour, one sexual orientation. Paradoxically, Croatia is the most ethnically homogeneous of the six countries of the former Yugoslavia. The majority religion is Roman Catholicism with 86.28% of the population identifying with it.¹⁵ Certain parts of society (polls say one-third) are mobilised by denouncing prominent civil society actors as supporters of the former (only nominally social democratic) government, ‘budget parasites’ and those who ‘impose minority values on the majority’.¹⁶ This ideological field comprises informal initiatives and associations, all media types – print and electronic – a journalists’ association, political parties and religious organisations. Very often, political parties and religious organisations form associations media outlets that promote their conservative views. One noticeable example of this part of civil society is an initiative called ‘U ime obitelji’ (In the name of the family). This initiative collected more than 700,000 signatures in favour of holding a referendum on the constitutional definition of marriage. 40% of citizens eligible to vote participated in the referendum, 65% voted in favour of enshrining in the constitution the notion that marriage is a union between only a man and a woman. The initiative was financed by private, never publicly declared donations and had strong logistical support from the Catholic Church that ‘provided’ space in front of local churches for collecting signatures and in the churches for advocating. In the aftermath of the referendum, ‘U ime obitelji’ took the step to register as an association. On this basis, they could apply for public funding for their activities. Most responsive was the Mayor of Zagreb who provided an apartment¹⁷ in the centre of the city with all amenities paid¹⁸ without an open and transparent procurement procedure, and the same¹⁹ happened after the association started to publish a not-for-profit website.

The association quickly registered a political party, which was in a position to participate in the parliamentary elections in 2015. Although they did not win any seats in the Parliament, the influence of this ideological faction on the vision of civil society of the new government became apparent very quickly.²⁰ This traditionalist front strengthened its position by opposing what some parts of the liberal civil society scene hold against themselves – professionalisation and bureaucratisation, a donor driven approach, sectoral isolation. At the same time it took on the discourse of volunteering, activism, protection of rights and the struggle for the interests of the community and transformed its meaning according to their vision of the society, creating permanent antagonism to the liberal front which was, in turn, stunned with the success of conservative mobilisation.

Croatia’s recent history of transition to the market economy and democracy can tell us a lot about how civil society has developed and how these new tendencies in civic engagement have come into being. Even if the dissolution of Yugoslavia heralded new independent and nominally democratic States, it took the State and its institutions much longer to develop any true understanding and acceptance of horizontal accountability between the three separate branches of power and sufficient guarantees of citizens’ rights.²¹ Furthermore, although there was some tradition of associative life prior to the establishment of the modern Croatian State, civil society as we know it today, in its emancipated and independent persona, was not really all that apparent, even if critics of the State were often quite vociferous. After the formal changes – the organisation of multi-party elections and the adoption of the democratic constitution – basic economic structures and social relations also had to change. As in so many cases of transition to democracy, Croatia was in a paradoxical situation: democracy and the rule of law had to be established without the active participation of a civil society and the basic elements for the constitution of a civil society had to be established by the State. Indeed, civil society at that time

15 <http://www.croatia.eu/article.php?lang=2&id=15>

16 Only three among many news articles:
<http://www.ezadar.hr/clanak/priopcenje-zadarske-hvidre-vecina-ugrozena-od-manjine>;
<http://www.sloboda.hr/uhljebi-iz-platforme-112-sutra-prosvjeduju-protiv-hasanbegovica-jer-vise-nece-moci-izvlaciti-milijune-iz-ministarstva-kulture>;
<http://narod.hr/hrvatska/nacionalna-zaklada-za-razvoj-civilnog-drustva-jos-jedna-javna-institucija-preko-koje-nevladine-udruge-i-platforma-112-sisaju-drzavni-proracun>

17 <http://www.h-alter.org/vijesti/bandic-dodijelio-poslovni-prostor-u-ime-obiljli>

18 <http://www.h-alter.org/vijesti/bandic-placa-rezije-u-ime-obiljli>

19 <http://www.kulturpunkt.hr/content/u-ime-procedure>

20 <https://eblnews.com/news/croatia/ministry-says-non-profit-media-commission-dissolved-line-rules-8341>

21 Srđan Dvornik, Akteri bez društva: uloga civilnih aktera u postkomunističkim promjenama, 2009, Fraktura/Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

could hardly be understood as a vector for the intensification of the political participation of the broad citizenry. Rather, civil society and its members advocated for key aspects of democratic development, especially the rule of law, from positions of marginality, often made worse by the overbearing position of state actors. This struggle lasted for more than twenty years: through the immediate post-war period, through the privatisation of the nationalised economy, through the winding down of industrial production, and through the re-traditionalisation of social values and the establishment of a unitary national paradigm on culture and education in Croatia.

Soon after gaining independence, Croatia passed a law on the privatisation of public property. It regulated the process by which all previous publicly owned companies had to make a decision on the model they wanted to use for their transformation into private enterprises. The process of this transformation and privatisation took place during the Homeland War, the name used for Croatian military activities in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, which with different levels of intensity lasted until the middle of 1995. Against this backdrop, it was possible for a number of key individuals to consolidate assets, capital and power in their own hands. By the end of the 1990s, public assets in the telecommunications, oil, banking and electricity sectors had all been sold off to foreign investors, concentrating immense financial and political power in the hands of a tiny elite.²² In the 2000s, further privatisations of Croatia's natural resources and public services were completed, and Croatian society has really never recovered from the new social relations ushered in by this new economic system. In early 2016, upon taking up office, the new government announced plans to privatise the remaining 50 state-owned companies in Croatia.

A case in point for this approach to public goods is Croatia's natural energy resources, including oil and gas, and its renewable energy sources. Together, these could produce a significant proportion of the energy Croatia needs. However, the technology is not being developed in-house, and local communities are not invited to the table when discussing

how to approach such issues. Environmental issues, including renewables and energy independence, are still not a priority on the political agenda, and the acquisition of new knowledge in the field of sustainability is almost exclusively a concern of civil society. The service sector dominates Croatia's economy and accounts for about two-thirds of Croatian GDP. The most important industry is tourism, accounting for 15% of GDP and contributing to a sense that the economy is doing really well (both in terms of growth and in terms of employment). However, when one takes a more detailed look at the economic situation, one sees that youth unemployment was at 43% in 2015²³, and more than 20% of the population is at risk of severe poverty²⁴. Furthermore, the contemporary demographic situation in Croatia is characterised by three parallel processes: ageing, natural depopulation and the spatial polarisation of the population. The greatest population concentration is in the city of Zagreb (18%), as opposed to Lika-Senj County where only 1% of the population lives. In general, population density is lowest and the decrease highest in rural areas and parts of the country with poor transport links, such as highland areas, the islands, the Dalmatian hinterland, Slavonia, and distant and inaccessible parts of central Croatia.

Although the legal and regulatory framework for civil society had noticeably improved since the mid-2000s, 2015 saw the imposition of a number of ordinances, decrees and regulations on the procedures applying to civil society organisations, mainly not-for-profit organisations, focusing on their economic efficiency, transparency and public accountability. After January 2016, the government took steps to interfere with the organisational and budgetary conditions of not-for-profit media and the independent media regulator. The government's deliberate and targeted approach in taking such measures has been interpreted as a politically motivated act fully intended to suppress freedom of speech and of the media in Croatia.²⁵

23 <https://vlada.gov.hr/news/eurostat-croatia-s-june-unemployment-rate-down-for-fourth-consecutive-month-17445/17445>

24 http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion

25 <http://civic-forum.eu/en/civic-space/croatian-governments-triple-attack-on-autonomous-media-civil-society-and-culture>

22 Jovica Lončar, *Kontekst radničkih borbi u Hrvatskoj*, 2012, accessed on 15 April 2016.



Independent actors that provide professional and financial support to programmes promoting the sustainability of the not-for-profit sector, cooperation, civic initiatives, philanthropy and volunteering are currently facing similarly oppressive measures.²⁶ The changes to the rules regarding eligibility for public funding and regarding the process for receiving funding from the state lottery proposed by the government in early 2016 were drafted without the necessary transparency. Furthermore, these new regulations are having detrimental

effects on the functioning of the National Foundation for Civil Society Development which was established in the late 1990s and which has since then become a model of good practice for the institutionalisation of partnership between State and civil society for many countries in transition and beyond. At the time of writing, it was not possible to foresee how the new National Strategy for the Development of Civil Society 2016-2020 would look, since it had not yet been composed. It remains unclear how the Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs will function.

Social cooperative
Taste of Home (Okus
doma), Photo by Ida
Jagar

²⁶ <http://www.total-croatia-news.com/politics/11802-over-430-ngo-representatives-file-an-appeal-to-government>

Instead of mitigating social divisions, the new government contributes to their perpetuation and even active promotion,

taking a revisionist approach to Croatia's history and using hate speech. Citizens have begun to distrust each other and society as a whole, and are reverting to the narrow family circle as a means of self-protection. Today, civic actors are increasingly confronted with a deterioration in the social legitimacy of the values which are their *raison d'être* and with the deterioration of their material conditions such that their activities are under threat. These events are not only the result of a deep and long economic crisis, but also of extremely low social trust and confidence in democratic institutions and the rule of law.

CONTEMPORARY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DISCOURSE/S

The choice of actors and good practices highlighted and discussed in this country profile is based on the values they represent – equal rights of ethnic, national, religious and gender minorities, feminism, labour and social justice, alternative lifestyles, sustainable development, participatory democracy and civic activism. The emergence of new actors of civic engagement in Croatia is a reaction and response to the deep structural deficiencies of Croatian capitalism. At the same time, those civic actors are confronted with another illiberal attack on acquired human rights. These are the parameters of the main civic engagement discourse/s that can be observed today in Croatia.

Developing and promoting models of participatory governance and social control over public goods are currently among the most relevant discourses that new civic actors are invested in. New ways of engaging citizens in co-governance are emerging on the back of ideas about good governance, open and transparent government. Participatory budgeting has been offered as a democratic practice through which community members can be more directly involved in decisions about how to spend public budgets. At the same time, centralisation remains one of the most important and pressing issues for governance in Croatia. At the local level, some organisations and civic actors are advocating for co-management of the Commons and for participatory

governance of natural resources. The model of partnership established by POGON between the public and civic sectors, previously not known in Croatia, provided an ideological and practical framework for developing new types of institutional arrangement. These are spaces of sociability that produce social goods. They rely on resources from the public domain for the development of civil society. Resources remain in the public domain, but are not controlled exclusively by the government. The initiative usually comes from below and is linked to the existing infrastructure, which is an ecological model that best serves the public interest.

In 2013, Croatia became the 28th Member State of the European Union. The debate around that event focused on what kind of EU will emerge and how the new austerity politics would impact Croatia.²⁷ In the public debate around Europe, as Vedran Horvat wrote, there was an impression that the EU has been eroded as a community of values and that it has been completely hijacked by the neoliberal economic agenda. This reduction of the EU to economic and financial interests prevails in analyses predicting membership of the EU would result in the further privatisation of natural resources and public services in Croatia. The main concerns expressed in this regard relate to newer members (especially Croatia) gaining equal status in the EU, and its capacity to co-decide with the other 27 Member States. A severe lack of political imagination and the high costs of clientelism are perceived as weak points (also) within the EU's political and administrative elites. At the same time, this does not mean that the trans-national European struggle for a fairer, more inclusive and more sustainable society is not on the radar of Croatian civic actors. The economic size and political (in)competence of the country's representatives forces civil society to connect and network with similar and different movements across Europe.

This can be observed in the participation of Croatian representatives in several pan-EU and European initiatives and platforms. For example, Croatian representatives are active in the European Economic and Social Committee and form a

27 Vedran Horvat, *Turning bitter into sweet – an opportunity for the Greens?*, Welcome Croatia! Green European Journal special focus, accessed on 15 April 2016.

bridge between Croatian civil society and the European Union. Croatian community centres are members of Trans Europe Halles, and cultural organisations are engaged in the work of the Culture Action Europe network. One of the civil society organisations active in the area of international development cooperation is the Croatian Platform for International Citizen Solidarity (CROSOL). They are involved in attempts to create a European civil society connecting local initiatives across borders in Europe, including and especially in South-east Europe. Some organisations have been active since the 1990's, including and especially the feminist associations that now form the Women's Network Croatia, engaged in numerous European women's networks. Activists in all fields of civil society in Croatia cooperate informally with initiatives engaged in citizen participation on the European level and, especially the association BRID, with trade unions throughout Europe.

All the same, given the frustrating and challenging situation at home, the public discourse among civil society organisations about a European civil society has taken something of a back seat to domestic concerns. More than before, civil society looks with consternation to developments in both its closest neighbourhood – Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Poland – and sees similar developments in Western European countries that have been leaders in democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

SITUATIONS, NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF CIVIC ACTORS

The National Foundation for Civil Society Development implemented a new model of supporting co-planning, co-decision-making and co-governance of the activities of civil society organisations, initiatives, active citizens and interested members of the public concentrated in [various platforms](#). The new model consists of an open call, investing a concrete budget in the platform's development, but releasing an amount of that budget when the platform plans and strategises an activity or a campaign, thus moving a step beyond project planning and allowing the organisations to

respond promptly and effectively to needs. These platforms are comprised of organisations concerned with democratisation and the development of new institutions, cross-sectoral collaboration, sustainable development but also cooperation on regional and European level.

As mentioned before, the National Foundation now faces government interference in its system of values, organisation and finances, which will result not just in the suspension of the platforms it supports, but also in reduced funding for organisations that work with the most vulnerable groups. Apart from financial support, civil society actors will not be able to survive without the support of their programme users, regular citizens that benefit from their work without knowing it and citizens that engage in their activities and participate in the wider context of civil society.

To sustain visibility and size, they need to establish cooperation with those loosely organised collectives, connected with local inhabitants, that refuse professionalisation, and also with 'old school' civil society actors like trade unions that still have an impressive membership.

MAPPING MULTIPLIERS OF NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN CROATIA

BAZA ZA RADNIKU INICIJATIVU I DEMOKRATIZACIJU (ORGANISATION FOR WORKERS' INITIATIVE AND DEMOCRATISATION, BRID)

is committed to the protection and promotion of workers' rights, democratic decision-making processes among workers and economic democracy. It was established in 2012 by student activists and works closely with trade unions all over Croatia also functioning as a platform for wider connection of civil society actors.

ZMAG (GREEN NETWORK OF ACTIVIST GROUPS)

is an association that gathers organic gardeners, promoters of environmentally friendly technologies, permaculture designers, academic researchers and social activists. ZMAG publishes an annual report of best practices in green economy.

MREŽA HRANE (NETWORK FOR FOOD)

is a Rijeka-based platform connecting social supermarkets and civil society organisations that advocate for the development of legal conditions for donating food to the most vulnerable members of society. The platform is coordinated by [Centar za kulturu dijaloga](#) (Centre for culture of dialogue).

ZADRUGA ZA ETIČNO FINANCIRANJE

(COOPERATION FOR ETHICAL FINANCE)

is a cooperative for ethical finance, managing the process of creating the first social bank in Croatia, EBanka, which will be owned by its clients.

ARE YOU SYRIOUS?

a former initiative and now registered organisation, collects food, clothes and other utensils needed by refugees. Donations are delivered to improvised camps, closed borders or shelters.

OKUS DOMA (TASTE OF HOME)

The Centar za mirovne studije (Center for peace studies) started, a culinary-cultural-research project introducing the culture, customs and countries of origin of refugees and migrants in Croatia. The team consists of refugees, asylum seekers and volunteers/activists. A crowdfunding campaign helped to establish a social cooperative with the aim to start a catering business and culinary exchange projects.

POGON

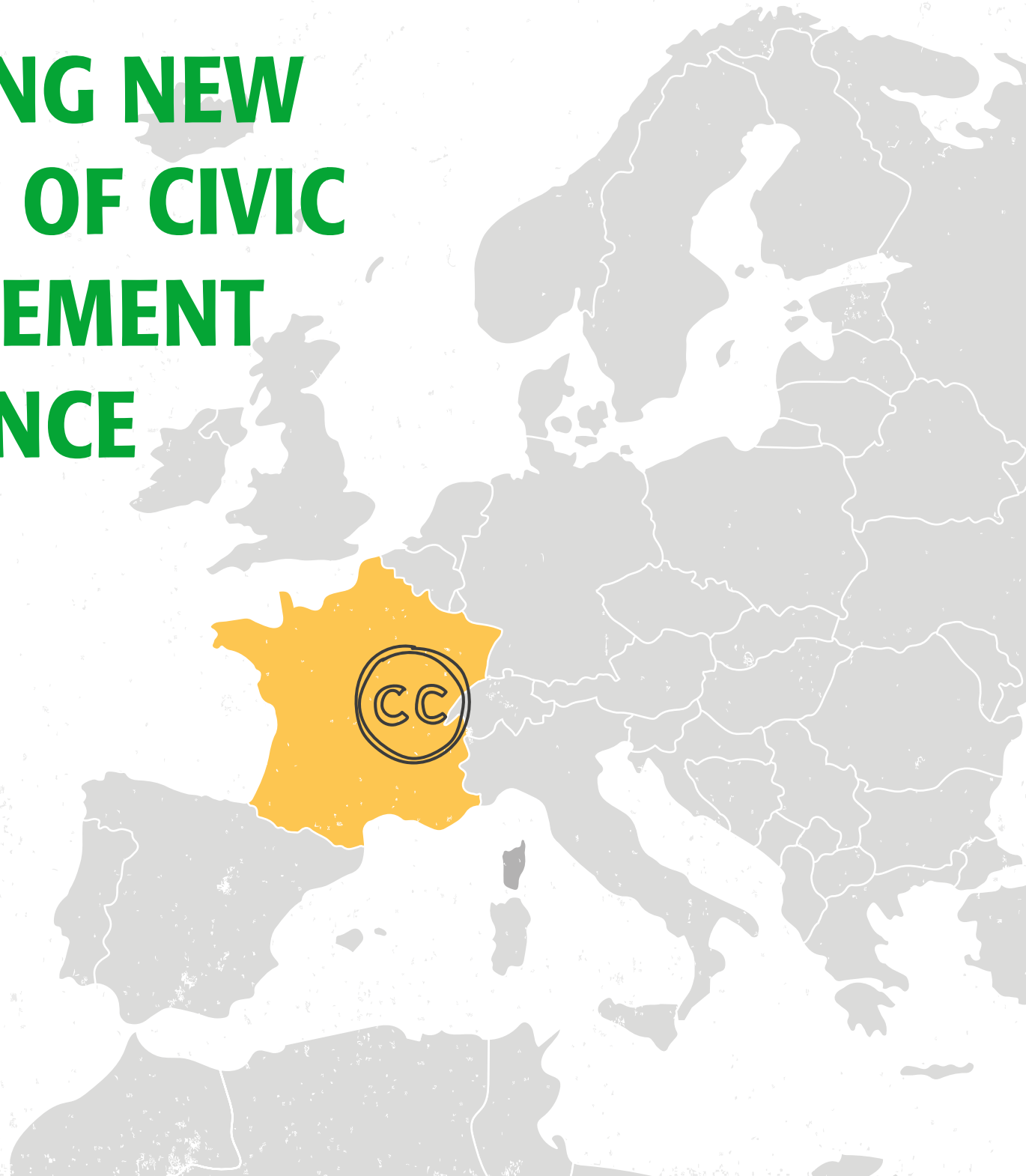
the Zagreb Centre for Independent Culture and Youth is based on a new model of civil-public partnership. It is co-governed by the City of Zagreb and [Operacija:Grad](#) (Alliance Operation:City). It is part of a platform engaged in establishing new models for socio-cultural centres. The platform is coordinated by ACT Grupa, a consortium of organisations and individuals that promote corporate social responsibility, social and solidarity economy, social entrepreneurship and civil society.

KOOPERATIVA – REGIONALNA PLATFORMA ZA KULTURU

(KOOPERATIVA – REGIONAL PLATFORM FOR CULTURE)

is a regional network of organisations working in the field of independent culture and contemporary art in South Eastern Europe. Kooperativa was founded in 2012 by 21 independent cultural organisations active in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Slovenia and Serbia.

MAPPING NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN FRANCE



INTRODUCTION

Reviewing today's new forms of civic engagement in France is a veritable challenge – the field has diversified and transformed so much, even in the last few years. It now includes climate, energy and biodiversity as much as technological innovation, intellectual property, quality of everyday life, nutrition, the fixing and re-using of objects, and the sharing of time and knowledge, to name just a few.

For individuals these fields of intervention are intertwined. Speaking of multi-faceted commitment would have been odd a few years ago. People used to be members of organisations that cohered with their place of work or where they lived, their local communities, or because they were passionate about and committed to some cause or another. Social, cultural and gender affiliations were powerful indicators of civic engagement. That is why as civic actors we can feel obliged to introduce ourselves with our belonging or membership in a social organisation, using it as a sort of civic calling card. Yet, often this reference is no longer enough to explain us to others. We briefly feel compelled to complete it with snippets from our personal lives, to provide insight into our backgrounds, our journeys and trajectories. This change can sometimes be disconcerting for members of older generations – they certainly find it curious. Yet, in these brief portraits economic aspects (references to social entrepreneurship and to the solidarity economy, for instance) also appear. Recent decades saw these almost disappear from the field of civic engagement. Civic actors and those involved in popular education, especially the older ones, rarely considered the economy as a framework to be questioned, or as a space of political struggle.

Even if they struggled for new rights or the preservation of privileges, generations of activists did not question economic relations, the power relations inherent to those, and the dominance of the economic logic as the primary framework for development. For example, there have been very few economic innovations, such as new company types or new legal statuses for workers and employees. At the end of the 20th century, the State still played a powerful role in the



Frédéric Sultan is a social worker and coordinator of cultural and popular education initiatives dedicated to science and technology issues since the 1980s. He works with Gazibo, a cooperative company created in 2008 offering expertise on the Commons. Since 2011, he coordinates 'Remix the Commons', a collaborative and evolutive multimedia project. It aims to document and illustrate the key ideas and practices of commoning. As an activist, Frédéric is a member of VECAM, a French not-for-profit organisation dealing with the impact of information and communication technologies on individuals and society. He has been involved in some international initiatives and projects for the appropriation of information and communication technology, such as 'Fragments du monde', 'I-jumelages'. He is also a member of AITEC, a French not-for-profit organisation dealing with citizenship expertise. AITEC is actively involved in the alter-globalisation movement. In 2009, and as an active member of these organisations, Frédéric participated in the process of writing the Manifesto 'Reclaim the Commons' and was the coordinator for the first World Forum – Science and Democracy.

redistribution of wealth, at least in the imagination of the citizens and the political classes. This idea about the role of the State was widely recognised and perpetuated. The welfare system as we know it in France, is the result of a long process of mediation (social negotiation) with the purpose of creating functional solidarity between the political (public authorities), economic (labour) and domestic (family) spheres. This social welfare system is still very powerful but mistrust in it among the general population has grown quickly. One can see this lack of trust most clearly in the attitude of ordinary people to the pension system and national education. Irrespective of how well they succeed in their education and in their later careers, young people no longer believe that they can provide the resources needed to maintain the welfare system, and therefore, what appears to be expected of them in terms of social justice.

In addition, the French welfare system is in transition. The context in which it has to operate has changed considerably in the last years. While changes are certainly necessary, these are difficult to make when neoliberal economic perspectives are favoured, as is the case today in Europe and in the European Union's institutions. Demanding that more must be done with less, the liberal approach pushes for reform of the current welfare system in the direction of the personal/individual coverage of risks through insurances, and social responses compatible with market logics including social enterprise, 'social impact bonds' and social investing. There is a very real risk that France's social welfare system will become a marginal safety net focused solely on the poorest in a market driven commodified society.

The struggle over what kind of society France wants to be is one of the key stakes of civic engagement today. Even if the reciprocity-based approach is gaining momentum, the idea of redeveloping the 'universal' social welfare system is not. On the one hand, people are excited by the ideas and practices of the collaborative economy and the circular economy. On the other, young workers do not trust the welfare State. They have been convinced by the dominant narrative, which claims the current model is not sustainable and will therefore not be in a position to pay them pensions by the time they are of retirement age.

At the same time, there is hope. Activists and social movements are learning from the myriad of initiatives they are experimenting with and observe in their immediate surroundings. They practice politics, in the form of debate in public spaces, and consensus-building on the questions of daily life and of social organisation. Will they be able to rethink the terms for implementing a social welfare system that takes from the Commons to build a decentralised, participative and inclusive approach? The challenge is to make social welfare a shared issue! Reinventing mutualism in the 21st century!

CONTEMPORARY TENDENCIES IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN FRANCE

We can observe two key new tendencies in civic engagement in France that are of particular significance. These are mobilisation for climate justice and the revival of the Commons. We will look at each, and then consider some specific initiatives that are good examples of how these tendencies are being played out in the French context.

The first tendency of significance is the growing space and role of mobilisation on environmental and climate issues in the post COP 21 Climate Conference context. COP 21 took place in France in 2015. The preparation of this international conference saw the emergence of a large movement for climate justice, and growing awareness and concern among the broader public for environmental issues. The concept of climate justice addresses ideas of justice as they relate to ecology, climate and the environment. It is based on the idea that the natural environment, and its ecosystems, should be considered as part of the Commons. This idea is widely shared today. Yet, and paradoxically, this shared concern has not yet opened up significant perspectives for change in the environmental field, with it becoming obvious that big business has not adopted new and innovative practices. At this point, it is still difficult to know precisely what the effects of this mobilisation have been on society. One would have to conduct some more in depth research with actors of the movement. However, first indications are that there have been two indirect effects in France. Firstly, civic movements such as Alternatiba (see below) were



able to mobilise activists, both active and new (for some, it was their first demonstration). These same activists are today more willing to participate in the activities of other movements like Nuit Debout (see below) even though the environment is not the primary concern of that movement. Secondly, the question of the Commons has gained social and political traction in France. Indeed, it is becoming politicised. Mobilisations on climate were the occasion of meetings and collaborations between actors that previously would never have connected or were not willing to cooperate. For instance, COP 21 was the platform on which actors of the collaborative economy and of alter-globalisation social movements met and worked together for the first time.

Broadly speaking and to paraphrase the title of David Bollier's book, the revival of the Commons is both asserting and developing itself.¹ The initiatives that we present below as exemplary of civic engagement in contemporary France refer to this notion in their discourse. Nevertheless, these references' meanings do not always cohere. In fact, they often vary. The notion of Commons is indeed particularly polysemous. Yet, the Commons is fast becoming a main point of reference in the various forms and fields of civic mobilisation. This has translated into a revival of the idea of sharing and of the value of use, rather than of ownership, among activists.

Very different forms of engagement and participation have emerged from these ideas. Common forms include 'skills sharing', as promoted by Pro Bono's values of corporate social responsibility (CSR), the experiments of the Assemblies for the Commons and of the Virtual Assembly (see below). Yet, these all cohabit within a variety of mobilisations. The notion of the Commons has become one of the keys to interpreting ideas about a Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), the collaborative economy, P2P, along with the values of the transition movement.

Ideas and action around the Commons and SSE are now coming together. The first meetings of activists and actors involved in these different movements only took place in 2011, although they share many values and interests: a pluralist vision of the economy and the urgency of finding new forms of social welfare. For these actors, the social protection system is not only a catalogue of social measures, but also a system reflecting a vision of the society and its values: solidarity, progress, freedom, equal access to health, and so on. It is not possible to assess the number of grass-roots initiatives that have been inspired by ideas about the Commons and that are implementing some form of SSE or that refer to its values (democratic management, collective and social usefulness of a project, moderate profit, etc.).

Until recently, literature and media used different terms to refer to new economic and social practices of the collaborative economy. Reference to the Commons was made by those who wanted to question certain forms of economic activity considered harmful. The Commons and transitioning are mutually reinforcing codes of values. They mark a merging between the Commons and cooperative unions, and more broadly with theories of SSE. By way of example, Ouishare,² an international network for a collaborative economy, conducts research aiming at identifying indicators for the merging of practices based on values shared by both the collaborative economy and SSE fields. The Commons also force the actors involved in the collaborative economy to question their vision of social welfare and of local governance.

Meanwhile, the actors involved in the field of SSE are searching for a way to reinvent themselves and to tackle the challenges of social transformation within a collaborative economy. Among the main economic actors of SSE, some insurance companies and mutual funds have experimented with innovative initiatives. The MAIF (the teachers' mutual insurance fund) is supporting a consortium of 23 collaborative economy start-ups. MGEN (the mutual health fund) has launched 'La Fabrique des Territoires innovants' ('The Factory for Innovative Territories').³ These organisations

¹ David Bollier has dedicated himself to the Commons since the end of the 1990s as an author, political consultant, activist and blogger. He is working on various projects linked to the Commons with American and international partners, and keeps a blog on the matter (www.bollier.org). He lives in Amherst, Massachusetts, USA. The book is: Bollier David, *La Renaissance des communs, Pour une société de coopération et de partage*, Editions ECLM 2014: www.eclm.fr/ouvrage-364.html.

² www.ouishare.net

³ *La Fabrique des Territoires Innovants* is a think tank looking to mobilise actors

gather millions of members. Their motivation is most certainly linked to the need for new approaches to management. Yet and more importantly, in their search for new 'products' and 'service' they are also finding ways to renew the involvement and foster participation among their members.

To illustrate these tendencies as described above we offer a series of examples. These examples can be symbolic or singular in some respects, but generally exemplify the ideas and values behind the movements described. They are not intended to represent the full scope of existing organisations or today's new forms of civic engagement in France, being just a selection.

ALTERNATIBA OR THE ALTERNATIVE (IN BASQUE LANGUAGE)⁴

Alternatiba is a process of mobilisation of civil society that was created in 2010 by the Basque environmentalist organisation Bizi!⁵ It aims at raising awareness and changing behaviours to face the challenges of climate change. The movement has organised some 84 festive Alternatiba events all over France since 2010. The first Alternatiba took the form of a village of conferences and thematic spaces with numerous booths and educative and artistic workshops. The experience gathered by Bizi! has been systematised and theorised into a methodological kit, movies, guidelines and documentary material. It is now to be found in a multimedia library so that it can be replicated by the members of each Alternatiba collective. Organised in the form of cross-disciplinary commissions (on funding, communication or logistics), and according to themes focused on the event's content, the collectives create conferences and diverse animations by themselves. Alternatiba events generally include a 'Climate Area' as well as spaces directly linked to the different uses of energy resources (transportation, energy, agriculture, nutrition), alternative lifestyles, culture, education, solidarity, sharing, sustainable economy, the implementation of an international justice

and social entrepreneurs to fuel the reflection on the most effective tools, methods and initiatives to solve collectively, and in economically sustainable ways, social, environmental and economical problems. See its webpage at: www.territoiresinnovants.org

4 <https://alternatiba.eu/en>

5 <https://bizimugi.eu>

system for the environment, etc. This movement has received massive support from civil society organisations. A European coordination of the Alternatiba was also created in 2015.

NUIT DEBOUT⁶

This is a movement of daily political demonstrations and occupations of public squares that is taking place all over France. It started at Place de la République in Paris on March 31, 2016, after a demonstration against a new labour law. This movement offers 'free' individual speech, and aspires to direct participatory democracy. Nuit Debout has quickly spread, both geographically (by the time of writing, occupations are taking place in tens of cities across France) and in terms of claims, moving from the rejection of the labour law to a more global opposition to political 'institutions' and to the economic system. Organised in commissions (coordination, logistics, reception and serenity, communication, etc.), decisions are taken by consensus during general assemblies that are now documented on a Wiki page quickly set up thanks to the support of Wikipedia activists. The method of occupying public squares is inspired by Spain's anti-austerity movement, the 15-M, Greece's '700 euros generation' and by the Occupy movement in the US. The initiators, around fifteen people, set up a steering collective which comprised a journalist, contract workers in the entertainment business, trade-unionists, and members of social rights activist organisations. Some are also part of the Parti de Gauche (the Leftist Party). Yet, admitting that they had been 'overrun' by the success and scope of the mobilisation, they have now stepped aside in favour of a horizontal movement with no identified leader. This movement is supported by organisations from the alter-globalisation and right to housing movements, including Attac (an alter-globalisation organisation) and the Solidaires trade union. This informal civic movement seeks to 'make struggles merge'. Their claims are focused on developing another project of society rather than on more specific demands. It is noteworthy that this movement has been able to mobilise large numbers of people in public spaces even during France's state of emergency in force since November 13, 2015.

6 <https://nuitdebout.fr>



VIRTUAL ASSEMBLY

The Virtual Assembly association aims at developing web 3.0 and reshaping society's modus operandi. Its objective is to support civic initiatives and to facilitate collaboration between members of civil society by 'sharing with them discoveries in the field of political philosophy', discoveries that are therefore being 'taken out of the academic world'. It provides activists with digital tools based on the semantic web. Created in May 2011, its first activities took place in 2012 (in the form of a video production). It participated in the General States for Civic Power in 2013, partnered up with Stample (a digital tool) and launched its first conference on the semantic web

in 2014. The Virtual Assembly association is part of a network of organisations inspired by reflections on P2P (Michel Bauwens⁷), the economy of contribution (Bernard Stiegler⁸)

7 Michel Bauwens is the founder of the P2P foundation. At the Ecuadorian government's request, he has headed the FLOK Society project aiming at rebuilding Ecuador's economy into a free and open knowledge society. With a team of researchers and with the involvement of the local civil society and of world supporters of the common good, the FLOK project enabled the creation of a framework for the transition toward a society based on the Commons, as well as the production of recommendations and of legislative projects in more than 15 specific political fields.

8 Bernard Stiegler is a French philosopher, director of the Institute for Research and Innovation (IRI), founder of Ars Industrialis political and cultural group in 2005, and of the School for Philosophy of Epineuil-le-

Urban walk dedicated to the Commons of the neighbourhood of La Chapelle, Photo by Paris 18ème.

and the Commons in order to create new organisational patterns, horizontal governance and a 'free' wage system (where welfare contributions are decided by the beneficiaries of the service). The Virtual Assembly association and its partners in its network provide organisations from the alter-globalisation movement and regional authorities with tools such as www.communecter.org.⁹

'L'ASSEMBLÉE DES COMMUNS' – THE ASSEMBLY FOR THE COMMONS¹⁰

Since 2015, assemblies for the Commons have started to emerge, inspired by the founder of the P2P Foundation¹¹ Michel Bauwens' ideas. This idea has been spreading in France since October 2015, when the 'Festival of the Time of the Commons' took place. The first meetings of activists claiming to be part of the movement for the Commons were organised in Lille and Toulouse in order to set up a new authority for local governance. The organisers suggest initiatives regarding the Commons, and gather to document their model, to communicate about and develop sharing tools (producers' referencing, or labelling, stocking and delivering systems, for instance) and to develop group shopping. Assemblies for the Commons aim at managing relations between local authorities and public institutions, and try to enforce a 'democratic pact', between politicians and citizens regulating the relationship and mutual responsibilities of the parties to each other. These measures include the possibility to impeach politicians, coordinate actions against privatisations and extractivism, and develop the Commons in the neighbourhoods, basing themselves on a social contract for the Commons still to be developed (for example, an internal community charter). The Assemblies for the Commons work with the Chambers for the Commons, which are essentially chambers of commerce for the Commons. They advocate that economic actors using the Commons for activities that generate income should have to pay for such use.

Fleuriel in 2010. Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus is his most famous work.

9 <https://www.communecter.org>

10 <http://assemblee.encommuns.org>

11 <https://p2pfoundation.net>

CIVICWISE¹²

CivicWise is a crowdsourcing and co-designing platform that fosters civic engagement and collaborative urbanism. Domenico Di Siena, its initiator and leader, is an architect and expert in participative urbanism, social innovation, civic design and digital city.¹³ CivicWise is first and foremost a community for the sharing of knowledge through the stimulation of civic engagement. Its goal is to channel global knowledge in order to improve local civic projects. The platform offers help to citizens and organisations to develop community projects by creating protocols and tools for co-design. CivicWise has developed the beta version of a co-conception protocol based on a ten-step process. Members of its community are experimenting with this protocol while also developing Civic Space, a third-space prototype for civic meetings in local communities.

PRO BONO LAB¹⁴

The Pro Bono Lab association was created in 2011 and calls on volunteers to advise socially-oriented organisations for free in the Ile-de-France, Rhône-Alpes, Nord-Pas-de-Calais and PACA regions of France, through sponsorship or sharing of expertise. Pro Bono Lab acts as a resource for socially-oriented organisations because it sees them playing a key role in the making of a more united and inclusive society. It brings them skills from the business, industrial and service worlds in order to make their activities sustainable, while offering the volunteers the opportunity to share their skills and giving companies, foundations and universities a chance to support organisations. Since 2012, Pro Bono Lab has supported 256 organisations thanks to the work of 3000 volunteers in the implementation of around 357 missions such as needs assessments, "marathons" (which involve a team of volunteers working on the needs of an organisation over a day), or long-term advisory support (a few hours a week over a period lasting from one to three months).

12 <https://civicwise.org>

13 <http://urbanohumano.org>

14 <http://probonolab.org>

These (new) actors, initiatives and movements have emerged out of a very specific context. The following attempts to synthesise the contextual factors common to several or all of these initiatives' emergence and further development. This, nevertheless, remains the perspective of just one activist, and others may see things differently.

CIVIC INITIATIVES ARE STRUGGLING WITH AN INCREASINGLY VIOLENT POLITICAL CONTEXT

In France today, the social contract seems to be in the process of failing. Young people, even those in positions of relative privilege from the middle and upper classes, appear to be losing trust in the State's capacity to respond to social needs. This is amplified by the mainstream's liberal discourse. Young entrepreneurs are becoming activists even though they reject the label. For the working classes, segregated by race and gender, this situation is nothing new. It has simply become more visible because of the increasing difficulties France is experiencing on the economic front. All the same, and despite their common concerns, young people from the different classes are not uniting and mobilising together. This economic context is intertwined with an increasingly violent political situation. The state of emergency in place since the terrorist attacks on Paris on November 13, 2015, has been extended twice. There have been controversies over a proposal for a law to deprive French citizens indicted for terrorism of their citizenship. Both the state of emergency and the tone of the debate over the proposed legislation have considerably increased the stigmatisation of people of Muslim and Arab origin. This situation has also been exploited by the authorities to prevent civic demonstrations against COP 21 and the social and environmental mobilisations against the airport at Notre Dame des Landes. Finally, the regional elections at the end of 2015 have shown the extent to which the extreme right has become a political force to reckon with in France. The elimination of the Left from the second round of the 2017 Presidential Elections and its weakening in the National Assembly is a real possibility.

Nuit Debout is an expression of increased public awareness that new forms of civic participation are necessary for public policies to be effective. This movement has become

extremely popular in a short period of time – the result of information spread by word of mouth and of two documentaries on current social and environmental issues. The movie *Demain* ('Tomorrow') made by Mélanie Laurent¹⁵ and Cyril Dion¹⁶ and produced by Bruno Levy¹⁷, presents initiatives bringing back hope in the possibility of a soft transition. The movie *Merci patron!* ('Thank you, boss!'), directed by François Ruffin (one of the initiators of *Nuit Debout*)¹⁸, shows how the Klur family was handled by Bernard Arnault (owner of LVMH, one of the biggest luxury goods groups in France). Both parents were fired from *Ecce*, a company he owns through the LVMH group. It, thus, seems that this context is characterised by a maturing of the social dynamics between a new generation in conflict with the ruling class. A unification of the different struggles is a clear objective. This will be an important task for *Nuit Debout* and *CivicWise* in the future.

Other, not at all progressive, actors of civil society have emerged around the struggle against societal reforms addressing 'lifestyle issues', such as same-sex marriage and the presence of religious symbols in the public space and in education. These actors cater to citizens from peripheral urban areas who feel left out, on the one hand, and to citizens from the upper classes that have abandoned political activism. The mobilisations against the law on 'Marriage for all' (same-sex marriage) is typical of this situation. Same-sex marriage has long been a struggle. It took until July 1982 for France to decriminalise homosexuality, pursuant to a proposal by Robert Badinter, who also fought for the abolition of the death penalty.¹⁹ Thirty years later, in 2013, conservative and reactionary opposition forces mobilised against the law on 'Marriage for all'. Some of these have existed for a long time. However, this mobilisation saw 'pro-family' associations (the National Union of Family Associations) joined by collectives and organisations who use this opportunity to renew their modes of expression and action in the public space. The

15 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%A9lanie_Laurent

16 Cyril Dion was one of the leaders of the *Colibris* movement before he became a movie director. More at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyril_Dion

17 <http://brunolevy.com/about>

18 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fran%C3%A7ois_Ruffin

19 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Badinter

collectives 'La Manif pour tous' ('Demos for all'), 'Homovox', 'Pour l'Humanité durable' ('For sustainable humanity') and the VITA Alliance were all opposed to 'Marriage for all'. They received support from reactionary Catholic organisations (to be clear, not all Catholic organisations are reactionary) and by the extreme right: the Civitas Institute, Le Printemps français, Droites françaises (all Catholic family organisations) and the French Catholic Church.

The first demonstrations started in August 15, 2012. More than 500,000 people have been mobilised onto the streets until the beginning of 2013. An important point here is the fact that this time, the movement was joined by Muslim organisations and by organisations coming from the neighbourhoods. The French Union of Islamic Organisations and Mohammed Moussaoui, then President of the French Council of Muslims in France, called for mobilisation against 'Marriage for all'. Unlikely as these allies may seem, they are joining forces in a struggle around the topic of education. Some of these movements have renewed the forms of mobilisation, organisation and demonstration they engage in, and several non-hierarchical collectives and forms of representation that are not led by individual leaders have emerged. Yet, the place given to religion in the public space remains central. Notably, it has appeared in the debates around freedom of expression that took place following the attacks on the Charlie Hebdo newspaper at the beginning of 2015. These events demonstrate that conflicts in French society transcend the traditional left – right cleavage, and that religion is making something of a come back as a key issue of contention.

This context is certainly also influenced by the fact that in France different social groups in peripheral urban areas of France, are segregated along race and gender lines. In 2005, France experienced a spate of urban riots following the death of two young people who were trying to escape from the police. The memory of these events has been erased from the French popular and political memory by the dominant class, which prevents any form of constructive political dialogue with the populations affected by segregation, racism and police violence. A new social movement focused on 'neighbourhoods' has emerged from this context. It has tried to bring issues of concern to the social contract, such as housing, education and health back into the public space. This move-

ment shapes itself around the Bacqué-Mechmache report and mission,²⁰ and around the creation of the civic coordination 'Ça ne se fera plus sans nous!' (Nothing about us without us!).²¹ The production of this report was achieved on the basis of a series of civic conferences, involving some actors from the neighbourhoods. It proposes the creation of modes of access to public action such as the 'fond d'interpellation' ('call out' fund) to fight against clientelism among local elected officials.

Even if this approach has had very little visible impact on current public policies, it has created space for the establishment of collectives that try to involve left-out citizens. Researchers such as Pascal Nicolas-Le Strat²² and Alain Bertho²³ have made parallels between these mobilisations and Nuit Debout. They argue that it is important to understand which social tensions these movements could work on together. They also argue that it is essential to recognise that safe spaces such as closed assemblies for racially segregated youth are necessary for developing trust and cooperation between these different movements.

CONTEMPORARY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DISCOURSE/S

Although each of these movements is inspired by and promotes its specific discourses, some aspects of these are similar. We will address several that we can identify one by one in the following considerations.

20 More information about the Marie Hélène Bacqué and Mohamed Mechmache report here: <http://www.associations-citoyennes.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/rapport-bacque-mechmache.pdf>

21 <http://passansnous.fr>

22 Pascal Nicolas-Le Strat is a sociologist at Paris 8 Saint Denis University. He works on long-term practices in the production of Commons, in Saint Denis and in a community in the Ardèche. Website: <http://www.le-commun.fr>

23 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alain_Bertho



REBUILDING A CULTURE OF STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY

Whether acting on the local (CivicWise), national (Nuit Debout), cross-disciplinary (Assembly for the Commons) or thematic (Alternatiba) levels, all these initiatives consider as necessary the (re)politicisation (in the wider sense of the term) of their causes. They all assert the necessity of rebuilding among activists a culture of struggling for democracy. This culture reintroduces two dimensions that have all but disappeared from the discourse in recent years: cross-disciplinary articulation of and solidarity between local mobilisations on the one hand, and the reconnection of action with the founding principles of human rights, on the other.

THE ACTION'S SELF-CONSTITUTIVE DIMENSION

Another dimension in the discourse of these actors, initiatives and movements that has made indisputable progress in terms of action, is the self-constitutive aspect of civic participation. Here again can be found a link to the Commons that, among other characteristics, allows for everyone to participate in the making of community rules, and therefore in their institutional functioning. Academics (philosophers and researchers in the social sciences) were the first to highlight this notion, relying on the work of Antonio Negri.²⁴ Between 2012 and 2013,

School of Data
Workshops

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_Negri

these academics organised a seminar called 'From public to common',²⁵ feeding reflection on this issue that has in part been taken up again and criticised by Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval in their book 'Commun', published in 2014.²⁶ Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, respectively a philosopher and a sociologist, work as researchers in French universities, and in a research and study group called 'Question Marx', which claims to contribute to the renewing of critical thinking in France. Numerous activists are inspired by Dardot and Laval's work. The Atlas project for charters on urban Commons, exploring the legal mechanisms stimulating urban Commons, works basically along the same lines.

At this point comes the question of the scale this work on the self-constitutive aspect of people's action can reach. Some think it is necessary and possible to organise themselves in order to recreate national level institutions, meaning rewriting the Constitution to abolish private ownership over the means of production, and to implement user ownership such that the means of production belong to those who use the product for non-profit motives. Many observers, including this author, are sceptical that this can be achieved considering the State and capitalism's capacity to sustain its hegemony over the levers of power. It is likely more realistic to pursue a strategy of equipping civic actors to build their community, and control leaders' actions, to the extent that those are affecting the community.

In relation to Europe and European values, it can be observed that the idea of Europe, and more specifically of the European project, seem to be a lost common, or a common that has been appropriated and needs to be conquered again. Within civil society, some actors question the European dimension. If it is fair to say that numerous progressive actors are involved in alternative practices at the local level, or are fighting for ecological, social and cultural transitions within their communities by sharing values and an ethic of justice in democracy, it should be noted that they rarely connect with their European

peers. The conditions that would allow these actors to create strategies on the European level are not yet in place. They still lack spaces for sharing visions and strategies for defending the Commons across Europe. Such a space is necessary so that trans-local actions with European scale can emerge. These programmes, as said above, should structure and allow for the Commons, as a new narrative, to be disseminated.

One of the challenges to progress on this matter is the question of how to facilitate the activists' and collectives' work on involving institutions at various levels (local, national and European). In France, local authorities are quite indifferent to the action of such civic actors, with the exception of when they are trying to control independent civic spaces. That is why several civic actors, including this author, have initiated a process of constituting a European platform called European Commons Assembly.²⁷ The work of this network will be dedicated to the creation of solidarity conditions to defend initiatives in a trans-local logic, and spaces of freedom (re)created in the form of Commons on the one hand, and on the other to elaborate alternative political proposals that will encompass this objective in a comprehensive way. After a meeting gathering 30 European activists at the end of May 2016, the first encounter of the European Commons Assembly took place in Brussels over three days in November 2016 with 130 activists. The Assembly included one meeting co-organised in the European Parliament with members of the Intergroup on the Commons. This platform is looking to build a common European agenda.

SITUATIONS, NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF CIVIC ACTORS IN FRANCE

These actors and movements are also working on building infrastructures that will allow them to meaningfully pursue their actions. This kind of infrastructure provides space for reflection, debate and documentation of best practices, of ideas and visions carried by the activists, space for the production of proposals and the defence of both the initia-

25 Antonio Negri, Bernard Paulré, Christian Laval, Carlo Vercellone, Giorgio Grizotti, Franck Poupeau, Nicolas Guilhot, Serge Cosseron, Pierre Dardot, Patrick Dieuaide, Pantaleo Elicio, Jason Francis Mc Gimsey, Jean-Marie Monnier, Judith Revel.

26 <http://www.editionsladecouverte.fr/catalogue/index-Commun-9782707169389.html>

27 <http://europeancommonsassembly.eu>

tives and their impacts. The documentation produced by the P2P Foundation, multiple attempts to map the Commons, the dynamics of festivals on Commons across Europe, the spaces for cultural integration in the form of Summer Camps or Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) on the Commons would all be part of this space.

Beyond what already exists, it would be useful to reflect on the ways to increase the scale of action. This depends on the actors' capacity to adopt and share a narrative that connects us all and allows us to share our story and our common perspectives throughout society.

The festival 'Temps des communs' ('Time of the Commons'²⁸), like Alternatiba, is an experience that illustrates perfectly one of the ways of tackling this issue. Organised for the most part in France in October 2015, it included around 350 events over 2 weeks. This festival follows the 2013 edition of 'Villes en biens communs' ('Cities in Commons'). It was organised in various places so that the programme would include various events, each one allowing for the discovery of and the involvement in the movement of Commons. The 350 – and more – events enabled the participants to discover the Commons through various themes from city to nature, science to artistic practices, P2P economy to the civil code, through workshops, conferences, debates, urban walks, documentary screenings, etc. The success of this festival is an indicator for the progress the Commons have made in the activists' imagination. Partly because the notion of the Commons is perceived as polysemous, it allows for the construction of synergies between activists involved in movements that until now did not forcibly know of each other's existence. Free culture, sharing economy, political ecology and co-operativism are some of the movements looking to better understand the elements they have in common. Yet, the capacity to share a compelling story of the Commons that could feed massive mobilisations able to create real political and ideological ratios of power, beyond the circle of already convinced and active people, is still missing. This can be changed if social movements gain access to media communication tools that have until now not been within their reach.

If we also consider the relationship between what might be understood as 'the old school' of civic actors in France and these new initiatives, we need to admit that this relationship is quite nuanced. For every movement that is integrated in the alter-globalisation movement such as Alternatiba, we find another, like CivicWise, that has little contact.

This situation also indicates a certain evolution of the 'old school'. It would appear that social movements have developed a culture of training new activists and ensuring leadership succession. Over the last 10 years, actors of the 'old' civil society have managed to move from what has been seen as obscure intellectualism toward a culture of action, communication and dynamic campaigning. Today this culture finds it easier to connect with the makers of the emerging generation of activists.

28 See the initiative's website : <http://tempsdescommuns.org>

MAPPING MULTIPLIERS OF NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN FRANCE

COLLECTIF POUR L'ACTION CITOYENNES

(COLLECTIVE FOR CIVIC ASSOCIATIONS)

was created in 2010 to fight against the coming down of associations to their sole economic aspect, and to defend the contribution of associations to the construction of a united, sustainable and participative society.

P2P FOUNDATION

is an international organisation that studies, documents and promotes peer-to-peer practices. It started to develop its French branch in 2015.

COOP DES COMMUNS

was founded in Spring 2016 to promote and develop bridges between the realm of the Commons and that of social and solidary economy. (No website)

ASSOCIATION VECAM

was created in 1995. In anticipation of an increasing digitalisation of human production, it wished to feed citizens and civil society's reflection on the matter. The question of Commons has also become central in VECAM's interventions and projects. It has stimulated a French-speaking network around the Commons and around its [le Temps des Communs'](#) initiative.

SYLVIA FREDRIKSSON (@S_FREDRIKSSON)

is dedicated to the promotion of the Commons and works on the challenges of citizen appropriation of technologies as a lever of emancipation for civil society. She specialises in hypermedia and has worked on exploring and designing local urban utopias.

NICOLAS LOUBET (@NICOLASLOUBET)

is the co-founder of Cellabz, Bluenod, Knowtex, Umaps. He develops innovation labs in the blockchain field, carries out monitoring and managing of creative communities, innova-

tive ecosystems, decentralised events, and tools for collective knowledge.

BENJAMIN CORIAT

is a French economist and professor at the Paris 13 University (University of Economic Sciences and Management). He situates himself within the Regulation School of thoughts. He is part of the administration council of the Économistes Atterrés ("the appalled economists") and researches the Commons.

FABIENNE ORSI

is an economist and researcher at the Research Institute for Development at the SESSTIM, in Marseille. With the launching of the project ANR on "Intellectual Property, Commons, Exclusivity" in 2010, she got involved in a pluridisciplinary research on the commons in the field of knowledge with a focus on governance of the Commons and property.

LIONEL MAUREL

is a blogger, legal expert and librarian. His blog posts deal with the redefinition of copyright in the digital era. He is one of the founders of SavoirsCom1, a collective of librarians defending a common domain for information.

VALÉRIE PEUGEOT

currently works at the Orange Labs (social and human sciences), in Paris. She has been involved in non-profit activities for 15 years in the fields of European policies, social impact of globalisation, participative democracy, and social and democratic use of ICT (Information and Communications Technology). She links the activist and institutional realm.

MAPPING NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN GREECE



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Popular and political discourse in and outside of Greece of recent years has often referred to the country as something of a 'special case'. What originally began with negative stereotypes and not little stigmatisation of Greece and Greek people, has transitioned through curiosity and solidarity to the development of a better understanding of what the 'special case' actually is. Apart from the media and various elites that address the status and situation of Greece in a top-down manner, there has been a simultaneous movement from the bottom upwards by civil society. On the one hand, there has been an attempt to act constructively towards the situation of the country as it developed, and on the other to present, through action, a more realistic and positive image of Greece and what is happening there.

This paper proposes that until recently civil society in Greece took a different form than that in other European countries, and it presents the rapid evolution of Greek civil society since approximately 2010, that has taken it in many new directions. Furthermore, it attempts to explain why Greece can indeed be considered a 'special case', not in the usual negative way, but rather by showing how Greek civil society actors can and do contribute creatively to the further development of a common European civic space.

In a first section we present the main categories of actors and tensions that exist inside the civic sector. We also describe the context in which civil society has evolved, and currently acts. A next section presents background information about how key moments in recent years have influenced the discourse/s of civil society, and describes the attitudes of current civic actors to European values. A last section considers the challenges civic groups face in terms of their sustainability, not only in financial terms but also in terms of their action and content, and the differences that exist between older and newer civic actors, discussing how approaches to public issues have changed since the crisis.



Loukas Bartatilas was born in 1981 in Athens, Greece. Working in the interdisciplinary field between Public Art and Social Urban Planning, he is interested in artist-run initiatives and urban projects that focus on neighbourhoods and local engagement. From 2013 to 2015 he participated in the 'Actors of Urban Change' programme organised by the Robert Bosch Foundation and MitOst e.V., as a member of the Athens team. In 2014 he curated his solo exhibition: "Urban Details, ongoing reflections on Patis-sion Street", with the support of the 'NEON Organization for Culture and Development'. In 2015 he organised the NEON Community Project 'syn. desmoi'. He is also a representative of the Robert Bosch Cultural Managers Network. He lives and works between Athens and Berlin. More information at: www.loukasbartatilas.com.

<http://www.actors-of-urban-change.eu>

<http://www.urbandetails.gr>

<http://www.neon.org.gr>

<http://www.syndesmoi.com>

PREFACE

It was spring of 2014 when I returned to Greece for a longer stay after a period of living in Germany. During the years prior to my return I had experienced the Greek crisis not only from a distance, but also through the eyes of the 'other side', those of Germany and of Germans. Throughout my stay in Germany, I was able to see and understand the culture I came from through the filter of someone else. Being familiar with both cultures I was sad to see conflicts taking place, and at the same time I was able to recognise how both sides' arguments represented the cultural contexts in which they were made. I then realised the important role an interpretative framework has and how, despite similarities, this can lead to different conclusions and actions on different sides.

It was in Berlin that I first heard the frequent use of phrases such as 'active citizen', 'civil society' and 'civic engagement'. I also experienced how citizens can participate in political decisions through their own initiatives and I became aware of the solid trust that exists between German citizens and the State. In Greece this specific vocabulary is almost absent. In other words, civil society cannot be interpreted through the same framework as for other Western countries where the same conditions of trust can be observed. At the same time, the Greek cultural context and local mentalities do make people act, albeit somewhat sub-consciously and with different outcomes than in Germany or other countries of Europe. In Greece strong family support structures, hospitality, openness and an interest in the public sphere have helped people establish a strong social nexus, although they would never use such grandiose definitions.

Despite the contemporary problems and difficulties that Greece, in general, and civic actors in particular, are facing, recent history including the crisis years also presents a fruitful field of opportunity. Having realised that the previous system failed, many civic actors now see the current time as their opportunity to make change. Of course, there are many differences between the Greek cultural context and that of Central/Northern Europe, and there is still much distance to be covered to overcome these differences. However, mutual

understanding and respect for difference should be the basis for a common European future. This country profile is, therefore, presented in the spirit of bridge building.

INTRODUCTION

It is the position of this author that civil society in Greece exists, acts and is interpreted under different conditions than those that exist in other Western European countries. However, since 2010 civil society has been changing as a result of multiple factors that we shall analyse in this paper. Before starting to talk about contemporary civil society in Greece, and in an attempt to explain its evolution within the social, economic and political context in which it has developed, it is necessary to take a brief look into history. This shall provide us with the interpretive framework within which we can effectively analyse the contemporary activities of the Greek civic sector.

What observers from other European countries need to understand is that Greece's 'belonging' to what is known as 'Western culture' is not as obvious as it may seem. On the contrary, the question about how Greece should be considered, as a Western or as an Eastern culture has been current since the birth of the new Greek State (1830) and has not yet been answered in a way that is widely accepted. For most Europeans this might appear to be a paradox, since in Western culture 'Europe', democracy and many of those concepts and ideas that are considered to be inherent ingredients of this culture have their origins in ancient Greece. Through this interpretive framework, Greece, therefore, not only belongs to the 'West', but is also its place of birth. One would be excused for asking how it is possible for it to be a question whether the country in which Western culture was born actually belongs to that culture. In order to answer this question, we have to make the distinction between East as 'Cold War era East' and Eastern civilisations that developed during the Byzantine Empire and that are intrinsically bound up with Orthodox Christianity. As a result, countries that belong today to this geographical territory and were influenced by this culture, such as the Balkans, Russia, Turkey and

Reviving Varvakeios Square through
a prototype participatory process
design, part of the Actors of Urban
Change Programme by Robert
Bosch Foundation and MitOst e.V.,
Photo by Loukas Bartatilas



the Middle East, are considered as places and cultures closer to the ones that lived in the 'old' Western Europe.

Furthermore, and because after the demise of the Byzantine Empire, Greeks lived under Ottoman rule, and they developed a different collective and public behaviour than people in those countries which at that time experienced the Enlightenment. As a result, one of the basic differences between Greece and Western Europe lies in the relationship citizens have with authorities. In Western European countries, faith in institutions, the function of the State for the benefit of its citizens and their mutual trust can be seen as the context under which civil society was born and developed organically. The rights and the obligations of both sides were clearly established and followed, and the civic sector acted in a supportive manner towards the functions of the State. In the case of Greece things are different. Living under the Ottoman Empire did not allow any trust to be built between citizens and authorities; trust and solidarity only existed through the closed social circle of church and family. During the evolution of the new Greek State, this situation of non-trust continued. In general politicians were seen as people who want to benefit themselves through their position rather than working for the common good. This developed the feeling that citizens should not expect anything from them, and instead act on their own initiative and ideas for the common good. Strong family structures, as well as the fact that Greece was an agricultural society, contributed to this mentality. Local culture was, therefore, based on the idea of the selfless collective offer to help or charity, which can be seen today as the first incarnation of Greek civil society. The stereotypical image of Greek people as being warm, open, hospitable people who eat and celebrate together proves that the meaning of sharing, helping and accommodation remain strong in Greek society.

It is true that Greek society has been vastly transformed since the 1980s. The agricultural society has become urban and the standard of living has risen. Greece joined the European Community (1981) and democracy was established after a period of civil war (1946-1949), dictatorship (1967-1974) and years of political instability. The following period was one of consumerism and individualism. Many people believed social

peace had been achieved. When the bubble burst in 2010, all the underlying structural problems that had remained suppressed for decades surfaced again, and within days people's standard of living collapsed. It was obvious that the State could no longer continue to exist in the way it had during previous years.

All the energy of the political parties went into overcoming the financial crisis, without success, as demonstrated by the state of affairs in Greece at the time of writing (2016). Important social sectors such as health, education, urban and environmental policy and social care were left at the mercy of brutal austerity measures. Together with the fact that the public did not trust the political classes, the financial crisis and the refugee crisis (experienced in Greece long before it became a subject of discussion elsewhere in Europe) created a toxic atmosphere, to which people began to react. Some took the radical path, voting for anti-European, nationalistic and anti-democratic parties. Yet many, the 'silent majority', acted in practical and creative ways through civil society. Despite the unstable situation, the high rate of unemployment and high taxes, there are people, mainly the younger generation, who believe in and invest their time and energy in civil society's activities. Much still needs to be done. However, the newly established ecosystem of civic actors that is passionate about what it does are probably the best hope Greece has for the future.

NEW TENDENCIES IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN GREECE

As applied in Western countries, the concept and idea of civil society is rather new. In Greece, civic groups can be divided into two general categories. On the one side are those who follow a more 'systemic' approach, establishing non-governmental organisations, fundraising, and developing a professional career in the civic sector. On the other side are those who take a 'vocational' approach, either for ideological reasons, or because they prefer to maintain 'unofficial' civic groups, without having any legal personality.

Each category, according to its background and goals, creates different tendencies. Nevertheless, their activities can be categorised in six common forms of activity:

- Solidarity activities: helping homeless people, collective kitchens, health care, psychological support, help for refugees, etc;
- Activities for urban regeneration through art, culture and community projects;
- Activities for children;
- Activities for the environment and recycling;
- Online groups that act on a neighbourhood level for local needs;
- Educational activities regarding unemployment, social entrepreneurship and hubs.

As a rule, and although there are exceptions, these activities have emerged in response to the failure of the public authorities to deliver necessary services and responses to the society's needs. As the lack of trust between citizens and politicians is strong, civic groups are at pains to distinguish themselves from political parties, mentioning (with pride) that they are not working together and remain independent.

It is also important to note that the institution of the non-governmental organisation is relatively new in Greece (its popularisation began with the early 1990s) and knowledge about how the civic sector works is not widespread among ordinary people. For example, the institution of the 'association', the legal form which helped the first social enterprises to act, was only established in 2011. In addition, as many of the NGOs that first appeared in the 1990s have been implicated in scandals, public opinion about this kind of organisation is not particularly positive. Positive cases are considered to be exceptions and new NGOs, associations or social enterprises have to convince people about the honesty of their intentions.

Another important fact is that in Greece voluntary work is not particularly well valued or recognised. The Olympic Games in 2004 were the first big event for which a huge voluntary movement was obvious, cultivating for the first time the positive value of volunteering. However, as the Olympic Games were later connected with political scandals, there was a sense that volunteering in that context was somehow tainted

or negative – the fact that someone else is profiting from your voluntary work negates its intrinsic value.

Against this backdrop, it is far from surprising that the question of what the role of civil society should be emerged. The debate revolved around dilemmas like: Should its role be to fill gaps left by a dysfunctional state administration? Should it be to highlight problems and push for action to be taken by those with the mandate and responsibility? Or should it be something/s else altogether?

The advent of the crisis in 2010 changed the political and social landscape. With it, the need for solidarity and action on with and on behalf of those worst affected by the austerity measures, came the impetus for civil society to engage in solidarity activities as described above. The mentality of offering help to those who have problems, a very deep cultural characteristic of Greek society, was the catalyst to motivate people to become a civic actor, despite any difficulties they may be experiencing themselves. In the months of the society's slide into poverty after two decades of prosperity, the feeling of coming together, sharing problems and helping each other was supportive for overcoming the shock that most people experienced.

An important civic actor, which represents very well an existing tendency in the field of solidarity actions, is the social kitchen group 'The Other Person'.¹ By providing free food to anyone who needs it on a daily basis, the team supports vulnerable groups especially badly hit by the effects of the crisis and refugees. This group finances its actions through donations and by collecting left-over food from the markets. 'The Other Person' received the 'European Citizen 2015' award of the European Parliament but refused to accept it, saying that they promote the spirit of another Europe, one of social solidarity. They argued that the need for their activities is the result of European austerity policies and that it would be hypocritical to accept a prize from the same institutions that pursue such policies.²

¹ www.oallosanthropos.blogspot.de

² <http://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/oxi-apo-dyo-organoseis%C2%A0allileggysis-se-eyropaiko-brabeio-einai-arnisi-stin-eyropi-tis-lit>



At the same time, actors from the younger generation took the risk of establishing NGOs, in an attempt to change attitudes towards this field (see for example, Place Identity).³ This is also seen as a creative answer to the failures of the old system and a way to propose a new working model, new values and a new attitude towards working socially. Hubs for young entrepreneurs started to appear, presenting a new work ethic, despite the major challenge of where to source funds.

From the perspective of local authorities, the Municipality of Athens is an interesting example of new directions in local governance. By establishing a Department for Civil Society (2014) they opened themselves up, through the SynAthina platform,⁴ to collaboration with civic actors. Through the Department for Children they also run a programme called

'Open schools',⁵ keeping school buildings open during the evenings and the weekends in order to strengthen the role of schools and education in local communities proposing diverse activities for the neighbourhood that take place on the school premises. Additionally, through European programmes and following the belief in opening new paths for economic development, they support young entrepreneurs through mentoring initiatives in the field of Social Entrepreneurship (see for example, the initiative called Epiheiro Koinonika).⁶

Moreover, some cultural institutions are supporting participatory artistic activities and initiatives on the local level. Since 2014, the NEON Organization for Culture and Development⁷ has been running the 'NEON Community Project', a programme which aims at implementing contemporary art programmes in Athenian neighbourhoods. These rely on the

A prototype participatory process for the future use of Kypseli's Market Hall. Organised by SynAthina and the 6th District of the City of Athens. Photo by Loukas Bartatilas

³ <https://placeidentity.gr>

⁴ <http://www.synathina.gr/el>

⁵ <http://athensopenschools.weebly.com>

⁶ <http://social.developathens.gr>

⁷ <http://neon.org.gr>

participation of local inhabitants, groups and artists. Additionally, the Biennale of Athens,⁸ through their two-year project 'Omonoia', aims to rejuvenate Omonoia Square through various artistic activities, an important central of downtown Athens, which today suffers from many problems including drug dealing, the presence of many homeless people, prostitution and commercial degradation.

The major challenge for all new civic actors is how to communicate their knowledge and to establish a new approach to developing and conducting activities that respond to the needs and situations they observe, in an environment that is suspicious, expects immediate solutions and has lost its willingness to invest its trust. The question of who is responsible for changing the ongoing crisis of trust in Greece has been debated considerably since 2010, and a clear answer has not yet been found, as opinions differ. For many years a public dialogue about civil society issues was absent. Hence, the definition of what an active and responsible citizen is, remains for the majority of people over 45–50 focused on voting in elections and taking to the streets to demonstrate against unpopular political decisions. At the same time, this generation has benefited the most from the system in place from the end of the dictatorship in 1974 until the crisis hit, in which the political classes and citizens made a tacit deal: citizens go to vote once every four years and the State was responsible for the rest. When the crisis started, public opinion turned against the politicians, blaming them and the European political and financial elite, for the hardship they were now experiencing. Indeed, it is hard to criticise them for complaining – they knew no other system. At the same time, the majority of these citizens refused to cooperate, and to take responsibility for the next steps still in the belief it was the responsibility of the political system to bring the country back to normality. For those who belong to the younger generations (under 45), also those involved in the new civil society, the situation is different. Almost all of them are university educated and have spent some time abroad (often even some years). They are familiar with civil society's initiatives from other countries, they are open-minded, recognise that the system as it was in Greece had to change and feel they should participate in

that change. In their eyes the crisis is an opportunity for social change and innovation. However, despite this great energy for participation and change, there remains the difficult financial reality that everyone in Greece is facing. Salaries have shrunk, there is high unemployment and the tax-system is prohibitive to anyone who wants to open a new business. For civil society, there is little or no national financial support, European programmes are not well known, and almost every position in the civic sector is underpaid or has to be done on a voluntary basis. What is crucial to highlight is that these people have two ambitions, that are simultaneously their greatest challenges: how to find ways to effectively make a living and develop a sustainable career, and at the same time, how to be of practical assistance in addressing the difficult social, economic and political situation Greece continues to experience through their work.

Another important aspect that characterises the context of civil society is that a very large number of citizens feel hopeless and have very negative feelings – one might even say the country is experiencing collective depression. The majority is convinced that things are not going to change, that Greece will never become 'European', which for them means a state where things function properly, that politicians will keep cheating the people and that the standard of living will not recover for years to come. Therefore, even if they view the activities of civil society positively, and very many do, they remain sure that no matter what happens, ultimately nothing will change. Of course civic initiatives raise the fact that this is paradoxical. Although they may initially have difficulties to find people to engage in their activities and the initial reaction of many is hopelessness, when people do join in they quickly become highly motivated, with a great team spirit and have plenty of ideas. They realise that trust-building is the biggest challenge, and in the knowledge that it needs time to be achieved, there is still hope that it can be.

CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE/S OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN GREECE

As mentioned above, civic actors have created some tendencies in the fields in which they are active. Each field and tendency usually has its starting point from a moment or a political decision which created reactions and therefore a debate.

Usually the cause for civil society to begin some new activity was some 'fait accompli' that came from the top down, in other words, some political decision or another. The lack of trust between politicians and citizens, and the widespread feeling of citizens of being excluded from important decisions has led to the creation of groups with the aim to democratise the political system and to increase the level of participation of citizens in political processes. In this context, some of the recent constitutional amendments caused a lot of controversy and disappointment, only increasing the lack of trust of ordinary people in the political classes. In particular, the constitutional amendment guaranteeing immunity from prosecution to Members of Parliament has been widely criticised. In effect, this amendment guarantees that even in case of political scandals, politicians cannot be prosecuted. Politeia 2.0 – Platform for Political Innovation⁹ is an interesting and innovative example. It initiated a citizen led activity to design a new Constitution for Greece, to be developed by the citizens. With the support of the EEA Grants programme 'We are all citizens', this group initiated many participatory citizens-workshops in different Greek cities on this topic. At the same time, some laws have facilitated civil society's efforts to increase citizen participation in decision-making. For example, 'Kallikratis', one 2011 law for the decentralisation of local government provides for more participation in local-level decision-making.

For the civic actors focusing on urban activities, 2012 was a key moment. A Greek not-for-profit Foundation (Onassis)¹⁰ offered to donate the costs of running an architectural

competition for the pedestrianisation of a central artery of the Athenian city centre. The plan was accepted and the competition took place, and a new design was selected. This, however, caused controversy and there was a huge public debate about whether the project should go ahead. In the end, the project was stopped but this debate has already given the opportunity to groups and individuals to start thinking about how they imagine their city from the bottom up. The experience of the 'contemporary ruins', the expensive buildings built only for use during the two weeks of the Olympic Games in 2004, and which have since remained closed, many even abandoned, was fresh in people's minds. This motivated people to think in another direction, that of small-scale participatory interventions with a sustainable and long-term impact on the city.¹¹

Environmental and recycling issues are not very present although there are some active groups (for example, Organisation Earth)¹² and people (see the work of the ethno-botanist Pavlos Georgiadis)¹³ that work in that field. These activists believe that Greece needs to make more of its (renewable) natural sources such as the sun, the light and the fruitful earth. Unfortunately, for the majority in Greece these ideas and issue are considered 'luxuries'. At a time when the State is unable to provide solutions to other, more 'existential' needs such as the economy, education and health care environmental concerns tend to get lost.

Another crucial event for the establishment of civil society in Greece took place in 2014, when the City of Athens created the position of Vice Mayor for Civil Society (for the first time). Through the SynAthena platform,¹⁴ which is run by the new City Department for Civil Society, under the authority of the Vice Mayor, the City of Athens tries to bring together, network and support the activities of civil society groups in Athenian districts. Through this approach, the role of the Municipality has changed. It is no longer the one that decides about the activities, which previously were often irrelevant to peoples'

11 See examples of urban projects in different Athenian neighbourhoods: <http://dourgouti.nkosmos.gr>, <http://www.urbandetails.gr>, <https://issuu.com/omadaasty> and <https://atenistas.org>

12 <http://www.organizationearth.org>

13 <http://geopavlos.com>

14 <http://www.synathina.gr>

9 <http://politeia2.org>

10 <http://www.onassis.org/en>

needs. Instead, the Municipality now supports, through its structures, initiatives that have emerged from the bottom-up.

When thinking about how civic actors in Greece engage with Europe and European discourses, and as explained from the beginning of this country profile, 'Europe' can mean different things in Greece than it does in other parts of Europe, and its meanings for Greeks are quite diverse. Europe is often understood as a continent with a history and great civilisation, in which Greece played an important role, and hence it is a matter of pride. It is also known as a continent of wars, national and cultural differences and other divisions which is trying to overcome its negative recent past through integration (in the European Union). In general, and maybe contrary to popular belief elsewhere, Europe is generally understood as something positive and progressive – in the sense of 'things work better in Europe'. It is only since Europe, and especially the European Union's policies, have become intimately bound up in people's minds with the economic power of the banking system and right-wing politics has it begun to lose its positive connotation. Therefore, although people are proud to be part of this continent they are also very disappointed in how Europe is developing.

This is most obvious when it comes to the European Union and the way it is perceived to have been transformed in recent years, especially since the crisis hit. In Greece, ordinary people have the feeling that there is a power differential when it comes to decision-making in the EU – the big, powerful countries make the decisions and the rest have to follow. The last years' discourse and debate around the crisis in Greek and other European media, which was based on nationalistic and populist rhetoric, has just made this situation worse. It seemed to people in Greece that for as long as the EU does not face big challenges (as it happened before 2010), then the EU would behave like a well-mannered family. Yet as soon as unavoidable problems began to appear, first with the euro crisis and since with the refugee crisis, the EU began to behave as if it was not a Union at all. Instead, each country took its own course of action behaving nationalistically, and as if some member States have been naughty children, punishing them and pressing them to leave. Most people openly recognised that the way the system was

running in Greece was wrong. Nevertheless, they did not feel that the responsibility for the crisis was entirely theirs to bear. Yet, the attitude and demands of the EU made them feel that they were to blame and had to be punished, an approach that is contrary to European values. Since the elections of 2015, which first brought Syriza (the radical left party) to power, and especially during July's 2015 referendum, it has become clear that there is also a political agenda. The majority of EU member States are run by centre-right governments. At the time of writing, Greece is one of the only countries being run by a left government. Therefore, there has been even more pressure for political change towards the neoliberal agenda in Greece. People have become disaffected as a result of the extreme and negative reaction of EU politicians to Papandreou's proposal for a referendum in 2011 and Tsipras' decision for a referendum in summer 2015, in other words, against the will of the people to be part of decision-making processes relevant to their lives and the tools of democracy people consider important. The result of these developments is that the great majority of Greek people have made it clear they are for a Europe of solidarity and social values, but not for a neoliberal Europe run by bankers. A small minority that has totally anti-European feelings, a populist and nationalistic agenda, has appeared and led the Golden Dawn Party into both the Greek and European Parliaments.

Of course, Greek people are deeply and intensely critical of the EU – of how it has lost its social character, of how the markets are in fact the governments, of how there has been a turn to the right, and of how the focus is on the numbers and not on the people. Yet, and although they are disappointed, many Greek people wish to participate in building a different Europe, one which does not build walls, accepts differences, is in cultural exchange with others, maintains its social values, exactly because of these obvious deficits in European integration.

For Greece, the reactions of other European countries and the countries on the Balkan route to the refugee crisis have been a very great disappointment. The refugee crisis reached Greece a long time before it was ever noticed in other European countries, maybe with the exception of Italy, actually as far back as 2003 – after the beginning of the war in Iraq and

Afghanistan. For many Greeks, especially the island populations, daily confronted with the arrival of thousands of half drowned, sick and injured refugees over many many years, the images of walls being built on Central Europe's borders was just further proof that Europe had lost its humanity.

Another point is that European connections and networking between Greek organisations and institutions around Europe remains relatively weak, although since 2013 its frequency has increased. As most of the groups are working on specifically local issues, they simply do not have time, funds or the inclination to build contacts with similar activities across Europe. What contacts there are mainly take place through the personal networks of people who have studied or worked abroad. However, these people belong to the young generation, which is now entering the field, and for whom it is normal to build collaborations and exchanges with other people and networks from abroad. 'Impact Hub Athens'¹⁵ belongs to the worldwide family of Impact Hubs, running its space in Athens from 2013 and maintaining a leading role in this way of working.

SITUATIONS, NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN GREECE

Considering the fact that civil society groups are mainly distinguished by whether they pursue a more professionalised approach or not, each category faces different problems in terms of sustainability.

The first category of civil society actor faces huge problem of accessing sustainable funding, lacks effective networks and because Greece is a small country, it also faces a small audience and market for its work. This has meant there is high competition for just a few positions, that salaries remain low and there is a lack of mobility inside the country (most are targeted to an Athenian audience) and the EU. Furthermore, regulations on capital flows into the country did not allow for, or made it difficult to get, funding from abroad. Moreover, as

the main sources of funding come from Greece and these are limited, knowledge about how to get European grants and build partnerships with other European institutions is poor. To this we have to add that the main focus of this part of civil society is Athens and the Greek context (understandable considering the situation), therefore, there is little interest in co-working on projects abroad.

The other group, the less-professionalised or independent group, functions through its networks of volunteers. Funding is not so much of an issue as these voluntary groups have help in the communities to get what they need. They are able to plan their activities according to the availability of their team members, as well as to the needs of their specific target group. There is no expectation or rush to follow deadlines and they can maintain their independence, keeping an open forum for their activities. In this case, the major issue is that there is no continuity, meaning that in one year a group may have one or two activities and in the next six or seven, which does not help to build a regular audience that wants to work with them. Most of these groups do have respect from their target groups as they recognise the value of their voluntary character. Another problem these groups face is that there is a lack of understanding of their potential. Since their members have already gained expertise through their activities and since they have a network and recognition for those, access to even a little more funding could significantly improve impact. It should also be noted that crowd-funding is almost unknown in Greece. A further fact that hinders in fundraising of any kind, apart from the complexity of the tax-system, is that many groups want to maintain their independence. Some of the early groups started as activists, and as is so common, as soon as they started to receive larger sums of funding, they transformed and lost their activist spirit, and many people lost trust in them. Therefore, it is quite common for such groups to highlight their independence from government and the fact that they do not swear allegiance to any political party as important advantages. Once again, this shows the major problem that the lack of trust between citizens and those active in the political system represents.

If thinking about the relationship between older and newer civic actors, it can be observed that 'old school' civic actors

¹⁵ <http://athens.impacthub.net>



Re-activation of the old tradition of celebrating the coming of spring in Kypseli neighborhood, organized by Citizens Union Kalliga Square, local schools and residents. Photo by Loukas Bartatilas

can be divided into two basic categories. The first category includes groups with a strong leftist political agenda. These groups lived through the Cold War, and through the Greek dictatorship of 1967 to 1974. For them, the anti-dictatorship movement inside and outside Greece and the major student movement of November 17th 1973 are important points of reference. One of the darkest episodes of recent Greek history is the way that day ended. A military tank entered the occupied University of Athens killing students. As a result, the early post-dictatorship era of the 1970's and early 1980's was characterised by a spirit of socialism and by the struggle against totalitarianism. These actors were members of political parties and put their political and ideological beliefs

front and centre of every activity. Old school civic actors retain this spirit today, and their followers were among the voters that led Syriza to its election victory in January 2015, the first time in Greek history that a left party won the elections. The general approach of such groups is rather traditional, in that they favour taking to the streets to demonstrate for rights. And they expect the State to take responsibility for making sure those are respected and provided for.

The second category of the old-school civic actors is very different. They are what one might call 'introverted'. These groups were formed mainly in Athens, by people who came from the same region or village and now live in Athens. Those

groups meet regularly, eat their traditional food together, celebrate and organise events connected with their place of origin. We consider them 'introverted' since what they do is targeted to their own members and not to an external audience. Nevertheless, these groups are strong. They function the same way as extended families and networks of friends, making the large and chaotic city of Athens more liveable for people from other parts of the country.

The new groups that were formed since 2010 come from very different backgrounds, acting productively in the emerging situation of the country. The new civic actors are, in fact, the children of the old actors, or at least that generation. They tend to see the activities of the older generation as irrelevant to the new situation, and perhaps as a little conservative. However, as family connections in Greece are extremely strong and considering that the rate of unemployment for those under 35 is extremely high, it means that those younger people get most of their financial support from their parents (many of which are older civic actors themselves). Although indirectly, these older people are engaging in a form of civic activity by supporting their children to act in this way, there has been a lot of criticism of the fact that so many Greek 'young people' are still being supported by their parents at age 30 and older. At the same time, familial support is a strong Greek tradition, and many parents see the support they offer their children now as an investment for the future when the economic situation of the country will improve and their children will be in a position to sustain themselves financially.

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MAPPING MULTIPLIERS OF NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN GREECE

PLACE IDENTITY

hosts Politeia 2.0, a platform for political innovation focusing on redesigning policy-making processes in Greece by mapping and connecting civil society initiatives promoting bottom-up problem-solving at a local level. The NGO organises citizens' workshops, collaborative trainings as well as conferences. It also connects internationally with similar initiatives to exchange best practices in social and digital technologies for citizens' engagement and advancement of the Commons.

CITIZEN UNION OF KALLIGA SQUARE

was formed in 2011. The initiative is active in Kypseli, one of the central neighbourhoods of Athens. Through major demographic changes during the last two decades the area started to have a negative image of being dangerous. Thus, the initiative focusses its activities on Kalliga Square to work towards the urban regeneration of their neighbourhood through solidarity and cultural exchange.

FOTINI KYPSELI (BRIGHT KYPSELI)

acts in the same neighbourhood. The local initiative tries to give light, both literally and metaphorically, to Kypseli. They illuminate entrances of apartment buildings and shop windows with LED lamps. Additionally, they started to build partnerships with NGOs working with vulnerable groups.

YOGA TO THE PARK

was started by two passionate yogis who taught yoga to friends in unfamiliar locations, such as parks, squares and beaches in 2011. Instead of money, they accepted donations of food, clothes, medicines, and services. After not being given permission to offer yoga classes in public space anymore, the group established a social enterprise.

GENERATION 2.0 FOR RIGHTS, EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

promotes equal civil rights regardless of gender, nationality,

religion or any kind of social category. The NGO focusses on the integration of second-generation Greek citizens as well as on economic migrants and refugees in Greece.

FEAST THESSALONIKI

is the first crowd-funding initiative in Greece. During their events food and wine from local restaurants as well as wineries are offered and five selected teams present their idea, asking for funding. The audience that paid a small entrance fee to attend the dinner votes for the idea which will get supported through this money.

IMPACT HUB ATHENS

is a co-working space and community of professionals, artists, social entrepreneurs, and creative minds that work, collaborate and innovate together towards creating an ecosystem of sustainable initiatives with the purpose of social change. Running since 2013 it is part of the global network of 85 Impact Hubs.

URBAN DETAILS

was an artist-run initiative that activated an abandoned building in the neighbourhood of Kypseli and transformed it into a temporary art space. Together with the presented artworks an intense schedule of parallel activities was run including guided walks in the neighbourhood and a discussion series.

MAPPING NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN HUNGARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After just twenty-five years of freedom to develop, Hungary's civil society faces a significant new adaptation challenge. Against the backdrop of a State on the verge of bankruptcy, in which the result of a turn away from democracy are daily reports of corruption and in which budget cuts to social services, including healthcare, public education and culture are threatening their most basic functioning, the activation of civil society is needed more than ever. Many actors of civil society in Hungary are grappling with important problems, among them the shrinking welfare State, the slowing economy, the ageing population, environmental challenges and an impending energy crisis. Mostly in Budapest, the vibrant capital of the country, they both develop and engage with practices and solutions that are brought from abroad. Yet actors of civil society are finding it difficult to make a difference in a generally unsupportive, and sometimes even hostile, environment. Few truly manage to adapt such practices to local problems and possibilities. Many experiments start, blossom and die fast. Nevertheless, a slow and steady change can be noticed. There are innovative actors and initiatives in fields ranging from education and environmental protection through community and civil society development to social inclusion, and although a political turn seems unlikely, there is steady political resistance and a will to maintain the freedom and democratic rights achieved in Hungary's short two decades of liberal democracy. A new generation is growing up. Children born at the time of the regime change to democracy are already in their mid-twenties. Having grown up in a globalised world and having become adults after the enthusiasm for neoliberal growth was already wearing out, these young people are aware of their responsibility and have a wider perspective and understanding.



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<http://collectiveplant.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/kozossegetez>

<http://offbiennale.hu/lumen-station-3-reap-and-sow-issue-release/>

INTRODUCTION

Searching for a metaphor to describe Hungary and its civil society, the most immediate association that came to mind was its most famous natural landscape, the Puszta.¹ For most people, the Puszta brings to mind a very flat and very dry landscape, like an endless desert on whose horizon a mirage looms. This image fits very well with how Hungarians see their country: a place where nothing grows, a country that is being deserted (by its own people and others), where memories of past greatness abound, and the mirage is a promised land that can never be reached, because people are unable to realise their potential. This image is also fitting for the current situation in Hungary: a State on the outskirts of Europe whose democratic credentials are questionable, whose welfare system is failing, whose economy is weak, laden with social problems. However, what most people do not know is that the Puszta is not dry at all. There is plenty of water in the permanent flood areas of the Tisza River, such as Lake Tisza. These are among the most valuable natural heritage sites of Hungary. The Puszta's richness lies not in spectacular forests and great wildlife, but in an extraordinary variety of small species, especially insects, small plants and birds. This kind of wildlife is good at hiding in unfriendly circumstances and at adapting to the changing environment. At times, one flower may paint the lake with its colour, or there may be dragonflies everywhere, making the landscape spectacular to look at. However, these moments do not last long. With the exception of a few rare trees that have a longer lifespan, most of the species that live in the Puszta live for only one summer. The Puszta's storks go out into the wide world and return with news and new ideas. Its rivers begin far away, bringing with them fresh water and nourishment. The wind over the Puszta brings seeds, and with them new and more resistant species are brought into life. Thus, the shape of the land slowly but surely changes.

CONTEMPORARY TENDENCIES IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN HUNGARY

For this author, there are four tendencies that can be observed in current civic engagement practice in Hungary that feel like they may be innovations. These relate to social entrepreneurship, ideas about 'community', urban development and citizen mobilisation around government policies, and we shall deal with each in a little more detail.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP HAS INTENSIFIED

Social entrepreneurship is a relatively recent phenomenon in Hungary. Beginning with the 2010s, and probably as a result of policies and programmes pursued by the European Union, there has been growing awareness of the importance of this form of entrepreneurial activity. Previously, there were two main incubators of social entrepreneurship: Ashoka Hungary² and Nesst Hungary,³ but recently new donors willing to support the development of social entrepreneurship have appeared. These include Social Fokus,⁴ Impact Hub,⁵ Kreater.⁶ One long existing developer of small and medium size enterprises, Seed, has also started to focus on social entrepreneurship in recent years.⁷ Despite the growing interest in social entrepreneurship, it would be an exaggeration to say that it is wide spread and very successful. It is estimated that there are only a few hundred social enterprises in Hungary. As there exists no specific 'social enterprise' legal entity in Hungary it is difficult to make accurate calculations how many organisations and businesses of different kinds are functioning as social enterprises. They can take many legal forms including that of the non-governmental organisation, not-for-profit small and medium sized enterprises, foundations or cooperatives. Few manage to become strong and survive over the long term. This has several reasons. In the first place, there is

2 <http://ashoka-cee.org/hungary/en/>

3 <http://www.nesst.org/>

4 <http://www.socialfokus.org/>

5 <http://budapest.impacthub.net/>

6 <http://www.kreater.co/>

7 <http://seed.hu/en/>

1 <http://visit-hungary.com/things-to-do/regions/puszta>

The „Liget Protectors” demonstrating against the visionary plans of the Liget Project, a new museum and art quartier planned in the City Park of Budapest. Photo by Bence Járdány



no comprehensive public policy supporting social enterprises (although some support schemes have been implemented). Second, social enterprises are generally more concerned about the social issues they pursue than about economic sustainability, and often remain dependent on donors, which means that they tend not to be an important economic force. Third, there are few if any suitable micro-financing schemes available to social entrepreneurs, and business entrepreneurs are generally relatively risk averse, further inhibiting access to venture capital and credit. Certainly, it cannot help that the general population in Hungary is almost completely unaware of social entrepreneurship. A recent study estimated that only about 5% of the Hungarian population know what a social enterprise is.⁸

THE TERM “COMMUNITY” IS BECOMING TRENDY

In line with international trends, talking about community and making community projects has become more commonplace in Hungary, especially in the arts and among urbanists. There are community garden,⁹ community beekeeping (Social Honey),¹⁰ foraging communities (Collective Plant),¹¹ community offices (Kaptár, Loffice),¹² a community bank (MagNetBank),¹³ community job portal,¹⁴ community bicycle workshops (Cyclomania),¹⁵ community wood workshops (Technika),¹⁶ community planning, community art, and so on. On the one hand, this is a very positive development, considering the historical legacy of the Hungarian communist regime, which did not allow space for communities to organise autonomously, explicitly forbidding the formation of

groups not sanctioned by the Party-State. On the other hand, the notion of what a community is and how to work with communities is often not understood and considered in-depth. Although much time has passed, Hungarians still need to work on changing the way they think about social organisation, which has been significantly influenced by its state socialist history. Hungary still lacks experience in community organising and development. Furthermore, applying methods that have worked in other contexts, has not always had the expected results in Hungary, because it is often not taken into consideration that the starting point is one of non-community, or of suspicion towards the idea of ‘community’. An interesting public art programme focused on community and participatory art was run by the Fine Art Lectorate (resp. László Kertész) between 2008 and 2012. The programme was based on a yearly call for proposals to provide funding for projects all over the country. Even the social impact of the artworks that were created was measured. However, the restructuring of the cultural institutional framework, which started after the FIDESZ government came into power in 2010, brought the programme to an end.¹⁷ The understanding of public art in the new regime shifted back towards the historical practice of decorating public space, commemorating historical moments and shaping public opinion, described in detail in the doctoral thesis of public artist Dora Palatinus.¹⁸ Interestingly, ideas of ‘community’ have become instrumental in the political discourse of right-wing civic groups as well. Such groups include those politically loyal to the Orbán regime, such as Catholic religious groups, conservative women’s cooperatives and the self-declared ‘protectors’ of ‘real’ Hungarian culture. Since 2002, when FIDESZ lost the election, right-wing political actors have invested heavily in the development of a strong right-wing civil society that can be mobilised for political purposes. With the restructuring of funding for civil society (see below for more on this), organisations involved in this space have received the majority of public money made available to civil society. Many of these organisations are led by FIDESZ politicians, and did not exist, or were not active before the elections in 2010.

8 Study of Nesst Hungary on social enterprises:
<http://www.nesst.org/hungary/publications>

9 <http://kozossegitertek.hu>
<http://www.varosikertek.hu>

10 <https://www.facebook.com/kozossegimez>

11 <http://collectiveplant.com>

12 <http://kaptarbudapest.hu/en>
<http://budapest.lofficecoworking.com>

13 <https://www.magnetbank.hu>

14 <https://www.facebook.com/munkakozvetito>
<http://allas.club>

15 <http://cyclonomia.org>

16 <http://www.technikaworkshop.com>

17 <http://humanplatform.hu/watchdog/2012/12/a-kepzuveszeti-lektoratus-beolvasztasa-a-mank-ba>

18 <http://pea.lib.pte.hu/bitstream/handle/pea/14662/palatinus-dora-dla-2016.pdf?sequence=1>

COMMUNITY-INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT IS BEING EXPERIMENTED WITH

Since approximately 2012, the involvement of citizens and communities in urban development is increasingly being experimented with and discussed. The increasing frequency with which one can observe the appearance of community planning in city and municipality programmes is certainly down to the fact that the European Union supports it. Young innovators have also been instrumental in promoting such ideas inside the public institutions where they work. Good examples are Dávid Vitézy, who until 2014 was head of the Budapest Community Transport Centre (BKK),¹⁹ Sándor Finta, the Main Architect of Budapest since 2012, and former Head of the Contemporary Architecture Centre,²⁰ and Gergely Böszörményi-Nagy, initiator and CEO of Design Terminál.²¹ These prominent actors and their partners have initiated innovative programmes such as BKK Futár, an App for community transport, cyclist and pedestrian-friendly reconstruction of public streets and squares,²² TÉR-KÖZ, a programme for community-based urban regeneration which includes the participation of non-governmental organisations,²³ Töltsd újra, a community-based initiative to re-develop vacant urban properties in ways useful for local communities, to name just a few. As impressive as these initiatives have been, however, many ideas and projects never see the light of day, or are emptied of meaning by the toxic politics that requires that such initiatives, and their initiators, have the protection of a politician with clout. Some prominent projects, including for example the much reported Liget project, through which a new cultural complex was to be developed in the City Park, have used community-planning as a cover for gaining public acceptance for projects that have already been to the greatest extent planned, without the real participation of the communities concerned.²⁴ In general, it can be observed that there is

a lack of understanding of the idea of community involvement in projects of the public administration and there continues to be a lot of mistrust towards the active and meaningful participation of communities and NGOs. Public authorities are often not open or able to take up innovative ideas, while NGOs harbour many prejudices that prevent them from cooperating with public authorities. There are, however, a few exceptions to be observed. These have succeeded on the basis of relationships of mutual trust between individuals or mutual interests among partners. Examples we can highlight are for the most part in Budapest, and include:

- the Miutcánk (Our Street) initiative in the XVIIIth district;²⁵
- the Teleki Square regeneration project in the VIIIth district;²⁶
- the Színes város project that painted fire murals in a tourist hotspot the VIIth district; and
- cooperation projects around sport and community gardening, which are considered relatively 'uncontroversial'.

There are also examples of open-minded mayors that contribute to the development of community-oriented programmes, such as Máté Kocsis of the VIIIth district or Attila Ughy of the XVIIIth district, both in Budapest. At the other end of the world, some Hungarian villages have been a source of inspiration: for instance, the mayor of Cserdi, László Bogdán, has become famous for the fight for his village's survival.²⁷ Bioszentandrás is an excellent example of cooperation between the community and its leaders to tackle problems including deep poverty, high unemployment and criminality.²⁸

MOBILISING CITIZENS AROUND KEY POLICY ISSUES

The restructuring of Hungarian politics towards an illiberal State has been achieved through several measures that met with extensive opposition in public opinion. This has particularly been the case with limitations to press freedom, the introduction of a new constitution, the criminalisation of homelessness, state racism, particularly against Roma and refugees,

19 <http://bkk.hu>
https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vit%C3%A9zy_D%C3%A1vid

20 https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finta_S%C3%A1ndor
<http://kek.org.hu/en>

21 <http://www.designterminal.hu>

22 <http://futar.bkk.hu>

23 <http://budapest.hu/Lapok/2016/ter-koz-2016.aspx>

24 <http://ligetbudapest.hu>

25 <http://miutcank.hu/#/csatlakozz>

26 http://index.hu/urbanista/2014/09/15/szerdan_atadtak_a_teleki_teret_es_jo_lett

27 <https://hu-hu.facebook.com/cserdi.kozseg>
<http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20150618-cserdi-bogdan-laszlo-cigany-roma-jobbik.html>

28 <http://www.bioszentandras.hu/gazdasagunk>



and educational reform. Interestingly, these topics called into life civic movements rather than institutional forms of organisation (such as NGOs) that continue to exist as networked platforms or Facebook groups. Some interesting examples include: Migszol (Migrant Solidarity Group of Hungary),²⁹ HaHa (Student Network),³⁰ The City is for All (a homelessness related initiative),³¹ Milla (One Million for Press Freedom),³² Tanítanék ('I would like to teach', a platform for education)³³ or Human Platform (a platform for the field of healthcare, education, culture and social care).³⁴ These movements have also come to realise that in order to have a voice and make a change in the topic they are engaged in, they need different, more effective communication and programmes.

29 <http://www.migszol.com>

30 <http://hallgatoihalozat.blog.hu>

31 <http://avarosmindenkie.blog.hu>

32 <https://hu-hu.facebook.com/sajtoszabadsagert>

33 <http://www.tanitanek.com>

34 <http://humanplatform.hu/en/mission-statement>

Thinking about the possible reasons for the emergence of these trends in civic engagement, we can identify the following:

THE QUESTIONABLE POLITICS OF THE ORBÁN (FIDESZ) GOVERNMENT

Since the Orbán (FIDESZ) government came to power there has been a major shift towards a more centralised and controlled, rightist and less democratic State. This context largely defines the lines and issues along which critical NGOs move. The general restructuring of the State, the reduction of state funding for the civil sector, centralisation, nepotism and corporatism, with people who support FIDESZ being put into leading positions in public institutions, irrespective of their suitability and qualification, corruption in the distribution of public funding in favour of politically loyal organisations, have all had negative and adverse effects on NGOs that are critical of the government, but also on NGOs that are active in sectors which are less immediately understood as political, including

Left: Re-habilitation (2009) is a public artwork by Ildikó Szabó and Katalin Tesch. The project dealt with shrinking villages and the memory of the people who left. Photo by Ildikó Szabó

Right: The space of the Contemporary Architecture Center on Bartók Béla út in Buda – new functions are co-working, project space, space rental, catering and the architect's beer.. Photo by Gergely Schöff

environmental protection, sustainability, creative sector, youth education.³⁵

THE RADICAL DECREASE IN PUBLIC FUNDING FOR THE CIVIL SECTOR

The funding available from public sources for civic engagement work is becoming increasingly scarce, and NGOs are being forced to seriously reconsider their functioning and economic model. Many are considering a market-oriented leg – offering products and services with which they can support their social goals. Fundraising is becoming increasingly important. However, few are successful, lacking the adequate knowledge and organisational structures.

EUROPEAN UNION STRUCTURAL FUNDS

Recent years have begun to show the effects of the EU structural funds that have been invested in Hungary. The changes are physical and highly visible. There has been a massive renewal of public spaces all over the country, making our cities look better, more attractive for tourists and also more like any other city in Europe in line with EU funding goals many projects have been set up for disadvantaged groups as well. However, money is often spent unwisely and without thorough research, consultation and thought for the social consequences of the investment.

MISTRUST BETWEEN GOVERNMENTAL AND CIVIC SECTOR

Among critical activists mistrust towards the State has reached schizophrenic heights. Although it is difficult to assess the extent to which the negative effects of public policies on the civic sector is the result of deliberate actions to limit the scope of action of critical NGOs or rather the consequence of rushed decisions taken by unprofessional and inexperienced political appointees, the former is more often than not assumed by NGOs. This approach makes NGOs and activists turn their back completely on the State and look for

new ways of functioning without public money. An excellent example is the OFF-Biennial,³⁶ that radically excluded public funding. The governmental sector is also mistrustful of civil society. The representatives of the authorities are fearful of anything they believe they cannot control, which inhibits the organic growth of free initiative. Under these circumstances, cooperation between the different sectors has become extremely difficult.

HARD TIMES

According to recent World Bank statistics, the poverty headcount ratio for Hungary was 14.9% of the population.³⁷ People struggling for survival are less likely to volunteer, or to engage in activism or civic life. High youth unemployment, low wages, and a sense of shrinking possibilities, especially in sectors such as civil society, culture, education and healthcare, have had various adverse effects on society. Talented young people and even many experienced professionals either

- leave the country with emigration accelerating at pace;
- leave their sector to work in private business;
- start a company in growth sectors, for example, information technology or tourism;
- or participate in dubious state-funded initiatives, believing this is their chance and time to show what they are capable of, and hoping that they can bring positive change ‘from the inside’.

BUDAPEST HAS BECOME A HOTSPOT

Urban development aims at branding Budapest and at boosting the already blooming tourist sector. Real estate prices have rocketed since about 2014. This change has had dual effects. As there is a steady income from tourism, initiatives that have programmes in line with the city branding and fuel tourism have better chances to realise their plans. For example, the Szines város or Colourful City.³⁸ After many years of fruitless talks with municipalities, this project has finally

35 National poverty headcount ratio is the percentage of the population living below the national poverty lines. National estimates are based on population-weighted subgroup estimates from household surveys. For more on Hungary see: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/hungary>

36 <http://offbiennale.hu/en>

37 <http://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/trukk-a-szegenyseg-ellen-95902>
<http://www.ksh.hu/?lang=en>

38 <http://www.szinesvaros.hu/en>

managed to develop good cooperation. Their proposal to paint murals on firewalls in the VIIth district met with interest, fitting as it does with the 'ruin-bar' design branding of that city district. Programmes such as Vacant City,³⁹ however, face a new challenge. With rising demand and gentrification, the starting point of the project no longer holds – filling up unused shops and spaces emptied by the economic crisis. Landlords looking to rent their commercial spaces can find paying tenants without much difficulty. This is pushing civic initiatives out of the city centre.

THE TERRIBLE STATE OF THE HUNGARIAN COUNTRYSIDE

Of Hungary's population, about a quarter lives in Budapest, whose population is growing. The reality of the countryside is largely different to that of the booming, tourist filled, capital. The countryside is dying. Villages are shrinking, the largest part of the population lives in deepest poverty, long-term unemployment is high, and criminality, mostly attributed to Roma, is a problem. Furthermore, the countryside is a strong base of the extreme right political party, Jobbik. The future of the Hungarian countryside is an acute problem, crying out for solutions. Yet, active civil society is in the capital. The problem is, however, gaining more and more attention, and there are some exemplary initiatives, including:

- the Symbiosis Foundation, which conducts social farming;⁴⁰
- the programmes of the Blue Bird Foundation;⁴¹
- Bioszentandrás,⁴² which is an excellent example of cooperation between NGOs and local authorities;
- and Changing Communities of Védegylet,⁴³ a programme based in the capital that searches for solutions for the countryside.

CONTEMPORARY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DISCOURSE/S

If looking back at the history of civil society in Hungary since the regime change to democracy, we can observe two distinct 'periods'. These have been formative for the nature of contemporary civic engagement, and have influenced contemporary civic engagement discourse/s to some extent.

The first coincides broadly with the period from the regime change through the 1990s up to and including accession to the European Union. The democratic change in 1989 brought with it the re-birth of Hungarian civil society. The first donors to engage with civil society were American foundations, notably the Open Society Foundations of philanthropist George Soros, providing funding in the form of grants to organisations doing work on human rights, transparency, democracy, press freedom. These donors cultivated a circle of grantees that over time developed a certain level of expertise and experience. In a second phase, Hungarian NGOs and civic initiatives became eligible for funding under the pre-accession agreements with the European Union. A third phase in the funding history of Hungarian NGOs followed with the accession to the European Union. From that point Hungary could participate fully in EU funding programmes for civil society. Mainly large organisations, with high levels of administrative capacity, were in a position to profit most from these three phases of funding and support for civil society. However, by the mid-2000s it could be observed that these organisations, while profiting in many respects and while having gained extensive capacity, had also developed a large measure of grant dependency. While in the 1990s it was considered an exceptional and courageous endeavour to work for an NGO, many people today feel that NGOs have lost their way, are no longer able to take risks, have become instrumentalised by the donors providing the grants, and are sacrificing their lofty goals on the altar of paying salaries.

The second distinct period broadly coincides with the global economic crisis and the Orbán era and is characterised by a scarcity of funding for civic initiatives, a 'cleanup' in the civil sector, and an intensification of civic movements. With the

39 <http://lakatlan.kek.org.hu>

40 <http://szocialisfarm.hu/rolunk/gesztor>

41 <http://kek-madar.hu/bemutatkozunk>

42 <http://www.bioszentandras.hu/gazdasagunk>

43 <http://vedegylet.hu>

economic crisis of 2008, and the beginning of the Orbán era in 2010, developments have taken a different turn. The economic downturn weakened the civil sector, as well as other fragile sectors dependent on public money including culture, education and healthcare. In 2012, a new law on civil society was passed, which changed the institutional system and funding for civil society. The overall sum of state funding available annually for NGOs in the former National Civic Fund, now called the National Cooperation Fund, has been reduced and smaller grants are now distributed more evenly between a larger number of NGOs, with the consequence that they are less and less able to sustain their activity. NGOs critical of the Orbán regime have been especially negatively affected by this turn of events. They have effectively been disabled, as funding decisions are now often taken on the basis of political preferences and allegiances.⁴⁴

The new law on civil society has also brought about a restructuring of the civic sector by ordering the re-registration of all NGOs. From that moment on, any organisation wishing to define itself as a 'public benefit organisation', which is a condition for receiving public funding, was required to prove that they fulfil functions defined as publicly beneficial by the State. On the one hand, the re-registration procedure took years because the State was not prepared for the huge administrative task that processing the requests for re-registration turned out to be, and was a negative experience for many organisations because among other things they could not apply for funding for as long as they had not re-registered. On the other, the process provided the government with the opportunity to study the civic sector and to conduct what might be understood as a 'clean up' – distinguishing critical and ideologically 'suspect' organisations from those that demonstrated loyalty and conformity. In the process, inactive NGOs were shut down, not-for-profit small and medium size enterprises were deprived of funding, and according to statistics from 2014, the number of public benefit organisations was reduced by approximately 15%.⁴⁵

In parallel, funding from abroad has progressively become less available. EU funding is distributed through national

agencies, which in many countries are set up by national governments. In Hungary, the consequence of this approach has been that EU funding is subject to political preference.⁴⁶ For many years, the Norwegian Civil Fund provided grants through the independent Ökotárs Foundation. Immediately after the elections in 2014, in which FIDESZ and Orbán were re-elected, the government claimed that they were supporting organisations of the political opposition, leading to a series of diplomatic incidents, the suspension of the Norwegian grants and the harassment of recipient NGOs by the tax authorities and other government agencies over a period of two years. After having found no evidence to prove the accusations of abuse, the Norwegian grants have been reinstated and are being distributed again.⁴⁷

In this second phase, the pursuit of civic engagement and the functioning of civil society was certainly more difficult and challenging. At the same time, the measures implemented by the Orbán regime to deconstruct the liberal democratic State have also awakened civic engagement in Hungary, and strengthened the civic sphere to an extent. This can be seen in the civic responses to the crisis, and in the attitude of civil society to discourses current in the European civic space. From approximately 2010-11 onwards, discourses of sharing, sustainability, localism, thinking in communities, community-based urban regeneration, social entrepreneurship, innovation through start-ups, in other words, concepts that for the most part developed and have been tried out in the 'West', and have come to be part of the EU agenda as responses to the economic crisis, have slowly started to arrive to Hungary. Today, and among young creatives, these discourses are quite widely known in Budapest, and in what might be called intellectual circles. However, from the situation in Budapest it is difficult to know the extent to which people living in other parts of the country, or those benefitting from less education than Budapest intellectuals are aware of such ideas. There are plenty of interesting programmes made by young creatives for other

⁴⁶ <http://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/nka-tovabbi-millio-k-a-haveroknak-97503>

⁴⁷ More information at:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_migrant_quota_referendum_2016
https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Norv%C3%A9g_Alap-%C3%BCgy

⁴⁴ <http://abcug.hu/egy-ugyes-fidesz-csaladnak-huszmillio-is-leeshet-az-allamtol>

⁴⁵ <http://www.ksh.hu/?lang=en>

young creatives in central Budapest, but other social layers and generations rarely participate. At the same time, there are also a number of committed initiatives going to the depths of social problems in the countryside and bringing about long-term change for the most vulnerable groups, some examples of which were introduced earlier in the section addressing the state of the Hungarian countryside.

Undoubtedly, another important contemporary development lending momentum to civic engagement has been the refugee crisis of 2015/2016. At one and the same time, it has been successfully used by the Orbán government to push ordinary people's fears, nationalism and criticism of the European Union, and has brought into being bottom-up civic initiatives and platforms such as Migszol (Migration Aid).⁴⁸ The government-initiated referendum on whether Hungary should or should not accept European quotas for refugees, which took place in October 2016, was probably one of the greatest successes of contemporary civic engagement. The referendum result was invalid thanks to a campaign by the civic actor and joke party, the Hungarian Two-tailed Dog Party (MKKP).⁴⁹ The MKKP has been fighting against official populist and anti-immigrant propaganda, by reproducing the visual imagery used in such propaganda and filling it with satirical and comical content, since 2015.

If we also think about Europe and European values, and without wanting to generalise, today's actors of civic engagement do tend to look towards Europe as a source of inspiration, from which they can learn best practices and innovative approaches. Actors critical of the political situation in Hungary were also hoping that the European Union would intervene in the first years after the FIDESZ government came to power to stem what they felt to be moves to institute an illiberal State. This proved to be a false hope. The picture looks a little different when considering the EU as a donor. In the interviews that this author has conducted among civic actors, the extent to which EU programmes are perceived as something of a 'cow to milk' and as an opportunity to travel, rather than as a relevant support system for their action, is striking.

SITUATIONS, NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF CIVIC ACTORS IN HUNGARY

In this author's experience, new civic actors are operating in a relatively broad series of fields and topics, as follows: education and youth, social rights (people living with disabilities, excluded groups including Roma, homelessness, refugees), healthcare, strengthening civil society, community development and sustainability, creative industries including the arts, design and architecture, unemployment and employment creation, environmental protection and sustainability, social services, urban development and urban culture including street art and design, sport in public spaces, democracy, freedom of the press, fundamental rights under the new constitution, and poverty especially the situation in rural areas.

Working on these issues, civic actors have some specific needs in common to be able to sustain and grow their action, as follows:

- to develop a stronger basis in society, that acknowledges that they are profiting from the actions and initiatives of civic actors and are more willing to support them both materially and morally. For that they need to develop their communications, towards both the citizens they are addressing and the public institutions with which they wish to work;
- to grow out of grant dependency, for which they require training in fundraising, from both private philanthropists and the business sector, and by developing marketable products and services that can help them to generate income;
- organisational development, including training in social entrepreneurship. Many NGOs need to rethink their organisational structures to respond to and meaningfully work with new methods and practices of civil society;
- to learn perseverance and to think long-term, which is key to successful initiatives. They need committed leaders who push ideas through challenges and obstacles;
- a public policy including a tax environment supportive of social enterprise and innovation in the civil sector, especially for organisations providing social services that the shrinking welfare State is unable to provide;

⁴⁸ <http://www.migszol.com>

⁴⁹ http://ketfarkukutya.com/?page_id=1233

- platforms and opportunities for bringing together actors from the governmental, civic and business sectors, creating meaningful opportunities for the local community in policy planning that affects their lives. Education for how to cooperate across boundaries, and positive visibility for successful experiences of this kind of cooperation are also needed.

If thinking further about the relationship between what might be termed 'old' and 'new' civil society actors, we can identify some interesting contemporary developments and contours, as follows:

SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

In the observation of this author, these new civil society actors are an inspiration for the 'old school', who also see the need to develop market-based, profitable products and services to become sustainable. Some pioneer social enterprises, especially in smaller towns in the countryside have managed to develop good working relations with local authorities and are successful in applying for grants (for instance Bioszentandrás and the Blue Bird Foundation).⁵⁰

INCUBATORS & HUBS

Recently some new incubators for social enterprise have appeared (Impact Hub, Social Fokus).⁵¹ These follow in the footsteps of Nesst and Ashoka, which have traditionally supported any good social entrepreneurship initiative, whether it comes from the old school of civil society or from newer actors.⁵² Further, they are trying to promote change in the environment for social enterprises by maintaining good relations with the public institutions and by lobbying for change. However, advocacy and lobbying remains challenging. Contact persons in the public administration change often and with each change, negotiations have to start from scratch. It is understandable then that such incubators and hubs calcu-

late whether it makes sense to concentrate their efforts on that kind of work. There are EU grants for incubators, but their support is filtered through national agencies, and outcomes are not always anticipated.

INNOVATIVE NGOS

Many NGOs, old and new, are trying to develop and change with the times, and many new initiatives are not even registered with a legal form. Approaches to institutions differ widely, from total refusal through putting pressure on the government and institutions to a strong will to cooperate, which depends on past experiences as well, but mostly the topic. A good example is Vacant Budapest⁵³ for instance, who need to be on good terms with municipalities because of the theme. Tanítanék,⁵⁴ an education initiative, is trying to put pressure on the government and the Ministry of Education to undertake educational reforms, while as a platform it brings together organisations committed to change in education. A good example of total refusal to cooperate with public bodies, on the left, is the OFF-Biennial⁵⁵ mentioned above, or on the extreme right, the Koppány group,⁵⁶ which tried to help individuals who lost their homes as a result of the economic crisis. It is important to note that 'old school' actors often have amazing knowledge of working with social issues and networks that makes their work more effective and sustainable than those run by young people, who might have creative ideas but less experience. Many of the older NGOs are more successful at developing innovative programmes, as they have more knowledge of the groups they work with than young people who start doing innovative programmes because the themes are trendy. Also, experience shows that programmes working over a longer time have much better chances of getting funding from companies and private persons, their history gives them a certain credibility, and helps them to develop long-term partnerships. Good examples of such actors are the Symbiosis Foundation,⁵⁷ the Igazgyöny Alapít-

50 <http://www.bioszentandras.hu/gazdasagunk>
<http://kek-madar.hu/bemutakozunk>

51 <http://budapest.impacthub.net>
<http://www.socialfokus.org>

52 <http://www.nesst.org>
<http://ashoka-cee.org/hungary/en>

53 <http://lakatlan.kek.org.hu>

54 <http://www.tanitanek.com>

55 <http://offbiennale.hu/en>

56 <http://www.koppanycsoport.com>

57 <http://szocialisfarm.hu/rolunk/gesztor>

vány or True Pearl Foundation⁵⁸ and the Contemporary Architecture Centre.⁵⁹

INNOVATIVE GOVERNMENTAL PROGRAMMES AND OTHER CROSS-SECTORAL INITIATIVES

These are usually initiated by young, engaged professionals, who got a chance to make a difference in the public sector. They try to change the system from within. However, even people working in leading positions find it difficult, sometimes nigh to impossible, to get innovative ideas through their own institutions. Additionally, they may be enthusiastic about civic initiatives and cross-sectoral cooperation, but they often experience that NGOs are unprepared for cooperating with the public authorities. Even if they claim to be innovative, few NGOs have leaders or communicators that are adequately competent to find a common language with other sectors. This was one of the main lessons learnt from the TÉR_KÖZ programme,⁶⁰ a project by the City Marketing Division of the city of Budapest mentioned previously. After a promising start, this initiative ended without the adequate involvement of the business sector and NGOs.

BUSINESSES AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Businesses and actors in the private sector that are open to collaboration with new and innovative initiatives from civil society are rare in Hungary. Many companies have back-tracked on previous commitments to corporate social responsibility in recent years. Furthermore, few initiatives are competent to partner and develop cooperation schemes. However, there are some good examples, such as NaNe, an association addressing violence against women, which worked out an excellent collaboration with Vodafone to develop their emergency line service.⁶¹ Hellowood is a yearly wood design summer camp that secures all the equipment

and raw materials it uses from sponsors.⁶² Companies such as Auchan, Tesco and Budapest Airport support local community initiatives around their facilities. There are also platforms for mediation and cooperation, such as the Hungarian Donors Forum,⁶³ while Demnet runs a programme called the Fund-raising Academy, to prepare NGOs to be more successful at collaborating with the business sector.⁶⁴

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58 <http://igazgyongy-alapitvany.hu/rolunk>

59 <http://kek.org.hu>

60 <http://budapest.hu/Lapok/2016/ter-koz-2016.aspx>

61 http://www.vodafone.hu/vodafonerol/tarsadalmi-felelossegvallalas/biztonsag/nok_biztonsagaert_program

62 <http://www.hellowood.eu>

63 <http://www.donorsforum.hu>

64 <http://www.demnet.hu/en/empowerment-of-civil-society/fundraising>

MAPPING MULTIPLIERS OF NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN HUNGARY

CITY MARKETING DIVISION (PROGRAMME OF THE CITY OF BUDAPEST FOR CULTURAL, SPORT AND URBANITY-ORIENTED CITY DEVELOPMENT)

tries to unite the bottom-up and top-down approach.

KÉK – CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE CENTER

is an independent cultural centre engaged in different urban projects. [Lakatlan](#) for example aims at finding innovative solutions for the community-based regeneration of vacant urban properties.

COMMUNITY GARDENS

also became more visible in Hungary recently.

CYCLOMANIA

is a community bike shop. The social enterprise is situated in Budapest.

SZÍNES VÁROS – COLORFUL CITY

is the Hungarian association which colours public spaces.

A VÁROS MINDENKIÉ (THE CITY IS FOR ALL)

are people who are affected by housing poverty and their allies, who all work together for housing rights and for an egalitarian and just society.

KÖZÉLET ISKOLÁJA (THE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC LIFE)

is a community-based training, research and development centre that develops democratic culture in Hungary by improving the citizenship skills of people living in social exclusion, supporting social movements and groups that fight for social justice.

NÓRA RITÓK / IGAZGYÖNGY FOUNDATION

is active in Eastern Hungary for the integration of children living in deep poverty. The foundation aims at improving living condi-

tions through gardening, community development, fellowship programmes and employment opportunities.

SZIMBIÓZIS FOUNDATION/ LÁSZLÓ JAKUBINYI (SOCIAL FARMING)

is a programme for inclusive micro-communities in the countryside with social, educational and healthcare functions. It aims at the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, creating employment and space for social enterprises.

NESST HUNGARY

is the oldest and most effective social incubator focused on creating employment.

HUMÁN PLATFORM

unites professional associations, NGOs and individuals working in the field of health care, culture, education and social care. HP is dedicated to represent and protect professional values, improve quality of life and foster social solidarity.

MIGRATION AID

is a volunteer civil initiative to help refugees arriving to Hungary reach their assigned refugee camps or travel onwards.

JURÁNYI INCUBATOR HOUSE

is a space for performing arts in Budapest.

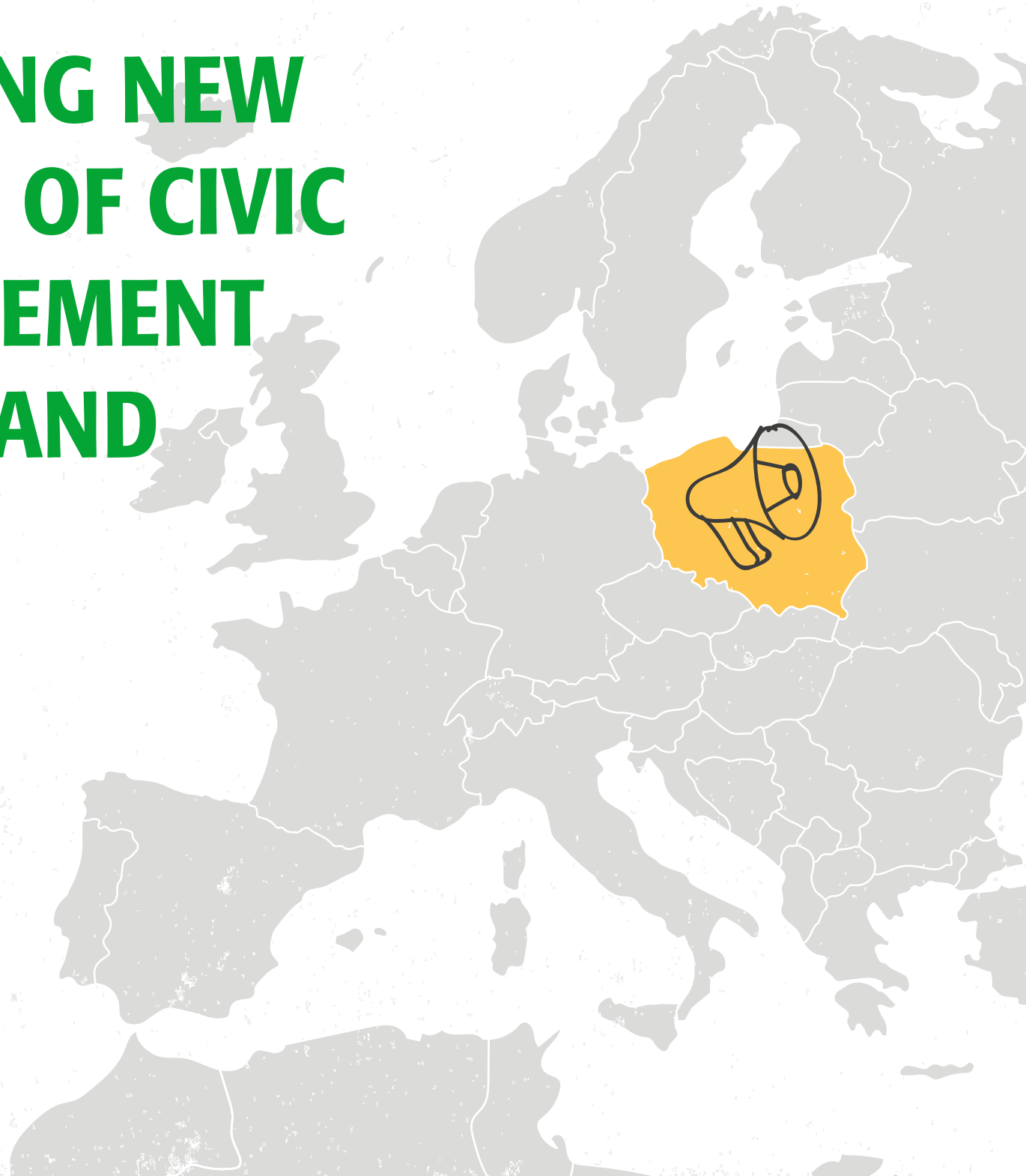
XKK- THE COMMUNICATION AGENCY FOR SOCIAL CAUSES

aims at using the power of communication to advance social causes and to reach youth in Hungary.

DEMOKRATIKUS IFJÚSÁGÉRT ALAPÍTVÁNY (FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRATIC YOUTH)

promotes youth development through youth service, democratic debate and professional development on a national and international level.

MAPPING NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN POLAND



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter presents the spectrum of new social movements in Poland against the background of the changes that have taken place in the political field and to the architecture of public communication over the last few years. These have led to an increase in the importance and strength of social movements, which is also associated with an increase in the diversity of activism. It will focus on a variety of manifestations of contemporary social movements in Poland, including:

- a movement of political protest that is trying to distance itself from established political parties;
- one political party that uses the strategies of social movements;
- a trade union mobilising employees in precarious employment circumstances;
- urban movements;
- activism in academic/scientific circles;
- a network of right-wing clubs that is organised around a conspiracy theory;
- and a march of extreme right-wing activists, organised on Polish Independence Day.

The dynamics and activities of these new movements are shaped by an important tension along two dimensions. The first is that there exists the possibility of mass mobilisation and impact, but closely related to a specific situation, for example the threat of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) or the rule of the authoritarian right. The continuity of impact means a smaller scale mobilisation and the necessity to institutionalise activities, for example in the form of a party, trade union or foundation. The second is that social movements face the dilemma of whether to formulate a distinctive identity, which will give them visibility and create a devoted membership or invest in the politics of alliances and cooperation with various actors in the implementation of its agenda, at the risk of allegations of conformism.



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INTRODUCTION

Looking at the demonstrations organised by the Komitet Obrony Demokracji, the Committee for the Defence of Democracy, against the policies of the Law and Justice government, that brought together between fifty and eighty-thousand people, are among the most visible in contemporary Polish history. Some commentators declared that they represent continuity of social engagement with the struggle against Communism. In these commentators' opinions, we are witnessing just the next episode of the activity of a civil society constantly struggling for democracy against the temptation of political power. This interpretation of events finds itself confirmed in KOD's own discourse, which refers directly to the tradition of democratic opposition prior to 1989. However, understanding the situation of new social movements and activism in Poland requires that we delve deeper than this historical analogy and look for more convincing explanations in the narratives of the movement itself.

The contemporary situation of social movements and activism in Poland is, in fact, more closely connected with the transformation of the political and public spheres that has taken place since the mid-2000s than with the distant past of the 1980s. However, capturing the evolution of activism requires that we describe the history of the social movements in which such activism takes place, because if we do not do so there is no way to fully understand its current dynamics and diversity. The main changes have reconstructed the architecture of public communication with the advent of the Internet and other ICTs, which on the one hand, strengthened political leaders at the expense of party structures, and on the other hand, strengthened social movements at the expense of symbolic elites (among others, journalists, public intellectuals).

The spectrum of progressive activism in Poland now includes, among others, movements of political protest that are trying to establish their own political identity, distinct from the political parties, a new political party that uses the strategies of social movements; a trade union mobilising employees in precarious employment circumstances; urban movements; activism on issues of concern in the academic community

and ecological movements combining activism with knowledge production. Furthermore, not all activism in Poland is progressive. There are also some very active right-wing and nationalistic social movements. Notable are two: a network of right-wing clubs that is organised around the conspiracy theory around the Smolensk disaster¹ and a march of extreme right-wing activists, organised on Polish Independence Day.

The above mentioned movements are very different from one another, especially as concerns their ideological profiles, political aims and organisational forms. Nevertheless, they share the fact that they are acting under the similar conditions: those of the new architecture of communication, and awareness of the limitations of institutionalising activism in non-governmental organisations.

NEW TENDENCIES IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN POLAND

The history of social movements after the introduction of Martial Law in Poland in 1981 can be divided into two periods. The key turning point is not 1989, as popular memory would have it. From the point of view of the dynamics of social movements and activism the more important transition took place between 2007 and 2009, somewhere between the end of the first Law and Justice Party government and the closure of 'Dziennik', a nationwide newspaper published by Axel Springer, which is the event that is symbolically considered to be the end of print media dominance in Poland.

From the mid-1980s through approximately 2005, the structural position of social movements was defined by their

¹ On 10 April 2010, a Tupolev Tu-154 aircraft of the Polish Air Force crashed near the city of Smolensk, Russia, killing all 96 people on board. Among the victims were the President of Poland Lech Kaczyński and his wife Maria, the former President of Poland in exile Ryszard Kaczorowski, the chief of the Polish General Staff and other senior Polish military officers, the president of the National Bank of Poland, Polish Government officials, 18 members of the Polish Parliament, senior members of the Polish clergy and relatives of victims of the Katyn massacre. The group was arriving from Warsaw to attend an event marking the 70th anniversary of the massacre, which took place not far from Smolensk.



The most important social movements at the turn of the 21st century were organised around women's issues, the involvement of Polish troops in international military interventions and LGBTQI rights. Photo by Natalia Sawka ©, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0, source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/97532364@N07/13845471285>

marginalisation from the mainstream political agenda, and they fulfilled the role of publicising demands ignored by the most powerful political actors. The end of the 1980s was dominated by the political conflict between the ruling Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – PZPR), and Solidarity, which functioned in the partly open public sphere of the non-democratic political system of the time. Martial Law served to petrify political identity and to ritualise politics as a struggle between the ruling party and the opposition over the requirements of Realpolitik on the one hand, and the aspirations of a nation to freedom, on the other. At this time, it was the ecological and pacifist movements that took up the most important issues ignored both by the ruling party and the opposition, such as environmental pollution, nuclear power and compulsory military service.

Despite the changes in the organisation of the political system after 1989, the structural situation of social movements remained more or less unchanged. The political field was reorganised according to democratic rules, but up to 2005

it operated along the same fault line of opposition between parties deriving from Solidarity and those deriving from the former ruling Communist party. The most important social movements at the turn of the 21st century were organised around the demands neglected by mainstream actors. The most important of these were women's issues, the involvement of Polish troops in international military interventions and LGBTQI rights.

These social movements were attractive to the public exactly because they made public issues and concerns that were absent from or ignored by the mainstream debate. However, in reality, the public sphere continued to be controlled by representatives of the symbolic elites – newspaper and television journalists played the role of 'gate-keepers' to mainstream media, and social movements had very little influence. This situation changed in the mid-2000s, by which time many more ordinary people had access to digital media. The Internet reconfigured the public sphere. Members of the public abandoned traditional media in their droves, fleeing

into cyberspace. Print media were especially hard hit. This development has weakened the economic and symbolic power of the press, which has lost its hegemonic position in shaping public debate, both in terms of the quantity and the quality of the content. Television has not been spared, however. Both television and print media have to compete with the Internet for the attention of their audiences. This has led the intensification of competition between them on the speed with which events are reported, the authenticity of the message and the sensationalism of the reporting. Today it is the Internet, which has different rules of content creation, that is the hegemonic medium of information and communication in Poland.

This has dramatically affected the political sphere. The role of collective political identities and narratives describing the world and defining the purpose of political action has been diminished. Politicians have resorted to emotional responses to events as they happen, replacing the previous practice of parties developing reasoned debate on issues in the public sphere. The way politicians dealt with the refugee crisis is a good example of how this change has impacted political dynamics. Liberal elites abstained from engagement in favour of refugees and right-wing leaders stoked fear of 'dangerous others', giving them electoral victory in 2015. Today, the success of political parties depends on the effectiveness of their leadership in dealing with such events.

Maybe even more significantly, this new architecture of public communication has profoundly changed the conditions under which social movements function. It is much easier for them to attract public attention and to break into mainstream media with their messages. There are several reasons for this. First, the activity of social movements is generally more authentic, relevant to the times, actual and sensational than that of the traditional media, making it easier for it to go viral in the Internet. Secondly, for traditional media such as TV or print media, not reporting on social protest is extremely costly, not only in the sense of audience numbers and ratings, but also in terms of their credibility, because they can acquire a reputation for being 'manipulative'. Thirdly, the social movements themselves generate content that other media want to use, as doing so reduces their production costs. Fourth, and

finally, social movements can create events or participate in the events of others that mainstream media wish to cover.

For new social movements that are keen to overcome their limitations in terms of public communication, it appears to no longer be relevant to institutionalise and professionalise by establishing NGOs. After a period of fascination with this form of institutionalisation of activism during the 1990s, the following decade saw disappointment and disenchantment regarding the NGO-isation of Polish civil society grow. Criticism of NGOs came from within the NGO eco-system itself, as well as from other parts of the public sphere, regarding donor dependency, the bureaucratisation of activism, exploitation of staff under the guise of social engagement and donor-driven priorities being favoured over real needs in society. Even if social movements today work with elements of institutionalised NGO practice, they attempt to be something more: a group of activists, a network of diverse actors, a centre of social mobilisation or a unit of knowledge production.

Among the most important contemporary social movements in Poland, the following actors stand out:

KOMITET OBRONY DEMOKRACJI (THE COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENCE OF DEMOCRACY)²

Komitet Obrony Demokracji was established in November 2015. It is significant that the impulse for its foundation was the text published on the Internet by a former democratic opposition activist. He criticised the actions of the new Law and Justice party government for violations of democratic standards and called for citizen self-organisation in the defence of democracy. The day after the publication of the text, social activist Mateusz Kijowski,³ who was not well known to the broader public, created a Facebook group called Komitet Obrony Demokracji. In just three days, 30,000 people had joined up.

² <https://www.facebook.com/KomitetObronyDemokracji>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mateusz_Kijowski

RAZEM (TOGETHER)⁴

Razem is a political party founded in spring 2015. It was founded by activists of left-wing youth organisations and some politicians, who left Zieloni 2004, the Polish Green Party.⁵ The party came into being after appeals for the unification of the various extra-parliamentary left-wing circles to create one party, which could stand in the parliamentary elections in autumn 2015. However, Razem was not created as a coalition. It is a completely new project – oriented towards people previously uninvolved in politics or located at its margins, and the the party is focused on building a separate political identity.

INICJATYWA PRACOWNICZA (WORKERS' INITIATIVE)⁶

Inicjatywa Pracownicza is an anarcho-syndicalist trade union that has existed since 2002. Its activity is particularly interesting because of its efforts to organise workers in a liberalised labour market.

URBAN MOVEMENTS

have been the most important phenomenon in Polish local politics since Poland joined the European Union. These have successfully entered public debate with ideas about change and societal transformation at the national level. The founding of the association 'My Pozniacy' ('We the citizens of Poznan') in 2007, which demanded new quality in urban policy from the local authorities, is generally recognised as the beginning of urban movements. In the years that followed, and in cities across Poland, initiatives that are a manifestation of new thinking about the objectives of urban policy and the role of citizens in co-deciding on local matters have been founded.

POLSKI ALARM SMOGOWY (POLISH SMOG ALERT)⁷

Polish Smog Alert can be considered the continuation of urban activism. It is a network of local organisations fighting to improve air quality. Its most active cell is the Krakowski Alarm Smogowy – Cracow Smog Alert, which was created in response to the extremely dangerous air quality in that city.

KOMITET KRYZYSOWY HUMANISTYKI POLSKIEJ (CRISIS COMMITTEE FOR POLISH HUMANITIES)⁸

The immediate reason for the establishment of the KKHP was the announcement that the Department of Philosophy at the University of Bialystok (2013) was being closed down. Nevertheless, the dynamics of the activities of the Committee extended beyond that local struggle and are now defined by a general critique of reforms to academia introduced in 2011. These reforms have meant that the financing of academic research primarily takes place through projects and grant applications and that bibliometry is now the measure of academic quality, exacerbating the poor working conditions of academics, bureaucratising universities, and creating 'excellence' rankings that mean some universities receive more funding than others.

KLUBY GAZETY POLSKIEJ (GAZETA POLSKA CLUBS)⁹

This is a network of clubs that has developed around the right-wing weekly Gazeta Polska.¹⁰ The development of these clubs was the result of the Smolensk catastrophe in which the then President of Poland, Lech Kaczynski, and nearly 100 others lost their lives.¹¹ Members of the clubs are involved in organising monthly commemorations of the disaster. They are convinced that the plane crash was planned to eliminate Lech Kaczynski, and demand that relevant authorities recognise this 'fact'.

4 <http://partiarazem.pl>

5 <http://partiazieloni.pl>

6 <http://www.ozzip.pl>

7 <http://polskialarmsmogowy.pl>

8 <http://kkhp.pl>

9 <http://www.klubygp.pl>

10 <http://www.gazetapolska.pl>

11 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_Polish_Air_Force_Tu-154_crash



MARSZ NIEPODLEGŁOŚCI (INDEPENDENCE MARCH)¹²

This is the annual march held by Polish nationalists on November 11th, which is Polish Independence Day. Although the March is organised by nationalist associations, which came into existence shortly after the 1989 mass mobilisation, this kind of march attracts many more people than are active in such nationalist associations. These marches are usually about 50,000 strong and include right-wing extremists, football hooligans and ‘banal nationalists’. Violence and punch-ups with the police are common.

CONTEMPORARY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DISCOURSE/S IN POLAND

The discourses of the different civic actors differ considerably, and it would not be representative of reality to generalise these. Hence, we have chosen to present each actor’s main concerns and ideas, how these have developed and their expression in actions, one by one.

KOMITET OBRONY DEMOKRACJI (KOD)

KOD’s stance was first put to the test when it called people to protest when the then Law and Justice government started to act against the independence of the Constitutional Court in 2015. This political conflict began in October 2015 with the appointment of five judges to the Constitutional Court by the Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO) Party. These included replacements for two judges whose terms would not expire until after the upcoming election that the Civic

A KOD demonstration in Warsaw against surveillance law and government policy. Photo by Grzegorz Żukowski ©, CC BY-NC 2.0, source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/gregorz_zukowski/24458040932

¹² <https://marszniepodleglosci.pl>

Platform was predicted to lose. After the Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) won the parliamentary election, it made its own appointments to the Court, arguing that the previous appointments of the five judges by PO were unconstitutional. In December, PiS changed the court's decision-making powers by prescribing a two-third majority vote and mandatory participation of at least 13 of the 15 judges on the Constitutional Court. These appointments and amendments caused domestic protests and counter-protests in late December and early January. The changes to the law were criticised by the European Union as threatening the rule of law and the human rights of Polish citizens.¹³ While the first picket, organised on a weekday in early December, drew limited numbers, the demonstration on Saturday 12 December in Warsaw saw 50,000 take to the streets, a significant number by Polish standards. What is significant here and previously seldomly seen, is that parallel demonstrations and actions took place in other cities including Poznań, Gdańsk, Szczecin and Bielsko Biala. Other large demonstrations were organised in 2016. In January, KOD rallied several thousand people in defence of the public media, which the ruling party has sought to control, quite successfully. In February, tens of thousands took part in a demonstration to defend the good name of Lech Walesa¹⁴ and again in March, tens of thousands demonstrated for the rule of law and the constitution to be respected by the government, after the Venice Commission on the Polish Constitutional Court published its findings.¹⁵

Although KOD is registered as an association and develops its local affiliates, its main activity so far has been the organisation of demonstrations. What is new and even surprising is their success in mobilising large numbers of people, and that demo-fatigue has not yet set in, despite the frequency of KOD's protest actions. It can be argued that KOD has managed to achieve this because of a number of its open ideological position in the defence of the democratic minimum, which is a broad common denominator for diverse circles and groups, on the one hand. On the other,

the existence of an enemy, in this case the Law and Justice government, which is incisive, headstrong and whose actions have aroused public emotion, has also helped to unite people around KOD's message.

RAZEM

The party refers to the experience of social movements from the south of Europe highlighting the non-hierarchical nature of the organisation and emphasis on the collective management of the party. During the formation of the party, core activists were keen to develop a distinct visual identity and ideological profile. However, in practice the party attempts to reconcile fire and ice. On the one hand, it presents itself as an alternative to the old political parties, by showing young faces, attractive logos and using the aesthetics of social protest. On the other hand, the party relies on its distinctiveness, a separate political profile and by distancing themselves from certain 'cultural' issues, including the presence of religion in public life or same-sex marriage. While such demands are present in the party programme, they rarely appear as important issue in its activities. The party managed to register lists in the parliamentary elections in 2015. For most of the campaign, however, it was not able to break into the mainstream debate and performed poorly in opinion polls. The situation changed after a television debate, in which the most experienced party leader, Adrian Zandberg,¹⁶ made a strong impression on the general public with a good performance. Razem garnered 3.6% of vote in the elections, which meant it did not make the threshold for entering Parliament. Nevertheless, the party gained the right to receive public funding. The result of Razem has been widely interpreted as a success, considering it is a very young organisation.

INICJATYWA PRACOWNICZA (IP)

IP develops traditional forms of worker mobilisation including picketing, demonstrations and the circulation of trade union literature. However, it also refers to the conflict of interests between employees and employers, noting that in modern capitalism, new institutional arrangements – among other

13 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_Constitutional_Court_crisis,_2015

14 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lech_Wa%C5%82%C4%99sa

15 <http://www.dw.com/en/council-of-europe-reiterates-admonishment-of-poland-over-constitutional-standoff/a-36049470>

16 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adrian_Zandberg

things, the greater flexibility in the labour market – has led to the weakening of worker representation and of workers' rights. Hence, IP also appeals to people who might be considered in precarious circumstances, especially as concerns labour regulation. For example, IP organised a march called 'My prekariusze' ('We the Precarious') in Warsaw, which was special as it addressed non-unionised, 'flexible' workers and attracted quite a large number of people. At the same time, IP's mobilisation potential remains limited. The most important reason for this appears to be IP's anarchist identity, which is remote and exotic for the majority of its potential audience, many of whom demonstrate other political identities or no political identity at all. IP has succeeded in establishing itself in artistic circles. Artists are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the liberalisation of the labour market and experience pressure to perform their work without remuneration, in accordance with antiquated ideas about art and culture requiring sacrifice. Within the IP, artists are organised in the Commission of Art Workers, which is the first case of trade union self-organisation of artists and cultural operators for many years.

URBAN MOVEMENTS (UM)

Characteristic of Urban Movements is the involvement of mainly young people who grew up after the change in political system in 1989 and entered adulthood after 2000. They reject the idea, so popular among the transition generation of the 1990s, that there is an absolute opposition between 'communism' and 'capitalism' that equates modernisation with privatisation and commodification, and proposes that transformation requires great sacrifice. In contradistinction, and although involving a variety of actors, UM have stressed the importance of recognising the basic needs of citizens as an important point of reference for urban policy. Access to housing, costs of public transport, distribution of expenditure between different kinds of infrastructure (e.g. cars vs. public transport), spatial planning, access to social infrastructure (schools, kindergartens, health care) have emerged as demands of urban policy and have been raised by urban movements.

Among the most spectacular successes of UM, we can highlight the effective campaign to block the plan to organise the Winter

Olympic Games in Cracow. A group of activists organised under the banner 'Kraków Przeciw Igrzyskom' (KPI) or 'Cracow Against the Olympics' managed to ensure that a referendum on the plan to apply for the Winter Olympics would be held, and then effectively mobilised citizens to vote against the project. It was not without significance here that the campaign was organised by connecting the interests of many groups, testimony to the organisational skills of group leader Tomasz Leśniak,¹⁷ who successfully courted support among parents dissatisfied with school closures and among education workers threatened with cuts in local education budgets.

Another expression of the growing importance of UM was the Congress of Urban Movements¹⁸ which first took place in Poznań in 2011, where representatives of 48 organisations and many activist-members met. In the discussion they adopted 'Tezy miejskie' or 'Theses on the City',¹⁹ expressing desired directions for urban policy as adopted by the participants of the Congress. They consisted among others of demands for participatory budgeting, the fight against exclusion, care for the spatial order, co-presence of citizens in processes of regeneration and decentralisation of important public institutions outside Warsaw. Since 2011, this Congress has been held annually, and each time it takes place in a new location.

The dynamics of UM was significantly affected by the local elections in autumn 2014. Many activists and organisations decided to break with the distance towards organised political life and run in the elections achieving some success. In Warsaw the activist organisation 'Miasto Jest Nasze' (MJN) or 'The City is Ours' fielded their representatives for positions in district councils. Joanna Erbel,²⁰ the well known urban activist launched her candidacy for Mayor of Warsaw on behalf of Zieloni 2004 (the Green Party), coming in sixth with 2.8% of the vote. In Cracow, Tomasz Leśniak candidate for the city presidency received 4.8% of the vote. In Gorzów Wielkopolski, Jacek Wojcicki,²¹ an activist from urban movements, won the election.

17 https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomasz_Le%C5%9Bniak

18 <http://kongresruchowmiejskich.pl>

19 <https://kongresruchowmiejskich.pl/tezy-miejskie>

20 https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joanna_Erbel

21 [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacek_W%C3%B3jcicki_\(samorz%C4%85dowiec\)](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacek_W%C3%B3jcicki_(samorz%C4%85dowiec))

POLSKI ALARM SMOGOWY (PAS)

PAS emphasises the promotion of knowledge about air pollution among inhabitants of areas where air quality is poor or deteriorating, advocacy towards local authorities and putting air quality concerns on the public agenda.

KOMITET KRYZYSOWY HUMANISTYKI POLSKIEJ (KKHP)

KKHP has achieved unprecedented success by organising the first major protests by the academic community post-1989. KKHP's activities began with the preparation of an open letter in defence of Philosophy, signed by many prominent figures in science and culture in Poland. A series of actions to mobilise the scientific community followed, echoing the public debate. Among other actions, KKHP organised occupation lectures at the Ministry of Science, raising black flags at various departments of universities across the country, a procession of academics dressed in black, and protests against the outsourcing of cleaning services at universities, which would lead to less employment security for unscientific workers at the universities. KKHP's critique of the reforms is based on the fact that they are imitative of formulas for the organisation of the sciences in developed countries. Seemingly neutral rules of organisation and evaluation of the work of academics involve the risk of unfair competition and the destruction of local approaches to practicing the humanities and social sciences. The organisation in its activities is not limited to academics. It also takes into account other groups of university employees which are affected by changes that are bringing universities closer to the logics of commercial enterprises.

KLUBY GAZETY POLSKIEJ (KGP)

The most visible activities of the KGP are the monthly commemorations of the Smolensk catastrophe. On the 10th of each month, the Clubs hold religious services, marches and rallies. In the first and second year after the disaster, these commemoration activities attracted wide interest. Today, the interest in KGP activities appears to be less pronounced, because the movement feels well represented by the Law and Justice government. This said, the sixth anniversary of the catastrophe in April 2010, gathered several thousand people

in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw, including many who travelled to Warsaw from all over the country. In addition to these commemorations, the Clubs organise meetings and discussions with right-wing politicians, writers and publicists, conduct film screenings and engage in the construction of monuments. Members and supporters of the clubs are quite elderly.

The pivotal idea of the Clubs is the thesis of the Smolensk plot. The weekly newspaper *Gazeta Polska*, around which the clubs are organised, distributes a variety of interpretations and positions to undermine the findings of the official investigation, according to which the plane crashed as a result of a failed landing approach in very difficult weather conditions. The members of this movement are dedicated to unmasking the plot to eliminate then Polish President, Lech Kaczyński, as they see it. The idea of the Smolensk plot coheres well with the thesis popularised by *Gazeta Polska* that a secret network system, originating in the period of real socialism, involving members of the secret police, judiciary, business, politics and journalism, rules Poland. This said, the profile of the weekly appears not to be overtly nationalistic, but rather anti-communist and anti-liberal.

MARSZ NIEPODLEGŁOŚCI (MN)

The first major March took place in 2011. This mass mobilisation was a reaction to the blockade of such a march by a coalition of progressives in 2010, that was to be repeated on the 11.11.2011. People joined far right activists to express their solidarity with the nationalists, but also because they wanted to protest against *Gazeta Wyborcza* – the largest, liberal newspaper in Poland – which encouraged the blockade initiative. During the March through the centre of the capital nationalist participants clashed with police. For several years this defined the March, which always seemed to erupt into violence. The exception was 2015, when the Law and Justice party was elected.

Interestingly, and maybe counter-intuitively for non-Polish observers, the March is usually dominated by young people. The slogans of the March have a clear right-wing and nationalistic profile. They refer to the need to protect national

unity and to fight against the internal and external enemies of Poland. Criticism of the West and the European Union is typical. For the participants of the March, these are the incarnation of liberalism, cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, all of which represent a threat to Polish national values. Each year the message of the March changes and refers to current topics. In 2015, the threat to European civilisation posed by refugees was put on the agenda. The main slogan in 2016 was 'Poland for Poles, Poles for Poland'.

In terms of 'European values' which might be understood as a discourse of its own, each of these new civic actors has its own position.

KOMITET OBRONY DEMOKRACJI (KOD)

KOD is definitely pro-European and one might even consider its approach Europhile. Marchers often carry European flags, as a symbol of democracy and freedom. Entering the European Union is treated as the fulfilment of a Polish dream and as a pivotal moment in the history of Poland.

RAZEM

While not anti-European, Razem is critical of EU institutions as they conduct their business and have a real impact on the world. In this respect, it appears to be close to social movements in Southern European, which emphasise the need to democratise EU institutions and strengthen the mechanisms of social development, instead of promoting economic growth.

INICJATYWA PRACOWNICZA (IP)

This union distances itself from institutions that do not originate in grass-roots in self-organisation. Hence, they are critical of EU institutions, among others, that are seen as part of the 'apparatus' serving the circulation and accumulation of capital. However, this distance is not grounded in any nationalistic sentiment, rather a factor of critique of the capitalist State.

URBAN MOVEMENTS (UM)

Although the activities of urban movements are focused on local actions and struggles, their position on Europe has been an important factor defining the identity of many of the younger urban activists. They reject the romantic vision of the European Union and the 'West' as the embodiment of democracy and civilised standards. The 'West' is rather perceived as a reservoir of multiple solutions, some of which it might be relevant to implement in Poland, on the provision that local context and the local balance of power are considered in any efforts in favour of social change. Furthermore, non-transparent actions on the part of the European Union and its technocratic experts, as is the case of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), for example, are rejected as anti-democratic.

POLSKI ALARM SMOGOWY (PAS)

For PAS, Europe and the EU are a positive point of reference because its main concern is air quality in the EU and promotes several regulations and good practices in that regard. In particular, the EU is considered as an actor that can promote interest aggregation and the elaboration of common rules for the control of air pollution in Poland.

KOMITET KRYZYSOWY HUMANISTYKI POLSKIEJ (KKHP)

KKHP's attitude to Europe and the West resembles that of the Urban Movements to a large extent. When the European Union acts in an undemocratic way, introducing standards of dubious quality, as was the case with the Bologna system, it is subject to criticism. On the other hand, solutions from other countries, especially those that relate to struggles for the preservation of the specificity of the humanities, are favourably received and monitored closely.

KLUBY GAZETY POLSKIEJ (KGP)

It seems that for the KGP the 'realist' vision of the European Union dominates. This means that the Clubs tend to see the European institutions as a space where national interests collide and compete. Therefore, Poland should aspire to and

work for a better position in EU, and use the institutions as a strategic vehicle for achieving its national interests, rather than being 'fought against' per se. In this process any assumptions on the independent value of the European project are naïve and dangerous.

MARSZ NIEPODLEGŁOŚCI (MN)

The March is overtly Eurosceptic and anti-European Union. European institutions are perceived as a threat to Polish identity and national interests. They represent the decay of the West – multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, liberalism, tolerance for homosexuality. Polish nationalists are not simply anti-West, but claim to represent the true spirit of the West, which has been lost and must be rebuilt.

SITUATIONS, NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF CIVIC ACTORS

These new civic actors also have a variety of situations, needs and concerns. Some of these overlap, but there are also several which are quite distinct as a result of the particular political constellation that is currently to be observed in Poland. We will treat each actor one by one.

KOMITET OBRONY DEMOKRACJI (KOD)

For KOD the most important challenge is to maintain the mobilisation of its supporters. In that process, the role of the government in delivering new reasons for protest is important, but what counts more is to define the role of the movement for the future, which goes beyond the Law and Justice government. KOD is now thinking about how to engage in activities that consider the question of social change in Poland.

RAZEM

Razem receives public funding as a political party, so a minimum of financial resources are available. Right now, Razem defines its main focus as the creation of local structures that can function as the cells of the party organism and

create support for it in the wider public, now and the future. It will also be important for the party to maintain its public presence and visibility on issues of political conflict that are actual and relevant for people.

INICJATYWA PRACOWNICZA (IP)

IP puts emphasis on organising employees and the articulation of labour conflict. By moving into new fields of labour relations, like culture, it faces the challenge of the diversification of workers' identity (related with creation, devotion, etc.).

URBAN MOVEMENTS (UM)

For urban movements of different kinds to successfully enter local politics, which appears to be the aim for some at least, the challenge is to sustain the support of their constituencies (i.e. getting them to go out and vote for their candidates) in a context where entering formal politics diminishes their authenticity for exactly those people. The answer of UM to this dilemma has been to continue to critique local elites in power, even when their people have been elected. The disadvantage is that it makes it difficult to broaden UM's constituency to more moderate voters with aspirations for change, but who are not keen on the idea of a radical shift.

POLSKI ALARM SMOGOWY (PAS)

In case of this movement, some aspects of their work can be sustained and continue to impact on the contemporary field of action, in this case air quality, and there are also ideas about how to extend the movement and take its action to another level. When it comes to the former, funding is key so that research can be conducted, cooperation with representatives of science can be further developed, and the relationship of PAS with the media can be further developed. As concerns the latter, the movement will have to develop more effective direct communication with people suffering from pollution, so that a more grass-roots movement can develop.

KOMITET KRYZYSOWY HUMANISTYKI POLSKIEJ (KKHP)

For KKHP, the challenge is to sustain the activity of its supporters in times of political change. A new project of reforms has been declared by the new Minister of Science. The crux will be to develop activities that bring together supporters and critics of the Law and Justice government and its policies on the academy from among KKHPs constituencies, so that a more constructive approach can be achieved, one which allows both sides to work together on the negotiation of a new bill. The difficulty lies in the attitude of the Ministry, which is quite right-wing and generally not willing to consider input from a plurality of stakeholders.

KLUBY GAZETY POLSKIEJ (KGP)

Considering the stance of the 'Law and Justice' government on the Smoleńsk catastrophe, it is quite likely that the Clubs will find it more difficult to mobilise participation in their activities. The government has called for a new investigation and the sense among Club members that their concern is being dealt with by 'their people' is growing. This may weaken the popularity of the commemorations especially, and by implication of the Clubs.

MARSZ NIEPODLEGŁOŚCI (MN)

The problem for the organisers of the March is the fact that they organise it every year. Until 2015 this problem was not so important, as the sentiment against governing liberals served as fuel for people to mobilise with the March. However, the liberals are no longer in power, and the March will have to redefine itself in relation to the right-wing government, which shares many of its positions. Marching against the governing party will mean a loss of support from some right-wing participants, who identify with the 'Law and Justice' party. On the other hand, not taking a stand on government actions or even being supportive towards it, will mean the March loses at least some of its extremist glamour.

When it comes to 'older-school' civil society and the relationship of new civic actors to that sphere, we can see some continuity and overlap with other movements and traditions of citizen self-organisation.

KOMITET OBRONY DEMOKRACJI (KOD)

Symbolically, KOD draws from the tradition of the democratic opposition and refers to the mobilisation of citizens against the abuse of political power during state socialism in Poland. At the same time, it emphasises pluralism and independence from political actors, even those leaders that actively take part in its protests. This enables the movement to maintain its specific identity, while benefitting from the political capital that such actors' involvement offers them. Furthermore, the circle of KOD activists and partners is not limited to politicians. KOD invites representatives of various circles, groups and organisations of civil society to its demonstrations and activities. KOD's 'ecumenism', as it might be called, combined with the stubbornness of the ruling party on specific issues regarding the quality of democracy in Poland, has turned out to be extremely effective in sustaining its mobilisation. Although among the demonstrators older people far outweigh young people and KOD's 'ideology' refers to the tradition of the democratic opposition, the dynamics of the movement owes much to social media and the Internet. The pace of enrolment with KOD and its first successes took place through Facebook. This allowed KOD to build its visibility and the identity of its constituency fast. Images created, for example, using drones or the time lapse technique circulated in social media among supporters of the movement, providing proof of the manipulative nature of governmental media coverage, which covered KOD demonstrations as if they were insignificant and organised by just a handful of people.

RAZEM

During the hot political autumn of 2015, Razem was the only non-right-wing opposition party that was not included in KOD's activities, arguing that it does not want to cooperate with parties, whose earlier policies it rejected (e.g. the

'Civic Platform'²² and the 'Polish Peasants Party'²³) or whose programme it had criticised ('Nowoczesna'). This decision meant that Razem was relegated to the margins of mainstream politics for a few months. They told commentators that they were in the process of working at the grass-roots to build their local structures. After the Constitutional Court's judgment declaring the unconstitutionality of the new laws that the government proposed in its regard. The subsequent refusal of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister to publish that judgement, Razem returned to mainstream politics by organising a continuous vigil style protest outside the Prime Minister's Office. During this protest Razem displayed a presentation in which it demanded the publication of the judgment of the Constitutional Court. Although the campaign ended after a week, Razem received encouragement from the public, which was sympathetic to its cause. At the same time, the fact that Razem demonstrated it does not want the support of the establishment political parties confirmed its strategy of building a distinctive, separate identity, even in the context of punctual social protests. Razem is an interesting example of the attempt to reconcile grass-roots social movement style strategies with a critique of hierarchical establishment institutions. Furthermore, Razem has made it clear that it is trying to build a distinct political identity, using a principled and uncompromising stance to avoid any blurring of that identity.

INICJATYWA PRACOWNICZA (IP)

IP is critical towards traditional trade unions and treats them as a part of the problem rather than as part of the solution in contemporary industrial relations between employees and employers in Poland. IP's strategy to build a specific identity has distanced it from initiatives that do not correspond to its socio-political project. Nonetheless, it does not engage in 'sectarian' politics. The representatives of the union willingly participate in debates with other organisations and they occasionally attend rallies and demonstrations that are pitched as 'ecumenical'.

URBAN MOVEMENTS (UM)

The local election in 2014 was a turning point for many activists and organisations involved in Urban Movements. Although the 'activist capital' mattered in the campaign, this election also marked the moment when many involved in UM had to cross the line into the sphere of party politics. Those that have achieved success since the election have focused more attention on the political field. They still use the capital they accumulated during the activities and struggles at the grass-roots level, but today they receive some criticism for abandoning their ideals in the narrower political struggles they pursue.

For their part, those that have not succeeded appear less willing or able to practice activism in the way they did before. Some of them chose courses of action at the intersection of administration, management and expertise. For example, Joanna Erbel established a foundation called 'Blisko' (meaning nearby or close),²⁴ which is committed to promoting progressive solutions in the area of housing policy, urban regeneration and planning. The foundation is to work as an actor, joining other actors, creating common platforms to pursue joint projects aimed at the better satisfaction of the needs of residents and their greater participation in processes of city management.

POLSKI ALARM SMOGOWY (PAS)

The specificity of Alert is that it does not limit its activity to social campaigns in order to achieve its goals, but is also involved in the production of knowledge about issues of its concern. Among its activists PAS includes scientists, who are involved in the preparation of studies on the effects of smog on human health. This allows Alert to effectively influence the public debate, as the press willingly uses ready-made materials with high scientific credibility. PAS also willingly joins coalitions with urban movements, with which it shares an emphasis on meeting the basic needs of urban residents, especially health needs, and criticism of the equation of progress and modernisation with commodification and individu-

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civic_Platform

²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_People's_Party

²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/fundacjablisko>

alisation, which are known to generate problematic effects. In Poland, smog is primarily the result of the inefficient approach to heating by individual private households.

KOMITET KRYZYSOWY HUMANISTYKI POLSKIEJ (KKHP)

In the activities of the Committee, there is a clear focus on combining a variety of social circles and mobilising them by seeking to articulate common interests and points of view. The Committee, therefore, avoids referring to party identities in the process of mobilising its supporters. It talks about fostering its demands with the representatives of various political parties to keep the issues and concerns of the academy and especially the Humanities as close to public debate as possible.

KLUBY GAZETY POLSKIEJ (KGP)

The Clubs project has a distinct identity, strongly associated with the content of the weekly paper *Gazeta Polska*, which hosts the network, and with its columnists and journalists. This distinctive identity combines with public actions presented as the defence of lost causes. In this way, the Clubs have built up a sense of their heroism and the exceptional status of their members. At the same time, the Clubs are close to the Law and Justice party and government. It is an interesting case of a social movement strongly associated with a political party. We are dealing not with an alliance between partners who negotiate their interests and goals, but with a case of historical symbiosis. The basis for this is the Smolensk Catastrophe, which for the actors concerned acts as a 'reservoir of meaning', rather than as a simple political goal. Cooperation is not based on compromises, concessions, or the search for common ground, but loyalty to the memory of an event and the belief that it is significant for contemporary Polish politics.

MARSZ NIEPODLEGŁOŚCI (MN)

The March is organised by associations, which can be considered traditional actors of civil society. Nevertheless, the nature of the March goes far beyond their activities and the mobilisa-

tion of nationalistic associations' communities and people. Politicians are present during the March, although they are not the leaders. The demonstration owes its size to horizontal mobilisation based on nationalist ideology and anti-establishment sentiments. Major political parties, the media elites, but also representatives of non-right-wing social organisations, are all considered to be representatives of the establishment.

MAPPING MULTIPLIERS OF NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN POLAND

KOMITET OBRONY DEMOKRACJI

(COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENCE OF DEMOCRACY)

is a grass-roots civic movement founded in 2015 in Warsaw. Its goal is to protect the rule of law, democracy and European values in Poland. They mobilise people online via Facebook and offline in protest marches.

RAZEM (TOGETHER)

is a political party founded in Spring 2015 by activists of leftist youth organisations and politicians who left the green party ("Zieloni 2004").

KLUBY GAZETY POLSKIEJ (CLUBS OF GAZETA POLSKA)

are centered around the right-wing weekly Gazeta Polska. The development of the Clubs was related to the Smolensk plane crash in 2010 and members of the Clubs are involved in organising monthly commemorations.

MARSZ NIEPODLEGŁOŚCI (MARCH OF INDEPENDENCE)

is an annual march of nationalists held on November 11th on the Polish Independence Day.

INICJATYWA PRACOWNICZA (WORKERS' INITIATIVE)

was formed in 2001 first as an informal group of worker activists; in September 2004, IP was established as a formal but independent and grass-roots trade union, seeing itself in the anarcho-syndicalist and revolutionary syndicalism tradition.

KONGRES RUCHÓW MIEJSKICH

(CONGRESS OF URBAN MOVEMENTS)

is the most important platform for Polish urban movements.

MIASTO JEST NASZE (THE CITY IS OURS)

is a local movement in Warsaw. It is also very active and popular on Facebook, which is used for the critique of the local government, sharing information and spreading progressive ideas about urban politics.

POLSKI ALARM SMOGOWY (POLISH SMOG ALERT)

is a network of local organisations fighting to improve air quality.

KOMITET KRYZYSOWY HUMANISTYKI POLSKIEJ

(CRISIS COMMITTEE FOR POLISH HUMANITIES)

was founded after the announcement of the liquidation of the philosophy department at the University of Białystok (2013). The dynamics of the activities extend beyond that local struggle and criticise the reforms of science introduced in 2011.

MAPPING NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN PORTUGAL



INTRODUCTION

In relation to civic engagement in Portugal, Cabral et al. (2008) says that the existing relationship between citizenship and equality in Portugal is complex and differentiated.¹ It is unquestionable that feelings of social inequality are related to the lack of resources that ordinary Portuguese people have for participation in civic life. A vast majority of Portuguese have begun to feel deeply 'distant from power'.² Mattoso (2008) claims that in Portugal the State plays a strong regulatory role within society, but there is a large gap between elected and public officials and those they are supposed to represent. Furthermore, Portugal tries to copy the performance standards of more developed states. This is visible in often very progressive legislation and well drafted policies. However, political actors do not implement those standards in the operations of government and in their policy practice.

Portugal has a mainland surface of over ninety-two thousand square kilometres and two autonomous archipelago regions – the Azores and Madeira. Located at the most western point of Europe,³ Portugal's estimated population is 10.5 million, divided almost equally between women (51%) and men (49%). Following current European trends, the majority of the population lives in cities (particularly Lisbon and Porto) with the rural interior territories suffering from a severe process of depopulation.

According to Ávila and Amorim (2014), Portugal faces major social challenges.⁴ In 2011, Portugal's population was the sixth oldest in the world. Currently, there are 130 senior citizens (65+) for every 100 children (0 to 14).⁵ Furthermore, due to the financial crisis and ensuing recession, 2015 saw youth



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<http://www.ua.pt/aaaaua/4is>

- 1 CABRAL, M., F. Silva e T. Saraiva (orgs.) (2008). *Cidadania & Participação*, Lisboa, Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa.
- 2 MATTOSO, J. (2008). *A Identidade Nacional*, 4.ª ed., Lisboa, Gradiva.
- 3 Ávila, L. Amorim, M. – Aveiro University (2014). *The State of Social Entrepreneurship in Portugal*, SEFORIS Country Report.
- 4 Ávila, L. Amorim, M. – Aveiro University (2014). *The State of Social Entrepreneurship in Portugal*, SEFORIS Country Report.
- 5 Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos. 2012. "Projeções 2030 e o Futuro". <https://www.ffms.pt/publicacoes/detalhe/1586/projecoes-2030>.

unemployment reach a record high of 37.7%.⁶ Social organisations, deeply affected by government budget cuts, are concerned about diversifying their sources of revenue in order to become more sustainable and survive the crisis. For these reasons, social entrepreneurship is increasingly at the centre of discussions, especially between academics and actors in the social economy.⁷

This brief overview highlights the importance of the social and cultural sector in Portugal. Working within constrained conditions, the sector has managed to deliver support to people locally through social, economic, cultural and environmental initiatives. This is stimulating the society to rethink its social model, and to look at social entrepreneurship and civic engagement as a way to address social needs. To gain a better understanding of these initiatives, some projects have recently been launched to assess the state of the art in civic engagement. These include the Social Innovation Map and the Social Investment Lab, both conducted by the Social Entrepreneurship Institute.⁸ The ES+ methodology was the core tool for the identification of these initiatives. Megre, Martins and Salvado (2012, p. 100) explain the ES+ methodology as follows: *“ES+ is a strategic and innovative research methodology to identify and map social entrepreneurship initiatives with high potential for social and environmental transformation (...) The general goal of this methodology is to promote local and regional development (by identifying and characterising) socioeconomic and environmental initiatives and the individuals that lead them in a specific region, and to understand which social and environmental initiatives exist in that region”*.⁹ This project included 1,755 in depth interviews with local social experts from the North, Centre and Alentejo regions, and can therefore be

considered among the most comprehensive conducted in recent years.¹⁰

In spite of a national tendency to focus on the unaccomplished projects of collective dreams, a great deal has been achieved through 40 years of democracy in Portugal. The examples presented in this study are indeed examples of the vitality of Portuguese civil society organisations and actors, collectives and movements.

CONTEMPORARY TENDENCIES IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN PORTUGAL

In Portugal, citizenship practices such as civic mobilisation, participation in associations, political parties, trade unions, and voluntary welfare organisations, increases with the size of clusters. According to Silva, Aboim e Saraiva (2008), *“Living in a small, medium or large city affects the way how rights and duties of citizenship are exercised”*.¹¹ Physical distance to political power is smaller since spatial proximity facilitates contact between citizens and institutions. On the other hand, in a wider urban context, opportunities for interaction and political discussion are greater due to population density: the relative anonymity of urban life, frequent contact with each other, foster occasional meetings and unexpected elective affinities.¹²

Although all civil society actors (CSAs) interviewed as part of the Social Innovation Map and the Social Investment Lab projects recognised that participation is a fundamental part of their work, very few have clearly defined engagement strategies. Rather the most common approach tends to be quite ad-hoc and short term, engaging target groups in specific

6 Pordata.2014. “Taxa de desemprego: total e por grupo etário (%)”. Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos. [http://www.pordata.pt/Portugal/Taxa+de+desemprego+total+e+por+grupo+etario+\(percentagem\)-553](http://www.pordata.pt/Portugal/Taxa+de+desemprego+total+e+por+grupo+etario+(percentagem)-553)

7 Ávila, L. Amorim, M. – Aveiro University (2014). The State of Social Entrepreneurship in Portugal, SEFORIS Country Report.

8 IES-SBS Social Investment Lab – <http://www.investimentosocial.pt>; ES+ Methodology, MIES – Social Innovation Map from North, Center and Alentejo Regions, 2014 – www.mies.pt.

9 Megre, R., Martins, M. A., & Salvado, C. J. (2012). ES + Methodology: Mapping social entrepreneurship. ACRN Journal of Entrepreneurship Perspectives, 1(1), 97-110.

10 ES+ Methodology, MIES – Social Innovation Map from North, Center and Alentejo Regions, 2014 – www.mies.pt.

11 SILVA, Filipe, ABOIM, Sofia; SARAIVA, Tiago (2008), “Participação cívica e vida urbana em Portugal”, in M. V. Cabral, F. C. Silva e T. Saraiva (orgs.), Cidade e cidadania, Lisboa, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, pp. 213-241.

12 SILVA, Filipe, ABOIM, Sofia; SARAIVA, Tiago (2008), “Participação cívica e vida urbana em Portugal”, in M. V. Cabral, F. C. Silva e T. Saraiva (orgs.), Cidade e cidadania, Lisboa, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, pp. 213-241.

Citizens and artist from
VivaCidade. Dress
up city Voids project
co-illustrating urban
furniture. Image source:
www.citytoolbox.net //
Photo by Ivo Tavares.





actions or projects. In practice, then, participation tends to be short-term rather than long-term, although CSAs agree that both are necessary for successful civic engagement. Another point is that the same groups tend to be targeted repeatedly. For example, most organisations engage young people, as well as those working with youth. Others engage specific target groups of project-based activities such as teachers, local authorities or media.

The most commonly used tools for fostering participation and civic engagement by civil society actors are awareness raising campaigns and activities, complemented by advocacy work, capacity building and formal and non-formal (global) educa-

tion. Running workshops with schools and civil society organisations (CSOs), organising teacher-training seminars and training sessions for volunteers, organising conferences and debates, as well as online and offline advocacy campaigns (letter writing, petitions, calls for action) were commonly mentioned engagement methods.

The financial crisis is promoting greater reflection within CSOs about who they are, what they are trying to achieve and what they want to do. In particular, CSOs are starting to see the need to take a more systemic approach to working for change, rather than running ad-hoc activities. Several CSAs interviewed during the Social Innovation Map and the

One Lata 65 participant shows off her weapon of creativity: a can of spray paint. Image source: <https://www.facebook.com/Lata65> // Photo by Rui Soares.

Social Investment Lab projects felt that CSOs are beginning to change the public governance system from within: sharing new paradigms and learning through alternative initiatives and from the experience of social movements. The crisis is understood as offering increased opportunities for engagement, but also as bringing with it some threats. The main opportunity CSAs see is that is a chance to demonstrate alternatives: people have realised that the current system is not working and are looking for something different. Thus, there has been an increase in public willingness to listen to civil society and its ideas for promoting change. Practical examples including time banks, food and energy self-sufficiency, community gardens, the sharing economy, up-cycling, sustainable urban mobility (as expressed by a climate-friendly and urban liveability transport policy), among others, demonstrate that things can be done differently. This is extremely important. Indeed, as one member of the Portuguese transition movement pointed out, “(...) *frustration can be a motivation for change; but we also need to dream, and have the desire to change*”.¹³ Seeing alternatives motivates people to dream and imagine things differently. It is also a chance to reconnect people with the values of solidarity, collective action and humanism, rather than individualism.

Community arts are also very relevant to civic engagement in Portugal. On this front, we would like to highlight the PARTIS programme¹⁴ funded by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.¹⁵ This programme puts into practice the conviction that art is an engine of social inclusion and change, because it has the unique power to unite people. PARTIS has been designed to support projects that use artistic practices – music, photography, video, theatre, dance and circus – as tools to create bridges between communities that would not usually meet.

As mentioned above, the urban-rural divide is an important social issue for Portugal. A good example of urban-rural activities of relevance to civic engagement today is the PROVE

project.¹⁶ This is an inter-territorial co-operation project between eight local action groups (LAGs) located around Portugal. Taking into account the proximity of producers and consumers in peri-urban areas, PROVE aims to promote new forms of short marketing chain between small producers and consumers thereby i) helping producers to sell their produce directly, immediately obtaining a fair price for their products, while ii) consumers receive quality products and have direct contact with producers.

Unlike in many countries of the European Union, the contemporary Portuguese political and social scene does not have a significant extremist or right-wing movement. Such ideological positions are to date not represented in the Portuguese Parliament and the only existing right-wing party got 0,5% of the vote in the last election (October 2015). Nevertheless, the Internal Security 2015 Annual Report states that there was a slight intensification of political and social activism in opposition to migration policies, the hosting of refugees and what was termed the ‘islamisation of Europe’ in the report.¹⁷ Although those activities have not translated into violent actions yet, this ideology is spreading and so is the radicalisation of its activists. Yet, the response of Portuguese civil society to the refugee crisis in Europe has been resolutely on the side of ‘welcome’. Together with public authorities, this movement created the PAR or Refugee Support Platform.¹⁸ This is a network of civil society organisations whose aim is to support the hosting of refugees during the ongoing humanitarian crisis. Any organisation sharing this aim may join the platform. PAR has been formally recognised by the Portuguese government through a co-operation protocol and is a member of the Working Group for the Migration Agenda.¹⁹

The ‘Estado Novo’ or the Second Republic, was the corporatist authoritarian regime (often considered fascist) regime in Portugal from 1933 through 1974, when it was ousted by

13 ES+ Methodology, MIES – Social Innovation Map from North, Centre and Alentejo Regions, 2014 – www.mies.pt.

14 <http://gulbenkian.pt/projecto/partis> and https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_R_746_v5m4TfZ7nU9o2tVH1C8Bf9uVM

15 <https://gulbenkian.pt/en>

16 <http://www.prove.com.pt/www/english.T9.php>

17 Portuguese Internal Security 2015 Annual Report pp. 81. <http://www.portugal.gov.pt/media/18859123/20160331-rasi-2015.pdf>

18 <http://www.refugiados.pt/home-en>

19 <http://www.refugiados.acm.gov.pt>

the peaceful 'Carnation Revolution',²⁰ emphasised feelings of distance from power and detachment from politics. Participation culture in Portugal was already very low, and recent participation trends have been similar to those all over the developed world. In particular, the level of electoral participation in Portugal has been falling consistently. It has revealed a marked decline in all forms of conventional political participation, and is considered to be an indicator of the so-called 'crisis of representation' in Portugal and across Europe.²¹ In fact, and as elsewhere, the Portuguese participation reality demonstrates the extent to which participation is not an automatic act in democracies, and to which the socialisation of political participation is a slow process. Jalali and Silva point out that *"more transparent political processes are obvious starting points to encourage greater participation"*.²²

An excellent example of civic engagement, emerging from this context is the case of call centre workers, who are among the worst affected by the most extreme form of modern labour market 'precariousness', and who formed their own union. The 'Are you connected?' union defends the rights of those workers, who felt they were not being properly represented by traditional unions who are not prepared to address the new forms of exploitation that this type of employment entails.²³ With a broader scope, the 'Inflexible Precarious' association,²⁴ which views austerity as the *"end of the line for democracy"*,²⁵ strives to eliminate all forms of precarious employment and exploitation of the labour force. In their manifesto, they argue that precarious employment and the new issues of the working world challenge unionism to do better, but do not oppose it, and call for joint action to tackle

the issues of both precarious workers and the unemployed. These initiatives reveal that workers are mobilising for their employment rights, even though the movement does not explicitly challenge the economic and political system that created the precarious working conditions in the first place.

After the 1974 revolution neighbourhood commissions emerged spontaneously. Some have evolved into more formal organisations, and now include established neighbourhood associations and housing cooperatives. These organisations are an important part of present day Portuguese civil society and democracy. They allow citizens to aggregate their interests and defend their causes in a context of growing dissatisfaction with representative democracy which is frequently associated with technocratic governance mechanisms, social individualisation and the globalisation not only of markets, but also of decision-making processes, and which has highlighted participation as a factor that may contribute to the quality of democratic governance.²⁶ From this perspective, participation is more than a vehicle for equality, it also promotes political legitimacy in complex contemporary democracies.

Furthermore, the incentives given by public authorities and private foundations for the development and implementation of new civil society initiatives in social entrepreneurship to address the current youth employment crisis and the needs of the aged are increasing. This approach of initiating cooperation between the civic and state sectors is presented as one way to find solutions to various social problems, at the same time as promoting self-employment and active ageing. A good example of this approach is the programme 'United at Work',²⁷ a social experiment testing an innovative methodology to promote intergenerational entrepreneurship, uniting young graduates looking for their first job (up to 30 years old) and unemployed or professionally inactive seniors who have advanced academic and professional qualifications (over 55 years of old).

20 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estado_Novo_\(Portugal\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estado_Novo_(Portugal))

21 SILVA, Filipe, ABOIM, Sofia; SARAIVA, Tiago (2008), "Participação cívica e vida urbana em Portugal", in M. V. Cabral, F. C. Silva e T. Saraiva (orgs.), *Cidade e cidadania*, Lisboa, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, pp. 213-241.

22 JALALI, Carlos; SILVA, Patrícia (2009), "A culpa morre sempre solteira? Accountability, qualidade da democracia e governação em Portugal", in Manuel Villaverde Cabral, Marina Costa Lobo e Rui Feijó (orgs.), *Portugal uma democracia em construção*, Lisboa, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, pp. 285-308.

23 <http://www.stcc.pt/index.html>

24 <http://www.precarios.net>

25 Camila Rodrigues, Participation and the Quality of Democracy in Portugal, *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 108 | 2015, 75-94.

26 Smismans, Stijn (2006), "Civil Society and European Governance: From Concepts to Research Agenda", in Stijn Smismans (ed.), *Civil Society and Legitimate European Governance*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 3-19.

27 <http://uaw.unitedatwork.eu/index.php>



Orquestra Todos, an intercultural music project for social inclusion promoted within Mouraria urban regeneration programme. Image source: www.festivaltodos.com/page/view/5/orquestra_todos
// Photo by Luís Pavão

CONTEMPORARY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DISCOURSE/S

*"For me, ideas of engaging the masses, gathering partners for my cause or for my project, does not really drive me. I do not identify myself with the idea of 'marketing for clients' or seeing this in a consumption and marketing perspective ... I'm fascinated with the alternative solutions people find and how people can experiment and try. Apathy is what worries me."*²⁸

28 Testimony from a member of local collectives and movements.

*"In order to reach people, we really need to be with them, to meet them. Maybe we CSOs' people see ourselves too much as professionals – we don't meet with people from the outside world enough regularly of meetings is needed in order to stimulate reflection and reach action".*²⁹

Civil society actors interviewed as part of the Social Innovation Map and the Social Investment Lab recognised that there are different stages of engagement along a continuum, mentioning the importance of 'meeting people where they

29 Testimony from a civil society actor.

are' and acknowledging different scales of engagement, ranging from personal to collective, local to global, mainstream to alternative, social to political. People have different needs depending on where they are in their engagement journeys, and whilst some may be receptive to open, critically reflecting engagement processes, others may find it easier to engage if they are provided with certain concrete actions or guidelines to follow. Recognising that engagement is a process, a pathway or a journey, means being able to value engagement at all levels or stages. However, interviewed civil society recognised that they are often quick to judge or criticise what they perceive to be 'shallow' or uncritical forms of engagement given that there is a very real concern about how to move away from fragmented, ad-hoc engagement to more in-depth and long term commitment. At the same time, there is scepticism. One civil society actor pertinently questioned whether *"it is necessary to know global issues by heart and to have spent hours reflecting on them before becoming involved in any action for change? We need to include everyone and have different 'entry levels'"*. In the end, the people engaged in civil society actions are all of different ages, have different backgrounds, different levels of knowledge and experience and different needs for support to be able to participate. All the civil society actors interviewed felt there was a need to link into the political debates resulting from the crisis, to support citizens in engaging in participative and representative political processes and to advocate for policy changes and new governance structures.

Are CSOs engaging for revolution or evolution? Several civil society actors argued that civil society organisations should see themselves as 'system changers'. Some felt that civil society organisations should be *"more political, to dispense with political correctness, as our impartiality sometimes pushes us away"*, and others felt it was important to *"create spaces for resistance"*.³⁰ Are civil society organisations prepared to be more radical, to step out of their 'safe world'? Although there were no clear answers to these questions, there was general agreement that the crisis requires systemic change. There were references to the Commons, Creative Commons, De-Growth and the Transition Movement (a

movement of communities coming together to reimagine and rebuild our world) and for political engagement, if we want any real change towards greater global justice.

Most of the media platforms accessible to activists or civil society actors consolidated initiatives already working at scale. Emerging initiatives have little access to mainstream media and gain visibility mainly through online and social media or through traditional media programmes with modest reach. In the last years, the theme of entrepreneurship has gained a lot of attention and support by both traditional and online media. Nevertheless, it is something of an exception taking in account the vast range of topics and issues new civil society actors are working on in Portugal at the moment.

Some civil society actors interviewed raised their sense that some organisations, especially development NGOs, are trying to 'force' the global perspective onto the agenda, to the detriment of local perspectives and realities. Interviewed civil society actors agreed that it is very difficult to engage citizens for a global cause or issue, and many say they have only succeeded when breaking it down to very local realities and interests, among them the crisis situation. All actors see the need to be familiar with what is going on at the local level and to make much stronger links to the local context. Many emphasised the need to 'move out of the civil society bubble', to work more at the local level and to link better with social movements and other local initiatives and organisations. Actors mentioned that civil society organisations and social movements can learn from each other. Civil society organisations bring the global educational and learning perspective, social movements the direct action. Others mentioned that the crisis 'makes the world disappear' and makes civil society actors focus only on the here and now. This is a challenge to civil society organisations and actors in Portugal. Although it might be a challenging step to make, some actors suggested their role could be to help social movements bring the European and global dimension to their protests and make these links. The crisis and its implications in various countries reveal the interconnectedness of the world and this should be used as an opportunity to make local-global connections.

30 Testimony from a member of local collectives and movements.

SITUATIONS, NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF CIVIC ACTORS IN PORTUGAL

The relationship between public authorities and civil society has improved dramatically since the ouster of the authoritarian regime in 1974. At the same time, some ambiguity remains about which functions the State should not only finance, but also perform, and which functions it can rely on civil society organisations and civic actors to carry out with state support. Similarly, there remain doubts both on the part of the civil society sector and the public at large about the appropriateness of civil society's co-operation with the State, and about how to preserve a meaningful degree of autonomy for civil society while pursuing co-operation between public authorities and civil society groups.

Indeed, the question is whether civil society and public authorities are really engaging with what matters to the people. Civic actors felt that engagement efforts are often missing a clear purpose that the people they are trying to engage can relate to. Several of those interviewed highlighted the importance of entering into citizens' worlds rather than trying to bring them into the world of civil society organisations and mobilise them for 'its' issues. Indeed, many actors put forward that civic organisations tend not to carry out base-line needs and situation assessments and, therefore, do not always adapt to the requirements of their target groups. Some of the interviewed actors felt that this could be because civil society organisations have become too 'professionalised' and that this has distanced them from the public at large.

This raises the question of ownership and whose agenda is being promoted. Developing a sense of ownership was recognised as a critical success factor for long lasting engagement, yet a challenge for civic actors at present. Several reasons for lack of ownership or disengagement were pointed out, namely: disappointment and lack of trust in civil society organisations and public authorities, limited involvement in the implementation phase of activities rather than at all stages (especially initiation and planning), low investment in designing and implementing the engagement process for their supporters/volunteers/civic actors (related to gaps in

resources and the weak culture of participation in the governance and management of CSOs), and the fact that results are not immediately visible, so it is difficult to see the impact of one's actions.

Discussion also centred on the importance of tailoring engagement strategies to meet the needs of different groups, something which is not necessarily being addressed at present within civil society organisations and public authorities, due to a lack of time and their focus on project development. It is obvious that the creation of a public participation policy is much needed to support the capacity building of all involved in and concerned by decision-making processes.

In the private sector, Foundations such as the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation³¹ and that of Energias de Portugal – EDP (the Portuguese energy company)³² are playing a very important role in supporting and funding new civil society initiatives and organisations. Internationally, from 2013 to 2016, the European Economic Area (EEA) Grants implemented a major and ambitious programme for supporting active citizenship projects and NGOs in Portugal.³³

The Portuguese civil society sector's roots date back nearly a millennium. Early monarchs and Roman Catholic Church leaders created and supported a wide array of charitable institutions, and later the Portuguese maritime ventures introduced new forms of civil society activity. With the Industrial Revolution, new mutual associations emerged to address the needs of people that had been affected by the major socio-economic and societal changes of the time.

Through it all, however, Portuguese civil society organisations operated within the constraints of a paternalistic social regime featuring a close alliance between Church, State and rural elites. This kept civil society confined to assistance or charity activities through much of its history, except for a brief liberal interlude in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. With

31 <http://gulbenkian.pt>

32 www.fundacaoedp.pt

33 <http://eeagrants.org>
<http://gulbenkian.pt/en/initiatives/cidadania-ativa-programme>

the rise of the Salazar regime in 1926, the operations of civil society organisations were again confined. The overthrow of this regime in the early 1970s opened the way for a surge in civic and not-for-profit activity. As a consequence, Portugal has a civil society sector that, while smaller than its counterparts elsewhere in Western Europe, is substantially larger than its counterparts in many of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe with which Portugal shares a recent history of authoritarian control. After the fall of the 'Estado Novo' dictatorship in 1974, and the establishment of democracy, the first development NGOs started their operations. It was only on the 24th of May 1994 that the Portuguese State recognised the status of development NGOs, defining their principles, ways of action and organisation.

Civil society organisations continuously suffer from a lack of financial resources, such that they work primarily with volunteers rather than permanent staff. This is a problematic development, as clearly volunteering should not replace paid labour. Those volunteers are the new civil society actors. The permanent struggle for funding also limits and narrows the scope of their activities, especially concerning the design of long-term work strategies. *"Volunteering can thus be perceived in many cases, as a labour force that, replaces paid specialised professionals when there is not enough funding".*³⁴

The crisis has seen a rise in the number of social experiments undertaken by active citizens and the creation of alternative ways of doing things. However, where are the civic organisations in all of this? Do civic organisations want to be part of the experiments and the modelling of alternatives, and if so, how? What implications does this have for engagement strategies, as would this not mean leaving pre-determined, top down agendas focused on 'engaging the masses' behind, and providing space for experimentation, new ways of thinking and trying out new ways of doing? If civil society organisations want to be involved in *"visioning other interventions and thinking of alternatives"*³⁵ then an engagement approach which focuses on mobilising for a pre-determined cause or action may no longer be the most appropriate as the crisis

promotes the *"self-organisation of alternatives"*.³⁶ The big question is, *"how do we connect all of these 'alternatives'?"* *Any movement to achieve change must be systemic".*³⁷

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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36 Testimony from a civil society actor.

37 Testimony from a civil society actor.

38 IES-SBS Social Investment Lab – <http://www.investimentosocial.pt>; ES+ Methodology, MIES – Social Innovation Map from North, Center and Alentejo Regions, 2014 – www.mies.pt; DEEEP4 project – citizens' empowerment for global justice – www.deeep.org.

34 Testimony from a civil society actor.

35 Testimony from a civil society actor.

MAPPING MULTIPLIERS OF NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN PORTUGAL

PORTUGAL PARTICIPA – CAMINHOS PARA A INOVAÇÃO SOCIETAL

aims at promoting processes of participatory democracy to produce transformative change in society by empowering communities as well as individual and collective prosperity.

ASSOCIAÇÃO RENOVAR A MOURARIA

was created in 2008 and works on cultural, social, touristic and economical dynamisation of Mouraria neighbourhood in Lisbon.

VIVACIDADE. DRESS UP THE CITY VOIDS

is a community engagement project through place-making that develops temporary urban interventions in city voids. The the cross-sectorial collaboration between a municipality, an NGO and a cultural enterprise promotes urban change by implementing participatory processes that join citizens, artistic and academic communities for collective and collaborative solutions for abandoned spaces.

LATA 65

has been offering Lisbon's senior citizens an opportunity to explore street art firsthand since 2012. The popular urban art workshop has been developed with the intention to use street art as a bridge between generations, to spread creative expression throughout the city's most neglected areas and to shift perspectives on old age.

COMMUNITY GARDENS

The concept of community gardens spread out all over the country in the last 10 years, mainly promoted by the municipalities, [environmental NGOs](#) and some [companies of waste management](#). The main goals are related to providing land for self-sufficient small scale farming, leisure and health, and environmental education (reforestation, control of invasive species and respect for nature).

ZERO DESPERDICIO (ZERO WASTE)

is a citizens' initiative with the overall goal to promote the use of all surplus prepared food products, distributing them among people with food shortages under controlled conditions of hygiene and food safety, thus avoiding waste.

TIME BANKS

are a recent concept in Portugal. The first time bank agency in Portugal was created in 2002. Today, there are more than 1900 Time Bank members of whom 74% are women. Currently, there are 28 agencies working in various parts of Portugal.

COLORADD

is a social innovation initiative. Their app is a sign code for aiding colour blind people to recognise colours, while contributing to their social integration and welfare, turning communication more efficient, responsible and inclusive.

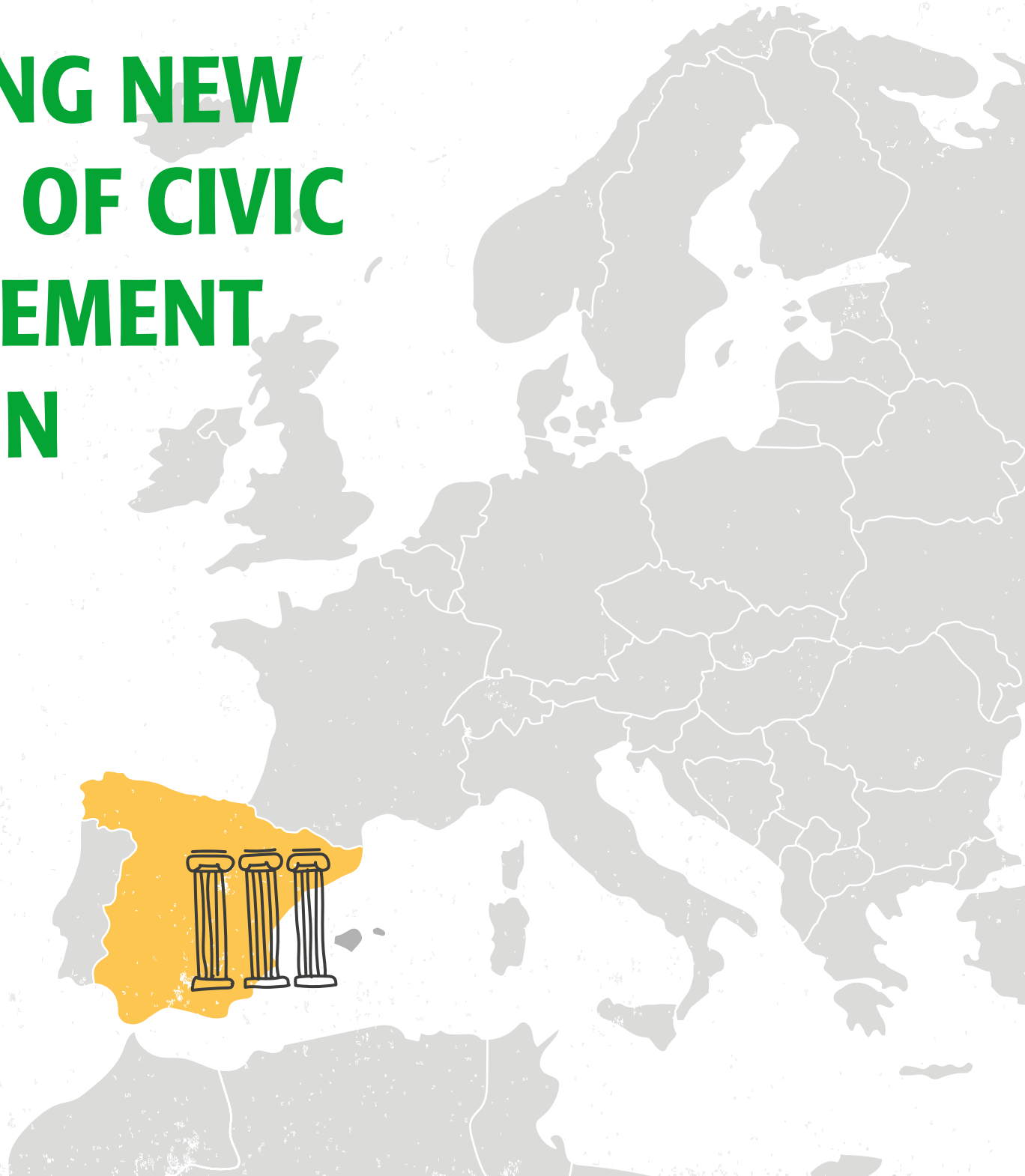
THE MAP OF INNOVATION AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN PORTUGAL

is a research project that will discover and map innovative initiatives by seeking to create knowledge, using a methodology which closely involves local communities.

CIDADANIA 2.0

is a conference and online platform about tools and networks for a better dialogue in society.

MAPPING NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN SPAIN



INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Spain has become something of a laboratory for bottom-up organising and empowerment. Beginning with 2011, [the 15M movement](#) (also internationally known as the Indignados Movement or the Spanish Revolution) has not just set the political agenda by framing the economic crisis and austerity measures as contrary to democratic principles, it has generated countless neighbourhood assemblies and amplified the voice of those that already existed, in addition to spawning new forms of civic engagement such as the [Platform Against the Evictions](#) (*Plataforma de Afectados por las Hipotecas: PAH*) and the “[citizen tides](#)” (known in Spain as *Mareas*) for the defence of social rights.

The ‘Tides’ were the first concrete post-15M tool for participation created by the citizens: groups of citizens organised around different social rights such as education, health, public services, and so on. Each tide was represented by a particular colour (for example, green for education) and each fought against the cuts in their area. Their claims were blocked by the authorities, reconfirming the sense among ordinary people that the “politicians do not represent us,” also a key message during the 15M. This sense of not being represented is informed by the strong perception of members of the general public that the political system is characterised by corruption, paternalism, incompetent policy-making, a lack of transparency, and a lack of mechanisms for citizen-led decision-making.

The movement’s ability to garner broad support among a majority of the population did not, however, result in institutional change, despite the movement’s best efforts to use every available mechanism. As people grew more and more frustrated, and the political class grew more indifferent, the institutional glass ceiling began to crack. 2014 saw the emergence of new political experiments that not only spoke the language of the new social movements, but also included some of its most familiar faces. [Podemos](#) has certainly been the most successful of these experiments on the national level, but there have also been interesting experiences at the local level, in cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, A Coruña, Cádiz and Zaragoza to name just a few.



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Many of those initiatives were/are led by well-known activists, community organisations and some political parties. These demanded more accountability on the part of politics, including greater citizen oversight, more community-based policies (named by some academics as 'Políticas de proximidad', literally 'proximity policies') and direct democracy in two of Spain's most important cities. Those platforms were considered as a post-2011 movement, identified by some academics and journalists as Municipalism or the Municipalist Movement. The fundamental thesis and proposition of this movement is 'Democracy begins with proximity'.

Podemos has continued working regionally, including presenting candidates for regional governance positions, and which as the second or third force in many places, have formed government with other political parties, and nationally, having won the 2nd largest share of the votes in national elections and the 3rd largest number of seats in the Parliament in the 2015 general elections. [Pablo Iglesias](#) is Podemos' best-known face and its main spokesperson. His party is identified as part of what has become known as the 'new politics' by some media and academics, and also includes left-wing platforms and some elements of the Ciudadanos, a liberal political party.

CONTEMPORARY TENDENCIES IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN SPAIN

Spain's new political map is more diverse than it used to be. Since the economic crisis in 2008 many of these new civic practices and the people engaged in them have become more mainstream. Whether in alternative social movements, or in more institutional spaces, approaches to making public policy have started to change.

The change in the way those practices are perceived is the result of Spain's experiment with the regeneration of democracy. 'New Politics' has developed out of the political statements and demands of the 15M. Podemos is the very expression of the 'New Politics', the new political party that emerged in 2014 and managed to win 1.2 million votes in the

Spanish elections to the European Parliament. Podemos, and its influence, is also the key to understanding all new political tendencies in Spain. At the same time, the best examples of what 'New Politics' is proposing and already achieving in some places are the municipalities being run by civic platforms, that include Podemos without it necessarily being the main actor. The Ciudadanos, a liberal party mentioned above, has also shown its capacity to capture the imagination of many citizens. It has been active in Spanish politics since approximately 2008, especially in Catalunya. It has effectively adopted the language of the 15M as a way of reaching out to the liberal community, which previously supported the Popular Party. Following Podemos' example, the Ciudadanos used the strategy of not defining themselves along the traditional right to left-wing spectrum of politics, and maintained some progressive positions on certain social and cultural issues such as marriage equality. However, the Ciudadanos does not have a strong grass-roots base, and has not established participatory processes of decision-making and interest aggregation. It is a top-down organisation which is perceived by Podemos and the previously mentioned municipal movements as the 'new right'.

In the meantime, the only conservative space that can still marshal some social and cultural participation in Spain is religious. Especially in the south of the country, the 'Hermanidades' (Brotherhoods) remain influential. These are organisations which traditionally take care of a church and the community that is connected to it. These organisations have some political influence. During the Franco dictatorship the Catholic Church remained loyal. Hence, while these Brotherhoods bring together active citizens, they cannot be considered agents of transformative politics, because of their conservatism and traditionalism. The civic platforms that have emerged from the Municipalist movement are better examples of new tendencies in civic engagement in contemporary Spain.

One civic platform which began as a political experiment is known as Ganemos ('Let's win'). It has experienced a lot of success, and has been replicated in many Spanish localities (sometimes under other names). In fact, it participated very successfully in the elections in May 2015, unexpectedly

Municipal Recipes,
a drawing mapping
the recent political
situation of Spain.
Illustration by
María Castelló and
ZEMOS98





winning a lot of seats. Today people involved in this platform are running some of the best-known cities around the country: [Ahora Madrid](#) (Madrid Now) in Madrid, [Barcelona en Comú](#) in Barcelona, [Por Cádiz Sí Se Puede](#) in Cádiz, [Marea Atlántica](#) in A Coruña and [Zaragoza en Común](#) in Zaragoza. At this point it is important to mention the increasing relevance of Feminism as part of the discourse of such civic platforms. [Ada Colau](#) (Mayor of Barcelona) even talked about a ‘feminisation of politics’. On the one hand, she referred to the importance of feminist movements for the success of the civic platforms. On the other, she referred to some of feminism’s new conceptions of politics, including, for example, the care economy. Be this as it may, it is also important to remember that such initiatives have a clear class and ‘privilege’ dimension in the Spanish context. They are almost exclusively an urban

phenomenon, and are formed mainly by what before the economic crisis were the white, ‘Spanish’, middle-classes.

We can identify two types of actors that have more obviously adopted new political practices emerging from the 15M experience. In the first place, these are civic platforms formed by civic activists that ran for election, and are now running local or regional institutions. On the other, there are the social movements which still function outside of the institutional framework and which prefer to remain separate and independent.

Taking these different spaces of engagement into account (i.e. inside or outside the institutions), we can see development in the direction of some tendencies, as follows:

15M movement. Photo by Julio Albarrán

DEMOCRATIC REGENERATION

The idea and ideal behind this is that of 'open public institutions'. It is becoming more popular to advocate for involving and facilitating civic participation in the process of creating, approving and implementing public policies, and it is also becoming more popular to actively try out new processes which focus on accessing citizen input and participation.

TECHNO-POLITICS

Free software and practices like 'do it yourself' (DIY) and 'Do it with others' (DIWO) are gaining traction. There is an increasing number of spaces, mainly in the cultural sphere, that are working on co-production and collaboration (like Medialab Prado). This is also related to the 'makers scene' where beyond 3D printing there is a philosophy of social economy (not 'collaborative economy'; in Spain there is a distinction between these two options) and self-management. These initiatives are activating citizen participation.

RENEWAL OF THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

The right to the city is making a comeback. Activists and initiatives of this kind are strongly influenced by 'tactical urbanism' and the 'urban Commons'. Their main issue is how to think about a fairer and sustainable social order in cities. These activists are confronting gentrification, housing speculation and the concept of the city as commodity, and they are trying to promote a re-distribution of resources. They are also trying to promote the recovery of abandoned places, urban gardening, and so on.

ECOLOGY

There is increasing awareness and advocacy for the natural environment, for a more sustainable approach to the production and consumption of goods and natural resources, imagining how cities can be liveable, not just places for work and production.

SOCIAL CENTRES AND 'MIXED COOPERATION'

These include occupied and civic spaces, that have long eclipsed the legacy of the traditional left-wing squatter movement, which has never been particularly able to dialogue with the newer actors and practices of civic engagement. These spaces have been defined as 'second generation' because they are conceived as civic laboratories where citizens are testing new ways of relating to each other, paying attention to how people feel, affinities and intangible knowledge, and rejecting the idea that principles of neoliberalism should govern social relations. This is a socio-cultural scene that is beyond the market and public institutions, and these centres are considered by some (academics) as part of the Commons. They practice what is known in Spain as 'mixed cooperation': hybrid models of governance. Some examples include: the [*Casa Invisible*](#) in Málaga, [*Patio Maravillas*](#) in Madrid and [*Ateneu Candela*](#) in Tarrasa.

If thinking about the context out of which such tendencies developed, we cannot avoid looking back to history. Even though democracy was established in Spain in 1977, many influential persons who were active during the dictatorship continued to have a role in the new political order. Guillem Martinez, along with other cultural workers, academics and activists, wrote a book called 'The Culture of Transition', in which they critique the 'change' that democracy brought to Spain, much of which has proven to be less transformation than continuity. This is just an example of the extent to which the dictatorship is still present in Spain. State corruption is not casual. It is the way things have been done in Spain for more than 40 years. After democracy was adopted, Spain experienced fast economic growth, fuelled by unfettered construction and tourism. And in 2008, when the financial crisis hit, the whole house of cards came crashing down.

All the same, Spain has also changed socially and people's minds have opened up in many ways. The generations born during democracy have enjoyed unprecedented access to higher education. Their parents, who lived through the dictatorship, were heavily invested in supporting their children to develop solid educational careers. Thus, when the crisis hit, many young people with university degrees were unable to

find work commensurate with their level of expertise. These generations of unemployed and under-employed young people were the founders of the Indignados movement. These young people grew up knowing nothing but economic abundance, and their ambitions were suddenly dashed by the crisis. So, the 15M movement emerged out of a melee of the problems passed down from the dictatorship, financial speculation in the lead up to the credit crisis, the housing bubble and more widespread political dissatisfaction, especially that of young unemployed people.

After the 15M, the citizens organised themselves in two ways, using 'tools', as follows:

NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSEMBLIES

When people left the squares and the social pressure began to decrease, citizens gathered to try to understand the lessons learned, and began to think about a new strategy, for how to bring these political ideas and issues into their daily lives. Citizens made claims for better public spaces and improvements to local infrastructure. They began to self-organise. The conservative media spoke about the end of the Indignados movement, but it was just a less visible period.

THE SPANISH 'MAREAS' OR TIDES OF CHANGE

While public services were being privatised and hefty budgetary cuts were being made in fields like research & development, education, healthcare, and so on, a great number of professionals in these fields organised sectoral protests. These protests were citizens' platforms, and included other citizens defending their most basic social rights. They organised hundreds of demonstrations against corruption. Their slogan was 'Don't save the banks, save the people'.

All the same, people's lives continued to descend into precariousness. By 2013, the youth unemployment rate had reached 50%. Many of the people involved were not interested in taking an active role in politics. Nevertheless, it was clear that at some point the only way to make change would be to occupy the institutions. That explains Podemos. However,

Podemos cannot explain everything. The importance of the Commons in the social discourse, a discourse which extends beyond Podemos, should not be underestimated. The Commons have become both platform and tool for protesting the fact that the public institutions have not been taking care of public amenities and goods, and for demanding policies focused on people, rather than on banks and corporations. It is a humanistic approach, and it uses many of the practices tested organically by cultural and social initiatives, some activists and academics.

The openness and flexibility of the term 'the Commons' mean that it has gathered under its umbrella a lot of different practices, actions and reflections. Even sometimes liberal ones. However, it is not a coincidence that one of the most closely related sentences to the 'New Politics' has been "to be the ones responsible for defending the Commons". That is why social movements, some communities and other stakeholders have been defending the idea of the Commons. For them it is a social defence approach to resist the power of public authorities coopted by big corporations and banks that privatise public goods and many Commons in the fields of economics, education, urban development, etc. A lot of these communities have found in this philosophy a way to find social value, but even sometimes a new economic framework (spaces for exchanging resources, alternative currencies, etc.) and also new models of authorship (collective authorship, collective funding, etc.)

CONTEMPORARY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DISCOURSE/S

Some discourses have become rallying cries for civic engagement in Spain. We can point to the following:

DISTRIBUTED SOCIAL POWER

While the government, the mainstream parties and the banks were concentrating and centralising power, the citizens started a struggle to subvert and to decentralise that power.

CIVIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

Citizens have become more vocal in demanding basic civil and social rights. As an example, the 'Platform Against Evictions' organised a series of actions called 'Escraches'. The protesters stood in front of politicians' homes, and following the principles of non-violent protest, carried out demonstrations demanding a more responsible approach to housing.

TRANSPARENCY/DIGITAL PRACTICES

The political and economic powers that be hid their agendas. In contradistinction, citizens started to struggle for more open and transparent information approaches. These movements shared, using digital means, their methodologies, their actions and sometimes even their strategies.

THE SOCIAL ECONOMY AND THE COMMONS

Against the background of a crisis brought about by a most brutal form of capitalism, citizens began to develop and promote ideas about new models of economic organisation, including the 'basic income'. Most of these models are citizen-centred and involve practices like organic farming, economic decline, etc. As we previously mentioned, the Commons has become essential to understanding new forms of civic action in Spain.

PARTICIPATION

This is the jewel in the crown of civic engagement in Spain, irrespective of the sector or of the type of actor. Whether educational, cultural or political institutions, everyone is trying to activate participatory processes. Social movements continue to press for authenticity, posing questions about the quality of participation that the spaces being created are offering. Do these really provide space for citizens to transform their cities? Or is what is being offered, in fact, reproducing subtle forms of control over social movements and civic organisations?

THE CARE-ECONOMY AND FEMINISM

For the 15M movement the main framework was how to value 'life'. This simplicity and radicalism could be interpreted as a legacy of the feminist struggle. With the onset of the crisis, awareness for the fact that the 'system' was not caring for its citizens began to grow. 'Care' is here not understood in the sense of 'health care' or as something only related to very individual and domestic situations. Thinkers like Marina Garcés promoted the idea that as citizens we are vulnerable and interdependent, such that 'life is a common issue'. Even if it was not a conscious decision to follow feminist principles, the key slogans of the 15M movement, including 'Let's care for our citizens and not for our banks' were inspired by principles like 'putting life in the centre of the debate', which do originate in feminism. At the same time, Spanish society remains deeply patriarchal and structural 'machismo' (male chauvinism) continues to hinder change in public policy and social relations. Digital feminist activism and an increasing number of feminist projects, including the influential magazine *Pikara*, have been influential in the development of new discourses of civic engagement.

Such contemporary discourses, influential for civic engagement, are formed in and are attractive for a particular milieu. Many of the activists who led the municipal platforms and even the leaders of Podemos have a very interesting profile which combines several dimensions including knowledge based on first-person experiences in activism; an academic profile, although not always anchored in institutional positions and impact on media. Most of them contributed to the legitimacy of those movements through a combination of journalism, activism and research. These hybrid profiles are really important for understanding why traditional media and academics reacted so defensively in the face of the 15M. To begin with both traditional academia and media denied the 15M was even happening. However, the number of ordinary people out on the streets along with their use of social media made it impossible to ignore. In this way, the legitimacy of mainstream media was undermined.

Academics reacted faster and with more curiosity than the media. Some young researchers tried to establish connections

between what was happening in the 15M and their studies of civil society and other related themes. Some well respected academics realised that this political movement needed theoretical support. The most interesting case is [Joan Subirats](#), a Spanish political scientist and professor at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. He frequently writes for Spanish media, sometimes even mainstream media, and over recent years he has written in support of the 15M and its aftermath, undoubtedly contributing to its legitimacy.

Digital media have also been an important spur for the emergence of contemporary discourses around civic engagement. Probably the most interesting case is www.eldiario.es, a digital platform run by a group of journalist-owners with the aim of addressing topics that the mainstream media were not covering. After just 3 years of operation, www.eldiario.es is the second most widely read news-site in Spain and it has increased the size of its team from 10 people to 40. It has managed to make this transition despite being funded mainly through subscriptions rather than advertising revenues, thus defending this as a way to guarantee their independence. Its role is changing the media landscape and is forcing mainstream media to keep pace with the discussion of topics and issues that have until recently never received much attention.

Spanish society has also developed increasingly ambivalent attitudes towards Europe as a political project. On one hand, it is clear that it is necessary to rebuild the European project so that it becomes more social and more equitable. The European Union has come under increasing criticism for what looks like and is interpreted by many of those in Spain who have been worst affected by the crisis as crony capitalism. On the other hand, the desire that does exist in Spain to build a new framework for Europe, also among new actors of civic engagement, has not been translated into new practices of connecting with other movements and actors outside Spain. Spain can sometimes be quite 'self-absorbed' and certainly it can be observed that Spanish civic actors are not well connected with peers from other countries in Europe, and even from Latin-America and North Africa to which historical ties are strong.

However, since the success of the 15M this has started to change. There are more and more people and organisations from civil society working on this. This can be observed in the increased interest of civic actors and ordinary people to follow what is happening in the news from other countries. For example, the elections in Greece in September 2016 were followed in detail not only by media but also by a lot of citizens. Furthermore, it is also tempting for many citizen and social movements to believe the story of Europe as a place of harmony among people and cultures. However, as the refugee crisis has shown, concrete policies do not seem to express 'European values'. So even though there appears to be a broader sense that something needs to change in the direction that European integration is taking, there remain too few positive and alternative policies and strategies coming from Spain and its social movements to respond to this.

It should also be noted that the development of a coherent discourse on Europe was not the number one priority of civil society organisations that appeared after the 15M. On the one hand, it required a lot of energy to bring all the different actors together. On the other, the material conditions of the majority of people involved were and continue to be very precarious. However, and as mentioned above, there is growing awareness of this question of broader spaces for action, not exclusively the nation State, and some actors are trying to establish international networks. Examples of this could be [The Commons Foundation](#) (which, legally speaking, is not a Foundation, but a cooperative), [ZEMOS98](#) and [Xnet](#).

SITUATIONS, NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF NEW CIVIC ACTORS

When it comes to the sustainability of contemporary initiatives or movements, it is really important to make the distinction between those agents and movements formed by activists who have now entered the 'institutions' and those who remained independent. We can observe rather different needs of these two groups of civic actors.



Copylove, a care economy workshop. Photo by Julio Albarrán

The new institutional agents need:

- to develop their political culture to be less confrontational and to take a more mature and respectful approach;
- to go beyond the traditional party-based model of engaging citizens in politics. This is key to building a system where citizens can really take part in politics and ensures the legitimization of those with political ambitions, rather than one which perpetuates tokenism. Podemos will self-destruct if it does not understand this. It has become clear that people do not want 'to be married' to political parties any longer;
- more active media support. Brutal attacks have been launched from conservative and mainstream media to belittle the legitimacy of these new institutional agents. These actions have taken a very sensationalist approach, publishing biased news without confirming the information, presenting certain legal issues as immoral and equating legally proved corruption (for example, that of the traditional political parties) with what are certainly questionable practices, but no more than that;
- institutional change on the national level. The Municipalist Movement will not succeed in bringing in progressive legislation if the national government is conservative.

The social movements need:

- to have access to funding for the process dimension of their work with people around their key issues. The main problem of sustainability Spanish activists and movements experience is that they lack of resources for doing their work. True, precariousness is part of the authenticity of their practices. At the same time, Spain's third sector is not an enabling environment that includes funders that would consider such processes and practices as relevant and important. Most foundations only support commercial issues and not political processes;
- to take part in broader European and international movements. Spanish movements are sometimes too focused on themselves and they should broaden their horizons through contacts and cooperation with similar movements abroad – in Europe and further afield;
- to cultivate and develop the idea of the 'political laboratory' that they have initiated. The 15M did not just happen. There were many experiences which created the invisible conditions for the movement to emerge. In most cases, it was the experimental dimension of such experiences which was important for their significance.

Furthermore, and because the funding situation is so important for sustainability, it is important to mention two successful cases which can act as models for a future funding landscape:

- [Goteo](#): This is a platform for civic crowdfunding and collaboration of citizen initiatives and social, cultural, technological and educational projects. However, their specificity lies in that they only accept open source projects. This means a project needs to be replicable and to be willing to share its 'source code';
- [COOP57](#): This is an organisation which offers ethical financial services. They provide loans to NGOs and social organisations, and have established new approaches for securing re-payment of those loans (using a shared system of responsibility within the community that supports the organisation which has requested funding). They will also re-negotiate the deadline and the conditions of the loans if an organisation is experiencing cash-flow problems.

The emergence of a new culture of political participation has generated much conflict within the traditional political parties, in some of the mainstream media and in those parts of society that have experienced the transition to democracy first hand. In some cases, such conflicts have been 'solved' by putting into practice superficial measures rather than the radical changes that would be required (for example, some political parties have begun allowing open lists in their internal democratic procedures or they have decided to be more transparent in some of their decision-making). This new political culture is, however, the battlefield of the new parties and social movements with the 'old school'.

This cultural transformation has been used smartly to show the rigidity of the traditional parties by some people active in the New Politics. Two very representative examples are the incidents involving Podemos when the new national Parliament was established after the elections in December 2015. The first one was when [Carolina Bescansa](#) brought her baby to the Parliament. This created heated debate about the issues of gender inequality, maternity/parental leave, patriarchy, and so. The second incident took place when Pablo Iglesias, and the number one Podemos delegate from Catalunya, [Xavier Domenech](#), kissed on the mouth in public. Those were strategic gestures in order to show a new culture which is emerging and that wants to be different from the 'old school'.

Another interesting example of the situation of old civil society and its relation to new civic actors are the trade unions. During the first years of democracy in Spain, the big trade unions played a crucial role in defending and improving workers' rights. However, today the major unions, especially the [UGT \(Unión General de Trabajadores\)](#) and [CCOO \(Comisiones Obreras\)](#), have become part of the establishment, and they have become indistinguishable from the Socialist Party (which ultimately has the most to lose with the advent of Podemos and the Municipalist Movements). Although there are a lot of small regionally active unions, these are not representative and do not have the strength to be influential in the political arena.

Within new institutional contexts it has been interesting to see how NGOs, cooperatives and associations have devel-

oped practical relationships based on political empathy. Both activists and organisations have taken up specific tasks on behalf of public institutions. However, this is not universally seen as positive. It has caused tension among activists and organisations, as there is competition for limited resources. An important question remains about how decisions are being taken, and how those taken are being transmitted to the public. Thus, some small organisations have had the opportunity to improve their material conditions through the opportunities that now exist for cooperation with the institutions. However, the question of how those who do not wish to work on behalf of the State are going to survive remains. Spain does not have a strong tradition of funding and grant-making schemes for really independent civil society organisations, which is also the result of the policies of 'old school' parties and organisations.

The situation and position of the Church is quite ambivalent, as we mentioned previously. Even though Spain is officially a secular country, the Church receives a great number of public grants, resources and special rights. At the same time, the Church and all the religious organisations in the catholic ecosystem claim that they are non-political. This position guarantees them a certain respect in civil society, even if their support has rapidly decreased in recent years, especially among the young people.

Finally, it is important to mention that traditional political parties and conservative mainstream media are also using cultural issues to attack the New Politics. In December, two puppeteers were sent to jail for showing a performance which included mention of ETA, the Basque terrorist organisation, to children. The performance and the mention of ETA was recorded, and since the activity was funded by Madrid City Council, it triggered an aggressive campaign against Ahora Madrid. There was a huge controversy. Journalists defined it as a 'cultural war'. So, although those close to the New Politics are making some headway into what is considered common sense in Spanish political culture, there remain important struggles between them and more traditional / mainstream actors.

MAPPING MULTIPLIERS OF NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN SPAIN

LA HIDRA COOP

is a Barcelona-based social enterprise that offers training, consulting and research services. They contribute to designing, implementing or evaluating social policies, cultural projects and educational plans in relation to public, private or autonomous institutions.

LA FUNDACIÓN DE LOS COMUNES

is a statewide network of collectives that spans different cultural areas and comprises culturally and politically driven groups working for a process of social democratisation. They are engaged in concepts of self-management, horizontal decision-making, the socialisation of material and immaterial resources and support for the Commons.

LA CASA INVISIBLE

is a Málaga-based social centre engaged in the Commons and other participatory projects.

COLABORABORA

is a Bilbao-based cooperative of social initiatives dedicated to the Commons, cultural activism, and social innovation.

COOP57

is a cooperative of financial services engaged in ethical funding and by that fostering social economy.

GOTEO

is an open source online platform for civic crowdfunding and collaboration on citizen initiatives and social, cultural, technological and educational projects.

BASURAMA

is a Madrid-based artist collective dedicated to research, cultural and environmental creation and production whose practices revolve around the reflection of trash, waste and reuse in all its formats and possible meanings.

MEDIALAB-PRADO

is a citizen laboratory for the production, research and broadcasting of cultural projects that explores forms of experimentation and collaborative learning that emerge from digital networks. It is part of the Department of Culture and Sports of the Madrid City Council.

INTERMEDIAE

is a laboratory for projects and social innovation in Madrid, specialised in visual culture and driven by participation. It investigates new ways of involving different audiences in art and culture.

LA HARINERA ZGZ

is a creative space in Zaragoza. The centre is dedicated to social innovation, active participation, empowerment, and the transformation of urban space through creativity.

PANDORA MIRABILIA

is a Madrid-based cooperative of women with feminist and interdisciplinary perspectives. They are active in research, social intervention and consultancy.

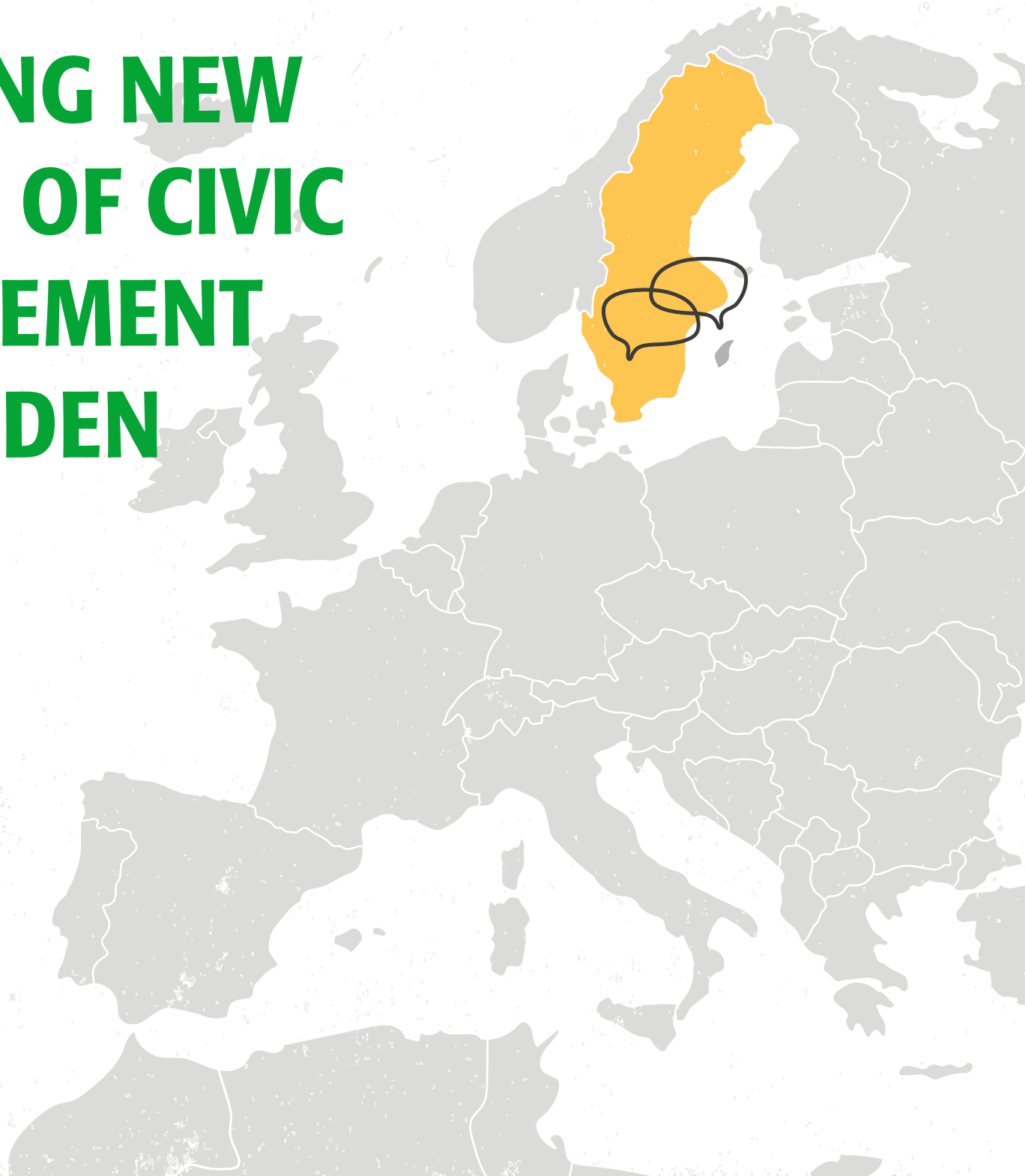
MARINA GARCÉS

is a Barcelona-based feminist writer and philosopher.

JOAN SUBIRATS

is a Barcelona-based academic involved in urbanism and the Commons.

MAPPING NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN SWEDEN



INTRODUCTION

The past years have seen a lot of change in the public discourse around a number of issues that are relevant for civic engagement and the democratic development of society. In recent years Sweden has seen the entry to Parliament of a right-wing populist party and increased polarisation in the political debate. This polarisation of the debate could be viewed as a risk for a democratic society that believes itself to be quite equal. At the same time, many positive impacts of people organising around the injustices they see in their own society, and of people speaking up and acting on those issues, can be noticed.

Young people of colour¹ and trans* people are among those who have marked a shift in the public debate, by most clearly raising their voices in the public discourse around racism and inequality in society over the past couple of years. A lot of their activism has happened online and through social media, but also through active engagement with more established civil society organisations. In order to build communities and societies that safeguard and ensure human rights, responsibilities and potentials, stable, effective, strong and efficient social institutions are necessary. Sweden has a long history of a strong and vibrant civil society sector. During the past two decades that sector has been faced with societal challenges and changes in behaviour when it comes to individuals' social engagement. For communities to move with the challenges of the times, there needs to be a supportive culture and space for new actors to inject new energy and perspectives into community development.

The twenty-teens are proving to be times of change and polarisation, not only for Sweden. Change is by definition a matter of perspective. One person's challenges can be another



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¹ 'People of colour' is something of a contested term, and many people who identify themselves as 'of colour' and scholars of race prefer to use terms like 'the racialised' because it signifies the experience of those 'of colour' rather than an identity prescribed by a majority white society. This said, the current Swedish context is using people of colour to discuss issues of race and racialisation. Hence, we have maintained use of this term here, however imperfect it may be for describing the range of identities that are subsumed under its umbrella.

person's opportunities and vice versa. Depending on where in the world you find yourself, the particular circumstances of your location will completely define your perspective. That is true across the globe, but also when thinking about local socio-economic circumstances. At a time marked by multiple simultaneous crises (climate, war, migration, social, economic), it is so very important to pay particular attention to initiatives taking action: to be part of local solutions that can make a real difference in people's lives.

This country profile could be written in a million different ways. What follows is the perspective of this particular author. Readers might consider its contents as they would travel tips – if you were travelling to Sweden and asked for suggestions this is a suggested list of places worth visiting, things worth seeing, and perhaps people worth meeting. It could be seen as a very personal shortlist of 'don't miss this' when it comes to the new civil society in Sweden right now. Crowdsourcing the list would certainly have made it much longer, and richer. Nevertheless, it attempts to provide an overview of a space that is necessarily changing.

CONTEMPORARY TENDENCIES IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN SWEDEN

Thinking about what has been happening in the field of civic engagement in Sweden today and over the past few years, four aspects come immediately to mind. Obviously, these cannot cover everything and to some extent there are overlaps between them. Nevertheless, and in the opinion of this author, they do represent important and visible tendencies. They are: refugee rights, antiracism, local empowerment and dialogue activism.

REFUGEE RIGHTS

Firstly, it is impossible not to start out with the issue of refugee rights. It has been the most acutely debated issue in the political sphere as well as in the media for some time. In April 2016, Kerem Yazgan, head of sustainability at the Axel Johnson corporation, called the ongoing refugee crisis the

number one sustainability issue in our society.² Objectively, the 2015 escalation of the war in Syria, and the unprecedented numbers of people who were forced to flee for their lives, has tested Swedish social infrastructure considerably. Although it has to be admitted that this can be said of other European countries, and even more so of the rest of the Middle East region, the 'crisis' has called for a whole new level and diversity of forms of engagement from citizens to volunteer their help in any way possible: to welcome and guide arriving refugees at train stations, to provide food and shelter, to make up for the fact that the established structures were quite unable to deal with the situation. Initially, spontaneous individual initiatives mixed with a variety of collaborations between civil society actors, businesses and other support structures. A lot of activism and volunteering was coordinated using groups and tags on social media.

Initiatives to act were swift by people who wanted to make a difference. Some of them started up a public Facebook group called Volontärhjälpen³ (Volunteer Help) to coordinate needs at different locations for welcoming and housing refugees. After a short time, Refugees Welcome Sweden formed its national network of local volunteer groups. A whole range of initiatives sprang up around the country, using social media and Volontärhjälpen to communicate and coordinate first response actions including initiatives to provide medical services, organise housing and shelter and conduct welcoming activities to meet urgent needs.⁴ Over the following weeks and months, established organisations and social services also acted to coordinate efforts and to organise relief and social services within the existing structures.

ANTIRACISM (AND OTHER ACTIVISM AGAINST OPPRESSION AND INEQUALITY)

Since approximately 2010, Sweden has witnessed the growth of civic engagement through alternative and social

2 "Flyktningkrisen är viktigaste hållbarhetsfrågan nu", Svenska Dagbladet, 4 apr, 2016, <http://www.svd.se/flyktningkrisen-ar-viktigaste-hallbarhetsfragan-nu>

3 Volontärhjälpen Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1720432594851262/>

4 List of initiatives compiled by Volontärhjälpen on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1720432594851262/permalink/1728841400677048/>



Saadia Hussain/
Förorten i Centrum
(The Suburb in the
Center). Kollektiv
Muralmålning: "MITT
HEM, MIN BILD"
(Collective mural "My
home, My image"
<http://saadia.se/konstverk/mitt-hem-min-bild>)

media platforms. These platforms have provided new ways for marginalised groups to claim a voice and a space in the public sphere, using the Internet. Crowdsourcing has, for example, become a popular approach to innovating solutions to stubborn inequalities, and online social and alternative media have been important for bringing stories of everyday racism, sexism and homophobia to light and to the attention of the broader public. Benefitting from separate safe spaces and opportunities to network around shared identities and ideas for change, marginalised groups have experienced some empowerment. Rummet⁵ (The Room), a blog, was started in

early 2014 as a safe and separate space for people of colour to raise shared experiences of racism in Swedish society, as well as a plethora of other everyday issues that tend to go along with it. Started by a group of four young women (Mireya Echeverría Quezada, Camilla Astorga Díaz, Judith Kiros, Valerie Kyeyune Backström), Rummet grew organically, inviting people who commented on the blog to join in. In the fall of 2015, the founders collected many of the posts into a printed book as a way of documenting this landmark initiative.⁶ This was a unique event and the first of its kind in Sweden, where a lot of the debate around racism has not really given space

5 Rummet website (blog) <http://rummets.se>

6 Rummet, Galago förlag. <http://www.galago.se/forfattare/rummet/rummet>

and voice to the people who are actually most affected by it. Swedish society likes to view itself as a tolerant society where all are equal, but these voices clearly showed the cracks in the system. Another early adopter of social media driven activism was [Rättviseförmedlingen](#) (*Equalisters*), an initiative to correct the inequalities between men and women in different sectors and professions. It started in 2010, as a way for Lina Thomsgård to prove to a club owner that she could get him a list of 100 women DJ's to choose from, and that it was not necessary to hire men all the time. It has grown to a movement with around 100,000 followers/participants (aka Equalisters) across all social media platforms, now driving issues of representation in many fields and more areas than gender inequality. The current head of the organisation is Seher Yilmaz.⁷

Another significant trend in recent years is the increase in the strength of the trans* voice that can be heard in activism, both in social and traditional media. In 2013, the legislation forcing sterilisation for people undergoing gender identity confirmation surgery. In April 2016, the government stated that they will make further legislative changes to enable financial compensation for people (up to 800 since 1972), who have been forced to undergo the sterilisation surgery when changing their legal gender identity. RFSL, the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Rights, has lobbied on these issues for over a decade, and other trans* organisations and activists have worked even longer and on both the personal and political fronts.⁸ Examples of trans* activists who have fought hard for equal rights include Warren Kunce, Alex Fridunger, Lukas Romson, Aleksa Lundberg and Freja Lindberg, to name just a few.⁹

LOCAL SOCIAL JUSTICE ORGANISING

The polarisation of Swedish society has also had repercussions on the local level. During the centre-right government of 2006-2014, conflicts over segregation and the growing gap between rich and poor emerged in many localities previously unused to social unrest. Sweden's larger cities have experienced a series of incidents in local communities, with frustrated youth reacting violently. It has become apparent that there are now locations in cities where the police no longer commands legitimacy and trust (if it ever did).

Right now there is a lot going on in urban suburbs of Sweden's cities, many of which are de facto segregated. The dominant image of such localities in mainstream media is negative focusing on high unemployment, social unrest and violence. In fact, a longer term trend of estrangement and exclusion from society and the job market, decreasing quality in education and the erosion of the social safety net have caused these more visible problems. Many new initiatives have developed in response to the frustration of the people most affected by this segregation. These have mobilised youth to develop their in-community organising and to stand up for their neighbourhoods, demanding access to rights, participation and influence.

Despite their power to mobilise, and surges of activity, it has been difficult for many initiatives of this kind to sustain their activity and to grow into lasting organisational capacity. Undoubtedly, they have had an important impact on individual young people and even on the communities concerned. Through their activism, mobilising activities and online writing, the young people have grown and developed capacity, and communities have gained in positive visibility. And, many of the people concerned move on to develop new initiatives and formations, taking their newly gained experience with them to some other field or space of engagement. Examples of such initiatives include Pantrarna (the Panthers)¹⁰, obviously inspired by the 1960s black power movement in the United States, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence; and

7 Seher Yilmaz on Equalister website
<http://rattviseformedlingen.se/om-oss/visomjobbar>

8 RFSL website <http://www.rfsl.se/en/about-us/kort-om-rfsl>

9 List on Equalisters, of people with trans* competence
<https://rattviseformedlingen.se/lista/transkompetens>

10 Pantrarna <https://pantrarna.wordpress.com/om-pantrarna>

Megafonen (the Megaphone),¹¹ which started as a collaborative initiative between local companies and young people in their neighbourhood to get youth organised around their own online magazine and to get their voice out, but which dissolved in 2014 under the pressure of hard criticism from established media.¹² There are also examples of initiatives which use art and social entrepreneurship to empower youth in local neighbourhoods, including Förorten i Centrum (the suburb in the centre)¹³ and Expedition Botkyrka.¹⁴

DIALOGUE ACTIVISM

There are also some new movements that attempt to use dialogue as a means to bridge gaps that are created as society becomes more polarised. They focus on creating a more inclusive, welcoming and collaborative society. Initiatives take on challenges or issues based on the purpose and motivation of those behind them, but they all seem to identify with the need to create 'conversations that matter'. Their speciality is getting people who might not otherwise get to meet and have a conversation into the same room. Most initiatives are inspired by or actively use methods for hosting gatherings of large groups of people meeting around a common purpose, and for harvesting their results, such as World Café,¹⁵ Open Space Technology¹⁶ and Appreciative Inquiry,¹⁷ developed in the 1960's, and that are used in civil society, in public institutions and in private business over many decades. Many of the practitioners concerned are part of the Art of Hosting community, which is a global community of practitioners seeking to grow the practices and mindset of co-creative leadership as a way to make lasting and significant contributions to their societies and the world.¹⁸ Examples of this type of activism in Sweden include the Art of Hosting community, with their

regular trainings and gatherings, Sverige 3.0 (Sweden 3.0), Samtalsaktivism (Conversations Activism) and LärOlika möten (the name is a word play for informative and diverse meetings).¹⁹

When considering why and how these tendencies have emerged, it is relevant to note trends shown in research on civil society and participation in Sweden, that points to a decrease in civic and political engagement through traditional forms, in particular through membership in established NGO's, trade unions and political parties,²⁰ even though the level and the amount of civic engagement (measured on the basis of hours spent volunteering for an NGO or a discrete cause) appears to be stable or on the rise.²¹ At Örebro University, a team of researchers has conducted a longitudinal study from 2009-2016, looking at what shapes the political involvement and civic engagement of young people in Sweden. The findings indicate that membership of a political party (especially) is no longer the best measure of political participation and engagement. Instead, the research shows that a large proportion of young people are 'citizens on stand-by': politically aware and to various degrees actively engaged in a diversity of initiatives but who do not commit to one single party or organisation. Instead, they will rally around a pressing debate, issue or cause that addresses their particular interest at a given moment in time, for as long as it is relevant for them.²²

This behaviour is symptomatic of the logic of social media. Individuality is central, and at the same time it is important for young people to develop senses of belonging within networks of friends and acquaintances. They do this by supporting causes and issues that are important to them directly or to

11 Megafonen <http://megafonen.com>

12 Article about the scapegoating of Megafonen: <http://www.aftonbladet.se/kultur/article18885081.ab>

13 Förorten i Centrum <http://forortenicentrum.org>

14 Expedition Botkyrka by The Good Tribe <http://www.thegoodtalents.com>

15 World Café method described <http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method>

16 Open Space Technology introduced <http://openspaceworld.org/wp2>

17 Appreciative Enquiry introduced <https://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu>

18 Art of Hosting community, <http://www.artofhosting.org>

19 The initiatives in order of appearance

<http://www.artofhosting.org>
<http://www.navidmodiri.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/VAD-%C3%84R-SVERIGE-3.0.pdf>
<http://samtalsaktivisterna.se>
<http://larolika.se>

20 Study by the Swedish board for youth and civil society
<http://www.mucf.se/publikationer/fokus-14-sammanfattning>

21 Study by Ersta Sköndal Högskola "Folk i rörelse – medborgerligt engagemang 1992-2014" ("People in movement – civic engagement 1992-2014") <http://esh.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:808859/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

22 <https://www.oru.se/forskning/forskningsmiljoer/hs/yes>



their wider networks of friends. At the same time, social media platforms have enabled individuals to find like minded others and communities and to develop common causes, to claim voice and space for their concerns, and to grow initiatives that would not have been possible otherwise.

Another important catalyst for debate on civic engagement, and especially for the political discourse in the media since 2010, has been shaped by the fact that a party expresses racist views, argues for hard restrictions on immigration and assimilation to some nostalgic nationalistic norm of what it means to be Swedish has been elected to the Swedish

Parliament. Sverigedemokraterna²³ or the Sweden Democrats achieved 5,7% of the vote in 2010, rising to 12,86% of the vote in the general election in 2014. Since then polls indicate that the support in the population for the Sweden Democrats has grown further, although not continuously. December 2015 saw their support peak at around 20% and then level off again.²⁴

23 <https://sd.se>

24 Svenska Dagbladet, "Forskare om tappet: SD har blivit mindre intressant" ("Experts about the decline: SD has become less interesting") <http://www.svd.se/forskare-sd-har-blivit-mindre-intressant/i/utvalt/om/opinionsmatningar>

Tess Asplund placed herself right in the path of the nazis of the Nordic Resistance Movement who were marching in Borlänge, Sweden. "I was honouring Nelson Mandela" she tells Expo. The moment was captured in a snapshot by Expo's photographer. Photo by David Lagerlöf/Expo



Dialogue
activists in action.
Photo by Andreas
Paulsson

This changed political landscape in Sweden and in other European countries, including neighbouring Nordic countries, has certainly contributed to the sense that society is polarising. The political debate has seen the gradual normalisation of racist and nationalistic rhetoric. At the same time, there is the bigger picture of the long term liberalisation of the Swedish welfare model that began in the 1990s, especially the privatisation of public services which has strongly affected the labour market, social services, schools and youth programmes, in particular dismantling of several hundred youth after-school programmes and spaces during that decade.²⁵ Recent

years have witnessed some of the most blatantly racist political demonstrations. At the same time, these have been met with some of the largest counter-demonstrations of modern Swedish history.²⁶ In parallel, new antiracist initiatives have gained momentum, especially those that are organised by people of colour and organisations and individuals that experience racism in society. Often the most affected groups have previously not found support or safe space in established civil society organisations to voice their issues and protest.

²⁵ http://www.fritidsforum.se/om-oss/eempowerment/#.WAE_i5PhCRs

²⁶ https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antirasistdemonstrationerna_i_K%C3%A4rrtorp_2013

As concerns the 2015 influx of refugees, established society institutions such as the Swedish Migration Agency and local authorities are the public authorities 'responsible' for handling arrivals, and their approach has been widely accepted as the 'standard' for how arrivals should be dealt with. In addition, there are the well established organisations, including the Swedish Red Cross, that provide support systems, activities and other structures, and that are supposed to complement the action of state authorities. In autumn 2015, however, it became apparent that these established mechanisms and approaches were unable to cope, driving demand for better and more effective alternatives. Aid and charity organisations took huge steps to expand their support groups to meet the massive interest of ordinary people in Sweden to offer their help in some way (for example, the Swedish Red Cross set up a new migration network for local initiatives).

CURRENT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DISCOURSE/S

It is difficult to identify discourses that are generally relevant or influential for all different types of initiatives that can be observed in Swedish civil society at the moment. Undoubtedly, and if thinking about the wider political context, the 2010 entry of the nationalist Sweden Democrats into Parliament was a symbolic and political defining moment. The party leadership came to the ceremonial opening of Parliament dressed in Swedish folk costume, thereby, claiming the (symbolic) right to interpret and define what can be considered as Swedish culture and heritage. During the same opening ceremony, when the bishop of Stockholm started talking about protesting against racism, the deputies representing the Sweden Democrats staged a walk out. After that, different actions of this party and their supporters have been highly visible in the public sphere. One notable moment is known as the 'iron pipe scandal'. Three people from the party leadership walked around in the centre of Stockholm with long iron pipes from a construction site, behaving towards other people in a threatening manner, calling passersby in the street by racist and sexist slurs.²⁷ However, and although

having such a racist party in the Parliament is alarming, this development has also been important for the broadening of antiracism in Sweden. The anti-racist 'movement' is now in a better position to claim that racism and nationalism are becoming more 'mainstream' and the issue cannot be considered the preserve of one clearly nationalist political party and its voters on the fringe. Instead, it has become clear that Swedish society needs to sharpen its own understanding of how racism, oppression, norms, power structures and privilege are created, reproduced and play an active part in everyday life between people who do not see themselves as racists or even as mildly prejudiced. Underscoring the developing awareness of political polarisation in Sweden is a series of debates that has taken place on the opinion pages of the larger national media outlets, such as Aftonbladet²⁸ and Dagens Nyheter²⁹ over the last several years. At the risk of over-generalisation, it can be observed that many established voices in public opinion (and/or media) are opposed to postcolonial and transgendered critiques of a variety of issues in current affairs, whether presented in public debate, cultural expression or media. In some cases, the media onslaught against such postcolonial critique has had a devastating effect on local organising efforts, such as in the case of Megafonen, which was accused of inciting riots in a Stockholm suburb in an investigative journalism programme on state television.³⁰ At the same time, the presence of such discussions in the public sphere has served to strengthen the visibility, all be it controversial, of groups of people (especially people of colour and trans* people) whose issues would previously never have appeared at all. These are often young people of colour and trans* persons that are trying to create legitimacy for an intersectional approach to analysing society, promoting the creation of safe spaces for racialised and stigmatised people and groups to share their experiences of racism and transphobia without being belittled or told what is right and wrong.

English article in The Local <https://www.thelocal.se/20121115/44452>

28 <http://www.aftonbladet.se>

29 <http://www.dn.se>

30 Megafonen's response to the accusations:
<http://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/article18884556.ab>
Article critical to accusations:
<http://www.aftonbladet.se/kultur/article18885081.ab>

27 Wikipedia article in English https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_pipe_scandal

Furthermore, some public figures in popular culture have made strong statements about these and other contemporary social and political issues, causing further debate in the public sphere. In December 2013 artist Jason “Timbuktu” Diakité claimed his equal rights as a citizen in his acceptance speech at the award ceremony in the Parliament chambers in Stockholm, for the antiracism prize awarded by the NGO “512 rörelsen” (the 5 to 12 Movement).³¹ He held up his passport and pointed out that the hate directed at him is racism, and not xenophobia (a fear of strangers). In 2015, the rap artist Adam Tensta walked out of a morning show where he was being interviewed, when the show hosts refused to take a position on the fact that the TV station had worked with a person who had expressed racist opinions in her youtube vlogs.³² One of the most powerful public statements made by a popular artist was made during the finale of the 2016 Swedish Grammi music awards. Seinabo Sey performed ‘Hard Time’ as over a hundred women of colour of various ages, dressed in black, silently joined her on stage. Through this action, the artist was making a statement about visibility and presence, claiming space, not only as individual entertainers, but also as a collective representing a very many different stories, competences and experiences that are often just ignored in the public sphere.³³

In relation to Europe, and again at the risk of generalising, there appears to be some gap when it comes to European exchange and organising. On the one hand, there is activism and involvement that happens with inspiration and exchange across borders, but without much contact with the institutional structures. For example, Refugees Welcome Sweden is part of broader European movement enabling inspiration across borders. Even though the actual hands-on activism goes on very locally, there are also a lot of initiatives where people have actively sought out collaborations in border areas or places of crisis and need all over Europe. Among activists in the areas that have been mentioned in this country profile, there is certainly an exchange of ideas when it comes to, for

example, organising or initiatives that strive to empower youth with immigrant backgrounds in suburbs, or people of colour in the public debate. Sometimes it is on a personal level, where individuals might be influenced by experiences or debate in other countries, or it is more organised through exchanges or visits. On the other hand, on the more institutional level, there are local coordinators that work for municipalities or regions in Sweden, who have a role to inform and assist in getting local organisations involved and create exchanges with other European countries, using the funding structures in place. There is of course also the higher level exchange between the traditional, established CSOs and their counterparts in other countries in Europe, where there may be European networks, that create connections naturally through meetings in Brussels or exchange between member organisations. In between those levels, there would not appear to be a whole lot of ‘European dimension’ in much of the civic engagement work going on in Sweden, although there are some exceptions. With initiatives like Rummet or Megafonen, individuals have brought inspiration from other countries’ debates and organising efforts to Sweden (for example, separate / safe spaces, Black Lives Matter and other discourses in the UK, France, the United States and Latin America).

SITUATION, NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF CIVIC ACTORS IN SWEDEN

The needs and concerns of civic actors in Sweden vary depending on the context and the type of engagement that is under scrutiny. As so often, what is needed when it comes to sustaining civic engagement are a combination of dedicated core volunteers, effective recruitment of new core contributors, funding for activities, and institutional funding to develop and strengthen organisations’ and initiatives’ efforts. Among sources of funding supporting this kind of new civic engagement, some older and some newer ones can be cited.

31 <http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article17963233.ab>

32 <http://www.tv4.se/nyhetsmorgon/klipp/adam-tenstas-medverkan-blev-kort-3191065>

33 Seinabo Sey performs her song “Hard Time” at the Grammi music awards, Sweden, <https://youtu.be/Ds4TqWZ-vKg>.

Notable among the older ones, are the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society³⁴ which gives major organisational and project based support to youth organisations and CSO's in general (specifically that promote gender equality and integration) and Allmänna Arvsfonden³⁵ (a large national inheritance fund), that primarily support projects for and with young people, giving project grants to youth organisations and initiatives. In Sweden, local organisations and associations can also apply for funding from their municipalities and there are hundreds of smaller private foundations and funds that give stipends and scholarships. A new major actor on the scene of social entrepreneurship is Reach for Change, a foundation that was set up by the Kinnevik corporation and that has global reach through its subsidiary companies doing business in different countries around the world.³⁶ The foundation specifically directs its support towards change leaders who have ideas for improving society for children and youth. The global organisation Ashoka has also set up a Scandinavian office in Sweden, which selects fellows and 'change-makers' that they support.³⁷

When it comes to organising around refugee rights, social justice and antiracism, there is also the big issue of hate speech, especially Internet hate campaigns and threats. This is hitting hard against active women, people of colour and LGBTQ and trans* people, and course, against people who identify as all of those.

Furthermore, the relationship between what might be termed 'old school' civil society actors and the newer manifestations of civic engagement outlined here varies a lot. One aspect is certainly the emergent sense of disappointment in existing institutions, and the tiredness they seem to display, although Sweden prides itself on being a well developed (social) democracy. This is especially obvious among the most segregated groups in Swedish (and wider European)

society. Studies in Malmö and Gothenburg³⁸ have shown clear differences in health and life expectancy between different neighbourhoods in those cities, essentially based on housing segregation and corresponding to ethnicity. Housing segregation is clearly a factor of socio-economic status and ethnicity with white Swedes living separately from Swedes of immigrant background. The frustrations that build up in a segregated society have very negative effects, and 'old civil society' has not been as effective in engaging with this reality to the extent that would be necessary or demanded.

Another aspect that is common, and that is relevant for the relationship between older and newer manifestations of civic engagement, is the way that new and vocal talents get 'discovered' by larger NGOs and end up in their employment or coopted to their structures. This can be very positive, in that the talent of the person concerned is recognised and valued, and they get chances to develop that they might not have had in another context. However, a potential downside is that many such talented people end up in positions within large organisational structures, where they still have little institutional power, and even lose contact with the realities from which they emerged. This can make it difficult for the people concerned to actually effect the change they sought to embody through their activism.

34 <http://eng.mucf.se>

35 <http://www.arvsfonden.se>

36 <http://blog.reachforchange.org>

37 <http://scandinavia.ashoka.org/fellows>

38 Studies from Malmö and Gothenburg respectively:
<http://malmo.se/Kommun--politik/Socialt-hallbart-Malmo/Kommission-for-ett-socialt-hallbart-Malmo.html>
http://socialhallbarhet.se/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Sammanfattning_huvudrapport.pdf

MAPPING MULTIPLIERS OF NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN SWEDEN

OPENLAB “UTVECKLA DIN STAD”

is a centre where students, educators and researchers from Stockholm are working on challenges faced by the citizens of Stockholm. The goal is to produce proposals for solutions to complex social challenges through new interdisciplinary collaboration between traditional knowledge areas.

RÄTTVISEFÖRMEDLINGEN (EQUALISTERS IN ENGLISH)

was one of the early adaptors of social media driven activism and was an initiative to correct the inequalities between men and women in different sectors and professions. It has grown to a multi-platform movement with around 100,000 followers/participants, now driving issues of representation in many fields and more areas than gender inequality.

THE INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT @SVARTKVINNA (BLACK WOMAN)

was started in the Spring 2014 by Fanna Ndow Norrby. She collects every day stories of sexism, racism, prejudice, comments and behaviour faced by black women in Sweden. Her stories were edited into [a book](#) in late 2015.

@MAKTHAVARNA (PEOPLE IN POWER)

on [twitter](#) and [instagram](#) was started by Gülsen Üzz and Zahra Farag and is “a separatist platform for racialised people with an intersectional perspective on antiracist feminism.” It is a curated account that features a new person posting every week.

LEWEND TASIN: THE CREOLE REPORT (IN SWEDISH)

presents new concepts for youth identity, rooted in postcolonial theory and understanding of complexity, power and potential.

ADAM TENSTA, JASON “TIMBUKTU” DIAKITÉ,

ALEXANDRA PASCALIDOU

are relevant actors in the anti-racist space. Stories in Swedish

can be found in the profile piece [#Hatet](#) “the hate”.

STREET GÄRIS (STREET GIRLS)

was initiated by Ailin Moaf Mirlashari as a What’s App group chat and Facebook group for young women (and non-gender binary) living in Swedish suburbs. It is now a network and an NGO, whose mission is “to empower each other through sisterhood, inspiration and knowledge sharing.”

KAJSA BALKFORS

is active in [the Art of Hosting community](#), a global network with Nordic roots, building a community of co-creative leadership and hosting skills.

NAVID MODIRI

is involved in [Samtalsaktivisterna](#) and [Sverige 3.0](#) to make change through having and hosting conversations that matter.

KARIN BRUCE

is active in [LärOlika möten](#). The initiative brings together people from different parts of society and with various backgrounds. In several meetings participants share their thoughts on different topics to broaden their networks and get a wider understanding of society.

FÖRORTEN I CENTRUM

and founder Saadia Hussain use mural art for social change.

SANDRA KINNAMAN NORDSTRÖM’S THE GOOD TALENTS

uses entrepreneurial skills to find and develop talent in youth in underserved communities.

JÄRVASKOLAN

is an entrepreneurial initiative to build local capacity for equal education to start “the best school in Sweden”.

MAPPING NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE UK



INTRODUCTION

Three notable tendencies or currents can be observed in the United Kingdom as regards civic engagement. First, is the rise of campaigns supporting renters' rights, defending social housing and seeking to protect public space. Second, is the growth of groups and independent media in Scotland, and their exploration of what independence could mean. And third, under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour Party is trying to rediscover itself as a campaigning organisation. These are responses to the politicisation of key social, economic and political concerns among ordinary people: the rising cost of housing, student debt and living in relation to wages; the fragmentation of the United Kingdom's national-political identity (a huge number of Scots feel disenfranchised by the two main national political parties), the sense that enlightened thought leadership is needed to overcome stifling economic dogma.

Civic engagement is so broad, so it is hard to generalise about the key 'moments' pushing these currents forward. However, it can be observed that many people involved in new civil society movements are on the so-called progressive left. Key figures commonly are university educated, readers of The Guardian and Open Democracy, interested in music and art, ride bikes and read writers like Zoe Williams, David Graeber, Paul Mason, John Harris, Helen Wilkinson and Polly Toynbee.¹ While this might also be something of a stereotype, many probably spend a lot of time in forums and conferences, sitting in circles around facilitators with flip charts.

Unsurprisingly, and like anywhere else, new civic movements in the UK need money and time – as their activities are hard to fund. Arguably they also need education and knowledge of how policy making actually works, and better relationships with politicians. While it is not always constructive to think in terms



Charlie Tims is a researcher interested in art creativity and social change. For six years he worked for Demos, a British think tank close to the Labour Party, writing reports in the related areas of cultural policy, public spaces and the creative industries. He has worked independently, with foundations, cultural agencies and public funders of culture developing strategies, evaluations and new projects. Among his recent projects are a report about culture and development for the British Council and, with European Cultural Foundation, the development of the Doc Next Network – a European network bringing together activism and visual media. In 2016, he co-wrote an essay about what museums can learn from football clubs, entitled 'FC Museum: What do museums have to learn from football clubs?'

More information about Charlie Tims can be found on his website: <https://charlietims.wordpress.com/me-my-work>

<http://www.demos.org>

<http://www.docnextnetwork.org>

<http://fcmuseum.net>

¹ More about these authors can be found here:
<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/zoewilliams>
<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/david-graeber>
<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/paul-mason>
<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/johnharris>
<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/helenwilkinson>
<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/pollytoynbee>



of 'old' and 'new' civil society, and many individual actors move between them, civic organisations certainly differ in structure and culture depending on when they have emerged. 'Old civil society' tend to professionalisation and corporatism. These may be taken more seriously by politicians and the media, but they also run the risk of distance and separation from their supporters. Nevertheless, some larger charities also have an important role in supporting and organising smaller campaign groups.

In terms of relationship to Europe and European values, it is difficult to identify trends. The language of 'European values' is not common in the United Kingdom. Civil society and the left will often look to Europe as a place to learn from and celebrate, but European integration is not de facto a progressive cause, like the UK National Health Service has become. The Brexit debacle has been very divisive, and what enthusiasm there was to 'stay in' was conditional on change. Now that the UK has voted, all attention is on the practical business of Britain actually leaving the European Union, not so much on what Europe

stands for and what it could mean for cooperation among civic actors across borders.

CONTEMPORARY TENDENCIES IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

*There's something happ-en-ing here,
what it is ain't exactly clear.
For What It's Worth, Buffalo Springfield²*

Few predicted that the 2014 Scottish independence referendum would be so close³, fewer still imagined that the Conservative Party would win the 2015 general election, and no-one in the world believed that Jeremy Corbyn⁴ could

Film director Ken Loach symbolises a time of greater social mobility in Britain. Here, he participated in a debate with Members of the Culture Committee on the occasion of 10 year anniversary of LUX prize, Photo by European Union 2016 - European Parliament ©, source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/european_parliament/29629591563

² <https://play.google.com/music/preview/Thaqozi5wro53aqowjcvluinkda>

³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/events/scotland-decides/results>

⁴ <http://www.jeremycorbyn.org.uk>



"Our revolution: A club owned by the fans (FC United of Manchester)", Photo by Duncan Hull ©, CC BY 2.0, source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dullhunk/6368290603>

become the leader of the Labour Party. While Brexit was plausibly on the cards, it was by no means a foregone conclusion. At the time of writing in September 2016, it was unclear if (pro-European) Scotland would force a 2nd referendum on independence, and leave the United Kingdom forever.

The question is what the role of civic engagement in all this is. Are these great unpredictable swings of opinion driven by the absence of a strong civil society – leaving the public at the mercy of waves of digital emotion that roll across the web as quickly as they subside – or are they a testament to the power of leaderless movements, forensic campaigning and the re-emergence of political choices about sovereignty, nuclear weapons⁵, state intervention⁶, which have not been part of British political life for years.

5 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-13442735>

6 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/sep/20/jeremy-corbyn-rail-nationalisation-policy-labour-conference>

For the purposes of this paper civic engagement is understood as attempts by individuals or groups to influence public opinion, political processes and institutions, as citizens. Lobbying by the private sector and NGOs providing services, support and aid (such as food banks that provide emergency food to the poor and are big news in the UK⁷) are not included. This definition still covers a lot – everything from the direct activities of well-funded policy teams at big charities that quietly campaign, attend parliamentary hearings, submit responses to public consultations through the softer activity of politicised publishers, book shops and media platforms to the activities of think tanks, political parties, religious organisations and activist groups. Suffice it to say, it is hard to generalise about all this in a country of nearly 60 million people. There is no grand narrative here, just a series of trends and tendencies. And, these might also be a question of perspective – admittedly this author's is much influenced by living and working in London.

TAKE BACK THE CITY

On the left, and in the past, the issues that animated debate and action were about wages and working conditions. Later, they were about rights. These still stir passions, but the new issues are about space for living, or what some call 'gentrification'. The pressure on land is most acute in London where new campaigns aim to maintain social housing, improve the situation of private renters and to resist high-value real estate development. Generation Rent campaigns nationally for better (or at least some) rights for the growing number of people living in the private rental sector⁸; Renters' Rights London⁹ does the same for private renters in London; Defend Council Housing¹⁰ campaigns against the privatisation of public housing; and the Radical Housing Network¹¹ is a more free-form association of grass-roots groups.¹²

7 <https://www.trusselltrust.org/what-we-do>

8 <http://www.generationrent.org>

9 <http://www.rentersrightslondon.org>

10 http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk/dch/dch_about.cfm

11 <https://www.facebook.com/radicalhousingnetwork>

12 <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/24336/1/this-map-marks-all-of-londons-anti-gentrification-campaigns>

The following map shows some of the grass-roots groups that are active against gentrification in London.¹³



A list of those initiatives that engage with private renting specifically is available at the same website.¹⁴

It is also worth pointing out that comedian Russell Brand's youtube channel¹⁵ reached its zenith in December 2014 when he successfully helped local social housing tenants campaigning against a massive rent rise after their charity owned homes were sold to a property company.¹⁶ There are numerous other non-housing campaigns which set out to stop high-value real estate developments in the capital. In Shoreditch in East London, the anti-gentrification street protest Fuck Parade¹⁷, is at the less organised end of the spectrum, Save Norton Folgate at the more 'serious'.¹⁸ Same ends, different means. Take Back the City is a youthful crowd-funded fringe campaign group that fielded a candidate in the London

mayoral elections (May 5th, 2016) that campaigns on these issues.¹⁹ It is a small group, mostly made up of young (outer) east Londoners, but one that is representative of popular sentiment about the lack of living space in cities.²⁰

SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE

The Scottish National Party (SNP) nearly obliterated the Labour Party in the 2015 general election in Scotland and won control of the devolved Scottish Parliament in 2016.²¹ To a large extent, this is because it articulated a 'progressive message' not present in the rest of frontline UK politics.²² In the devolved Parliament the SNP has been critical of austerity, has nationalised some of Scotland's steel industry, maintained free universities, brought back free medical prescriptions, opposed nuclear weapons and has been a strong supporter of the European Union. Beyond the SNP – the nationalist cause is peppered with campaigners, bloggers, small political parties and discussion groups who helped to make the referendum what the political commentator Simon Jenkins called a six month "festival of democracy, an Edinburgh tattoo or argument".²³ These groups have enabled a debate excluded from mainstream media – it is noteworthy that only one mainstream newspaper supported independence. New groups include 'think and do tank' Common Weal²⁴ and The Radical Independence Campaign – a 'non aligned social justice campaigning group'.²⁵ Other important voices are Wings over Scotland,²⁶ Bella Caledonia,²⁷ Common Space,²⁸ the vlogger Left Scotland²⁹ and the new Podemos-like political party RISE –

19 <http://www.takebackthecity.org>

20 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/video/2016/may/04/take-back-the-city-london-politics-mayor-video>

21 <http://www.bbc.com/news/election/2015/results/scotland>

22 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2015/results/scotland>

23 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/04/scottish-independence-yes-vote-leaner-meaner-scotland>

24 <http://www.allofusfirst.org/what-is-common-weal>

25 <http://radical.scot>

26 <http://wingsoverscotland.com>

27 <http://bellacaledonia.org.uk>

28 <https://www.commonspace.scot>

29 <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJWnQhrxJJrWQZ5OLMveqW>

13 <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/24336/1/this-map-marks-all-of-londons-anti-gentrification-campaigns>

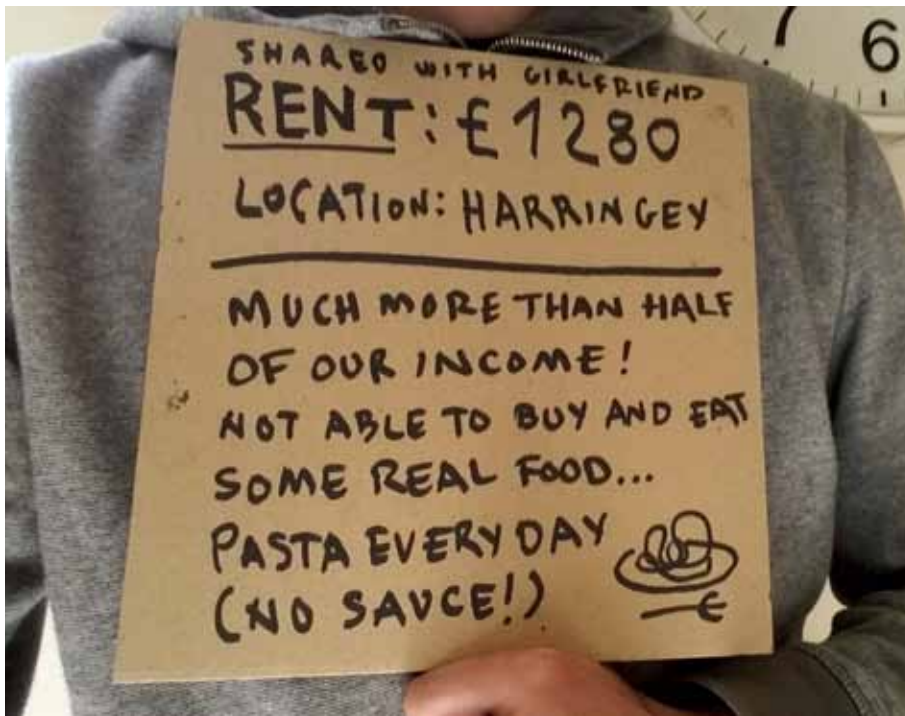
14 <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/24336/1/this-map-marks-all-of-londons-anti-gentrification-campaigns>

15 <https://www.youtube.com/user/russellbrand>

16 <https://www.facebook.com/neweraestatetenants>

17 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/28/cereal-killer-cafe-protest-gentrification-poverty>

18 <https://www.facebook.com/savenortonfolgate>



Generation Rent's #ventyourrent twitter campaign: London renters were asked to share their experiences in the private rented sector.

which stands for Respect, Independence, Socialism and Environmentalism.³⁰

IN LABOUR

Too far to the right to win votes in Scotland and too far to the left to win votes in England, the Labour Party has experienced significant challenges and something of a demise in recent years. At the same time, with Jeremy Corbyn, it appears to be in the process of reinventing itself. Its membership doubled to over 400,000 in June 2016³¹, and has made efforts to discover its inner social movement. In a strangely symbolic move, Ed Miliband – the party's defeated former leader – went on a training course for community organisers with CitizensUK³² – a social justice campaigning group that are well known for

30 <http://www.rise.scot>

31 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-party-gains-60000-new-members-following-attempted-coup-against-corbyn-a7112336.html>

32 <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2015/10/ed-miliband-attends-london-citizens-training-course>

bringing faith-groups and community organisations together to campaign on specific issues. A new campaign group within the party called 'Momentum' that boasts 60,000 supporters and 50 local groups³³ is trying to use the energy that drove Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of the party to renew Labour as a locally rooted campaigning organisation. The new interest in the Labour Party has been good too for 'Compass'³⁴ – a non aligned left-wing pressure group that has organised a number of interesting events including 'Change: How'.³⁵ 'Change: How' is an alternative political conference, and has launched campaigns on the London mayoral election³⁶ and the EU Referendum³⁷ both of which aimed to provide space for progressive voices.

CLICTIVISTS

Communication technologies have changed all forms of civic engagement. Maybe the most literal example in the UK is 38 Degrees³⁸ – a technology driven, social justice orientated campaign group with 2.5 million people registered on their website which is funded by a mix of member donors and foundations. Founded in 2009, they are best known for what might be called 'just in time campaigning' – massive petitions assembled in the days just before key votes and debates. They have claimed several significant victories, not least that they stopped the Conservative government from privatising British forests in 2011.³⁹ They are criticised for asking for low levels of political engagement and undermining traditional channels of participation by flooding politicians' inboxes with template letters. Stella Creasy, a Labour MP who cultivates an image as a local campaigner, published a statement saying she no longer has time to look at online petitions or automated emails from these organisations.⁴⁰ They have been trying to do more at street level – especially during the 2015 election campaign,

33 <http://www.peoplesmomentum.com/about>

34 <http://www.compassonline.org.uk>

35 <http://www.change-how.com>

36 <http://goodlondon.org>

37 <http://www.goodeurope.org>

38 <https://home.38degrees.org.uk>

39 <https://blog.38degrees.org.uk/2011/02/17/victory-government-to-scrap-plans-to-sell-our-forests>

40 <https://adragonsbestfriend.wordpress.com/2013/04/29/38degrees>

during which they encouraged users of the site to form local groups to organise hustings and to campaign locally to defend the National Health Service.⁴¹ The site is also used by hundreds of smaller groups around the country for local campaigns to save local hospitals, park facilities, etc.⁴²

THE INNOVATORS

Maybe one new trend is an approach to social change which does not appeal directly to the political system, but rather tries to tie together new technology, maker-culture, free software, consumer power, new ideas and social commitment to make a difference to issues previously thought solvable by government alone. The activists involved call this 'social innovation'. Impact Hub, an archetypal social innovation and social enterprise, which began in the Islington district of London in the mid 2000s, now provides workspace to social innovators in five UK locations and 79 around the globe.⁴³ Social Innovation Camp⁴⁴ and Bethnal Green Ventures⁴⁵ support and fund ideas that use new technology to do socially valuable work. NESTA – the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts⁴⁶ – supports much of this work and publishes an annual list of top social innovations.⁴⁷ While these projects do not necessarily conform to the definition of civic engagement at the start of this section – they influence groups that do. It is also interesting how much social innovation likes to appropriate the language of political action and civic engagement – as though they, themselves, offer a new way to do it. Spacehive, a crowdfunding site, urges their users to "create civic life";⁴⁸ 'Civic Systems Lab' claims to be building a Participatory City in West Norwood in South London;⁴⁹ The Guardian has recently launched a new civic space near their offices in London.⁵⁰

THE CO-OPERATIVE SURGE

Both as a reaction to the Conservative government policy of austerity (which has had its greatest impact on local government services)⁵¹ and to a pervasive sense that market norms are far too influential in how British government and society are organised, community ownership is on the rise. While being involved with established co-operatives might not be considered as a form of civic engagement, the act of forming them can, as it involves taking over businesses and organisations as an approach to influencing them. Enthusiasts and retirees in villages, often supported by community shares, have found ways to put pubs,⁵² post offices and village shops into community ownership.⁵³ On a larger scale some of the most interesting examples of community ownership in the UK are the communities on the Scottish Islands like Gigha and the Isle of Eigg, that since the mid 2000s, have been helped by the Scottish government to acquire their own land.⁵⁴ However, the most colourful manifestation of the 'co-operative surge' has been in football. Since the beginning of the 2000s, football supporters have formed 192 co-operatives and used them to buy shares in their football clubs.⁵⁵ In most cases, this has made football supporters a voice that has to be reckoned with in the running of the clubs. In some it has even meant that the co-operative actually took over the football club. The best known example is FC United in Manchester.⁵⁶ Formed in 2005, by disillusioned fans of Manchester United, the club is now owned and managed by its supporters and has its own micro-brewery, beehive and runs educational projects in the local community. It is clear that public spending cuts will in the near future begin to affect Local Authority funded Museums, of which there are hundreds around the UK. It will be interesting to see if a similar model emerges for their survival.

41 <http://election-plan.38degrees.org.uk>

42 <https://home.38degrees.org.uk/campaigns>

43 <http://www.impacthub.net>

44 <https://twitter.com/siccamp?lang=en-gb>

45 <https://bethnalgreenventures.com>

46 <http://www.nesta.org.uk>

47 <http://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/help-us-find-2016s-new-radicals>

48 <https://www.spacehive.com>

49 <http://www.participatorycity.org/#discovered>

50 <https://www.theguardian.com/membership/midland-goods-shed-progress/2014/sep/10/-sp-midland-goods-shed-guardian-events-membership-building-space>

51 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/nov/25/local-government-councils-funding-gap-critical-budget-cuts-social-care-spending-review>

52 <https://www.pubisthehub.org.uk/community-ownership>

53 <http://communityshares.org.uk/directory>

54 <http://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk>

55 <http://www.supporters-direct.org/homepage/aboutsupportersdirect>

56 <http://www.fc-utd.co.uk>

DIRECT ACTION

There is nothing new about direct action in the United Kingdom. Scaling and occupying buildings, blocking roads, disrupting events, making quasi artworks have all been done before. What we can observe, however, is that new and different groups are engaging in direct action. It is likely that this is because direct action is self-organised, unfunded and quite dependent on friends and friends of friends. The ethical cosmetics manufacturer Lush quietly funds some of these groups⁵⁷ as does the Edge Fund, with a much more participatory decision-making process.⁵⁸ Funding is small, light touch and often not tied to concrete outcomes. Groups like Liberate Tate⁵⁹, Platform⁶⁰ and BP or not BP⁶¹ have fought increasingly successful campaigns to encourage major arts organisations to divest themselves of oil sponsorship, principally targeting BP and Shell. The 'Closed radical black and asian revolutionary socialist group', London Black Revs⁶², concreted over anti-homeless spikes outside a branch of Tescos in 2014.⁶³ Feminist protest movements Sisters Uncut⁶⁴ and UK Feminista⁶⁵ are highlighting the link between austerity, domestic violence and sexism. Sisters Uncut drew attention for disrupting the premier of the film Suffragette this winter.⁶⁶ Frack off⁶⁷ organise anti-fracking campaigns around the country. Critical Mass⁶⁸ organise die-ins to draw attention to road safety issues⁶⁹ and the newly formed independent Workers Union of Great Britain – a new, breakaway, grass-roots union – have fought a number of

57 <https://uk.lush.com/article/charity-pot-funding-guidelines>

58 <https://edgefund.org.uk>

59 <http://www.liberatetate.org.uk>

60 <http://platformlondon.org/about-us>

61 <http://bp-or-not-bp.org>

62 <https://www.facebook.com/LondonBlackRevs>

63 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/shortcuts/2014/jun/13/london-black-revs-target-tesco-anti-homeless-spikes>

64 <https://www.facebook.com/sistersuncut>

65 <http://ukfeminista.org.uk>

66 <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/suffragette-premiere-protesters-lie-on-red-carpet-and-let-off-purple-and-green-smoke-in-a6685236.html>

67 <http://frack-off.org.uk>

68 <https://network23.org/criticalmasslondon/sample-page>

69 http://keyassets.timeincuk.net/inspirewp/live/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2013/11/die_in_protest_13_MG_33742.jpg

campaigns to improve the pay and conditions of precarious, migrant workers.⁷⁰

RIGHT-WING STREET PROTEST

Civic engagement is powerful as it can galvanise people from across the political spectrum around issues, but it has to be admitted that it is also something of a left-wing hobby. Traditional conservatives do not really need civic engagement, because they do not want to change much and if they do they are quite happy to use traditional means of doing so: playing golf, having dinner at the club, working through the Conservative Party, tapping up a local land-owner or old school friends. It sounds like a cliché, but it's true. Occasionally, however, they do make their presence felt using street protest. In the 2000s, the Countryside Alliance staged a number of protests against legislation which made fox hunting harder.⁷¹ The Tax Payer's Alliance⁷² is an ongoing presence in the media, campaigning against what they perceive to be profligate public spending. On the far right, there are a number of groups that stage regular street protests, the biggest of which is the English Defence League⁷³, now a political party, and Pegida, modelled on the movement of the same name that began in Germany, and which has been visible in the UK since 2015.⁷⁴

BREXIT

Despite the polls being close, the campaign to leave the EU won. Most of the debate was channeled through representative bodies and figureheads of industry, education and agriculture. The Stronger in Europe campaign was corporate and fronted up by a rather pale and bland aspiring politician called Will Straw, son of the former Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw. *Sayyes2Europe* – the self-styled 'grass-roots campaign' to stay in the EU made a valiant attempt to mobilise like-minded people but was not as successful as it hoped. The vote was

70 <https://iwgb.org.uk/how-we-began>

71 <http://www.countryside-alliance.org>

72 <http://www.taxpayersalliance.com>

73 <http://englishdefenceleague.org>

74 <https://www.facebook.com/pegida.uk>

clearly split along generational lines, and along class and regional lines as well.⁷⁵

CURRENT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DISCOURSE/S

If thinking about where these new tendencies come from, we are reminded of the factors Paul Mason listed in his hyperbolic blog post entitled 20 Reasons Why it's Kicking Off Everywhere⁷⁶, and which he published as a best selling book of the same name sometime later.⁷⁷ Explaining the revolutions, uprisings and disturbances of 2011, Mason linked rising levels of education, increased indebtedness, access to technology, the role of women, to explain where the new movements were coming from. In addition to the factors Mason identified, we could now add the following for the specific case of the United Kingdom:

THE HOUSING CRISIS

Home ownership in much of the UK, until recently something that was also available to people on average salaries, using mortgages, has been pushed entirely out of reach for people who do not have significant help from 'the bank of Mum and Dad'. At the same time, publicly owned housing has been sold into private ownership since the 1980s and 'buy to let' has been heavily promoted as a personal investment vehicle for those with capital. This has left a large number of people living in an almost entirely unregulated private rental sector, paying extremely high and ever-rising rents to amateur private landlords.⁷⁸ Unlike their European counterparts, the UK's 11 million private renters have very few enforceable legal rights and are technically never more than two months away from losing their homes: Legally, a private landlord does not have to give any

reason for evicting a resident tenant. The nature and causes of the housing crisis are complicated, but increasingly for young people in the UK the only route to what anyone would reasonably call 'a home' is owning a house and that is hard without inherited wealth. We have arrived at a situation in the south of England where housing does not just reflect inequality, it produces it. This, needless to say, is a hugely politicised issue. It is risky for genuine politicians to tackle the problem, as British people's personal and financial security is completely tied up in their homes. It is an electoral risk to help the third of people who do not own their own homes, without antagonising the two thirds of people who do.⁷⁹

DEBT AND PRECARIOUSNESS

Being young is never easy, but today it seems harder than ever. The cost of university fees alone is close to £27,000⁸⁰ for a three year degree course, double what it cost in the mid-2000s, just a decade ago. After living costs have been included, many students will graduate with more than £50,000 of debt. They will arrive in a highly competitive job market that offers little security and is concentrated in the expensive south of the country. Unpaid internships and expensive postgraduate qualifications have become prerequisites for entry into jobs in law, politics, the media and the creative industries, creating stark inequality between young adults who are financially supported by their parents and those who are not. Zero-hours contracts (employment contracts that offer no security and no guaranteed pay, yet still require an employee to be on call should the employer want them to work) are commonplace. There are now 1.5 million people in the UK working on zero hours contracts.⁸¹ The employment rights landscape has changed significantly under recent governments: In 2012, the 'qualifying period' – the time you needed to have already worked for an employer before you can take them to a tribunal if you have been mistreated – was increased to two years, effectively giving employers license to hire and fire at will. In 2013, tribunal

75 https://www.ted.com/talks/alexander_betts_why_brexit_happened_and_what_to_do_next?language=en

76 http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/newsnight/paulmason/2011/02/twenty_reasons_why_its_kicking.html

77 <https://www.versobooks.com/books/1075-why-its-kicking-off-everywhere>

78 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/sep/02/housing-market-gulf-salaries-house-prices>
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/property/property-market/12157946/Generation-Rent-London-to-become-a-city-of-renters-by-2025.html>

79 <http://www.rentersrightslondon.org>

80 At the time of writing in September 2016, this represented approx. 31,000 Euros or 35,000 USD.

81 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/mro/news-release/zero-hours-contract-in-main-job-now-reported-by-744-000-people/zhc0915.html>



Due to rising living costs, a fall in real wages, a rise in 'underemployment', many people in low paying self-employment, and a continuing cuts to state support personal debts are on the rise in UK. Photo by airpix ©, CC BY 2.0, source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/144152028@N08/33772075662>

fees of £1,200 were introduced, which drastically reduced the numbers of people able to take their employer to court. Wage theft is becoming more common among casual employers: between 2014 and 2015 it doubled.⁸² Trade Unions in the UK no longer have strong bargaining rights, and most unions will not take on individual cases of mistreatment.

Furthermore, unsecured personal debt is rising. Although this is still portrayed as a problem of 'financial literacy' and individual irresponsibility, data shows the increase is caused by the combination of rising living costs, a fall in real wages, a rise in 'underemployment' (people who would like more hours of paid work but cannot get them), record numbers of people in low paying self-employment, and a continuing programme of severe cuts to state support for working age households.⁸³ One

national debt advice agency, StepChange, reported that 40 per cent of people who came in to their offices for debt advice in 2015 were in debt for essential living costs such as local taxes, rent and utility bills.⁸⁴ By comparison, this figure was 25 per cent in 2011. The average household now has £10,000 worth of unsecured, non-mortgage debt (bank loans, credit cards and overdrafts). A 2016 report from housing campaigners Shelter shows that a third of private renters in London in 2015 had got into debt to cover rent costs.⁸⁵ People seeking advice or help with their debt tend to go to large, government-funded charities such as Citizens Advice, StepChange or National Debtline. Online forums such as Money Saving Expert⁸⁶ offer informal, peer-to-peer support, while local community organisations such as the Brighton Unemployed Families Project⁸⁷ or Community Links⁸⁸ provide face-to-face support. People struggling to stay above water tend not to have the time or resources to campaign for change, but unfunded protest websites such as Debt Resistance UK⁸⁹ provide some resources and events for multi-cause activists.

ECONOMIC DOGMA

Economics should be a way of describing human behaviour in a credible, disinterested, enlightened fashion. However, since the financial crisis hit in 2008 many have come to see it as a pervasive dogma of value judgements presented as truth. The point is that there has not only been a squeeze on housing, and public services, but also on thinking. Some are trying to change this. The Finance Innovation Lab⁹⁰ is a training programme for campaigners and activists trying to change finance, The Post-Crash Economics Society⁹¹ is trying to change the way that economics is taught in universities and the New Economics Foundation⁹² develops new policies

84 <https://www.stepchange.org/policy-and-research/personal-debt-statistics-yearbook-2015.aspx>

85 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-35977445>

86 <http://forums.moneysavingexpert.com>

87 <http://bucfp.org>

88 <http://www.community-links.org>

89 <http://debtresistance.uk>

90 <http://financeinnovationlab.org>

91 <http://www.post-crasheconomics.com>

92 <http://neweconomics.org>

82 <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-citizens-advice-works/media/press-releases/casual-workers-at-risk-of-wage-theft>

83 <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Britain-In-The-Red-2016.pdf>

for ‘economics as if people and the planet mattered’. Open Democracy published an excellent series of articles on the status of the economics profession several years ago, entitled ‘Uneconomics’.⁹³

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DISCOURSES IN THE CONTEMPORARY UNITED KINGDOM

If thinking about the shared points of reference and the shared experiences of people involved in such new and innovative examples of civic engagement in the United Kingdom, it seems important to highlight the following:

THE READING LIST

Several authors and their books would be particularly popular among people who consider themselves part of communities involved in citizen engagement. These include social epidemiologists, Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson’s ‘The Spirit Level’ which argues that inequality creates social problems;⁹⁴ essayist James Meek’s Orwell Prize Winning ‘Private Island’ which explores Britain’s 25-year experiment in privatising ‘natural monopolies’;⁹⁵ journalist Owen Jones’ ‘Chavs’, which looks at the media’s ‘demonisation of working class’ people in Britain;⁹⁶ All books by Danny Dorling, a geographer who publishes statistically rich books about inequality,⁹⁷ and the journalist Paul Mason, whose recent book ‘Post-Capitalism’⁹⁸ took Manuel Castells’ ideas and recast them for a broad readership.⁹⁹ Anarchist anthropologist David Graeber’s books are also much more widely read than in previous times.¹⁰⁰

POLICIES

Occupy protest movements were criticised for being oppositional: anti-austerity, anti-capitalist, anti-establishment – but not obviously for anything. This does seem to be changing. In April 2016 there was an anti-austerity march in London that included a section specifically marching in support of the Universal Basic Income – an idea that has been gaining popularity since the publication in 2015 of Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams’ book ‘Inventing the Future’ which argues for an unconditional basic income.¹⁰¹ ‘Rent controls’ have come under discussion in ways that were not imaginable some years ago.¹⁰² And, in some parts of the country an appetite for intervening in the housing crisis is more apparent. On May 5th 2016 in St. Ives in Cornwall, there was a referendum on whether second home ownership should be limited. 80 per cent of the town voted to ban second home owners from buying new-build homes in the area.¹⁰³ Until recently the re-nationalisation of privatised industries was such an unconventional idea that the campaign to renationalise the railways began as an art project. However, policies to renationalise the railways are now part of Labour thinking, even pre-Corbyn.¹⁰⁴ In Scotland, the SNP has recently proposed to create a state energy company that will invest in renewable technologies.¹⁰⁵

CULTURE

Many of these groups also have very similar cultural references. Although the links between Britain’s music festivals and its activists are not what they once were, most will have been to Glastonbury, or one of the other less commercial festivals.¹⁰⁶ They will read Vice News,¹⁰⁷ the Guardian (which has covered

101 <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/apr/13/should-we-scrap-benefits-and-pay-everyone-100-a-week-whether-they-work-or-not> and <https://www.versobooks.com/books/1989-inventing-the-future>

102 <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/davehillblog/2015/oct/19/new-report-finds-that-london-rent-control-would-have-mixed-blessings>

103 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cornwall-36204795>

104 <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/ed-miliband-plans-part-re-nationalisation-of-railway-network-if-labour-wins-election-9613404.html>

105 <http://renews.biz/102374/snp-eyes-state-energy-company>

106 <http://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk>

107 <https://news.vice.com>

93 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/collections/uneconomics>

94 <https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/resources/the-spirit-level>

95 <http://www.theorwellprize.co.uk/book-title/private-island-why-britain-now-belongs-to-someone-else>

96 <https://www.versobooks.com/books/2161-chavs>

97 <http://www.dannydorling.org>

98 <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/188551/postcapitalism>

99 <http://www.manuelcastells.info/en>

100 <https://www.theguardian.com/profile/david-graeber>

most of the trends and phenomena in this paper),¹⁰⁸ Open Democracy¹⁰⁹ and will have been on a Critical Mass bicycle ride. In London they might have been to a social centre like DIY Space¹¹⁰ or Dalston Hive.¹¹¹ They might have been to one of the Brick Lane Debates¹¹² or have attended a Radical Left General Assembly.¹¹³ Most will be familiar with the work of stand-up comedians like Stewart Lee, Bridget Christie and Josie Long who, along with spoken word poets, Akala and Kate Tempest, often appear at fundraisers and protests.¹¹⁴

EUROPE & EUROPEAN VALUES

It is hard to judge what the relationship of such actors is to Europe and European values. In Britain there is no clear idea of what 'European values' are, let alone how to relate to them. Of course, many people look to Europe to learn, but there is a pervasive idea in the United Kingdom 'we invented parliamentary democracy, and so – so what other values do we need from you?'. European integration is just not seen as a default progressive cause in the same way as say nuclear disarmament, minority rights or the National Health Service are.

On June 23rd Britain voted to leave the European Union. Geographical regions, generations and political parties (members and representatives) were extremely divided on the issue. Many felt it was hard to have a consistent position on the European Union when there are so many issues that are perceived to affect Britain in different ways. People on the left like workplace rights and protections, but are horrified by the TTIP. Those on the right appreciate free and stable trade, but constantly complain about regulations. Even those who voted

for Britain to remain, voted for Europe as it is. The non-aligned left-wing pressure group Compass campaigned to encourage people on the left to vote for Britain to stay in the EU, while at the same time imagining how it could be better. It's called Good Europe. They have organised a platform in London for Yanis Varoufakis' 'DiEM25 – Democracy in Europe Campaign'. Few activists in the United Kingdom are aware of or involved in wider European movements to link up small campaigning groups across borders. Nevertheless, most people who have worked in campaigning professionally for a few years will probably have had an opportunity to attend a conference, or join some European network organised by a cultural attaché or a foundation. That is quite common.

SITUATION, NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF CIVIC ACTORS

The question of the situation, needs and concerns of civic actors is highly subjective. Many in the community of practice would say: 'money', 'time' and 'help with finding money', because without funds to pay staff, most projects can only be squeezed in around paid work commitments – making them unsustainable and exhausting. Surviving on a part-time income, or on state benefits, has become considerably harder in the last ten years so there is less time and energy available for informal activism. There is plenty of funding in the UK for social entrepreneurship and innovation. However, much less is available for political action, critical campaigning and legal support. Campaigners who need to fight cases in the courts are particularly disadvantaged.¹¹⁵

Activists and campaigners also need training in the structures and processes of power that they seek to challenge. Critical politics is not taught to under 16 year olds in state schools, which 93 per cent of the population attend; 'citizenship' was introduced by the New Labour government as a school subject in 2002, but it has been criticised for focusing on topics such as how to recycle or how to call emergency

108 <https://www.theguardian.com/international>

109 <https://www.opendemocracy.net>

110 <http://diyspaceforlondon.org/about>

111 <https://hivedalston.wordpress.com>

112 <https://www.facebook.com/BrickLaneDebates>

113 <https://www.facebook.com/events/1588733401408239>

114 For more on these personalities see:

<http://www.stewartlee.co.uk>

<http://www.bridgetchristie.co.uk>

<http://www.josielong.com>

<http://www.akala.moonfruit.com>

<http://www.katetempest.co.uk>

115 <http://www.theguardian.com/law/2016/mar/31/legal-aid-act-has-denied-justice-to-the-most-vulnerable-it-must-be-reviewed>

services, and for being taught by non-specialist teachers who lack confidence in the subject. Consequently, many campaigners and activists do not understand the basics of the political system: what a Bill is, what the difference between parliament and government is and how political decisions are made. This limits their activities to protesting. Organisations like the New Economy Organisers Network (NEON), a project set up by the New Economics Foundation, provides training for campaigners who are not familiar with the political system or mainstream media.¹¹⁶ This helps them to step outside their bubble, in which activists only talk to each other and then wonder why the rest of society does not reflect their views.

Many of the older, larger and best known civil society organisations began as grass-roots volunteer-led campaigns, but over time have become professionalised. While this makes them better at understanding the technical and legal process by which policy is made, and possibly more accountable, it has also made many of them more centralised, creating distance from their members, organisations in which to practice a profession like any other. This divide between management and members is arguably similar to that seen in modern political parties. Most large, established campaigning organisations are not structured as membership organisations; supporters make regular donations, but do not have any formal control over the board of trustees or policy direction. War on Want¹¹⁷ and Friends of the Earth¹¹⁸ are notable exceptions to this rule.

Critics such as the National Coalition for Independent Action (NCIA)¹¹⁹ also argue that modern professional charities, which become too involved in delivering government contracts and providing government advice, have a reduced ability to be critical of government policy. When Oxfam publicly drew a link between food banks and government policy on zero hours contracts, welfare cuts, unemployment and childcare costs in June 2014, a Conservative MP directed the Charity Commission to launch an investigation into Oxfam.¹²⁰ This came six months

after the introduction of the Lobbying Act, which restricts the amounts charities are allowed to spend on any campaigning deemed 'party political'.¹²¹ This has caused many charities to self-censor to an unnecessary degree. It is fact that even large campaigning organisations require corporate funding as well as government funding from service provision contracts to function. That this entails dilemmas and constraints is clear. For example, in 2013 a former employee of anti-poverty charity Save the Children¹²² spoke on national television about how the charity had suppressed a fuel poverty campaign that criticised gas prices for fear of upsetting one of its donors, British Gas.¹²³ The charity denied the allegations.

It would be misleading, however, to consider 'old' and 'new' civil society as two separate spheres. 'Old school' NGOs link small campaigns around the country – particularly environmental groups like Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace.¹²⁴ Greenpeace is more than likely quietly funding and helping small direct action groups. The nature of the modern labour market also means that many activists move between organisations irrespective whether 'old' or 'new' civil society. Someone might be at a Sisters UN CUT demonstration one day, working on a short term contract at the Citizens Advice Bureau next and then campaigning for the local Labour candidate in the local elections on another day.¹²⁵ Since 1996, CitizensUK have organised trade unions, faith groups and other community organisations across the country to campaign successfully on a number of issues most notably the living wage campaign.¹²⁶

121 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/4/contents/enacted>

122 <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk>

123 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/the-price-of-charity-save-the-children-exposed-after-seeking-approval-of-energy-firms-8994225.html>

124 <http://www.greenpeace.de>

125 <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/apr/10/seach-for-21st-century-socialists-zoe-williams>

126 http://www.citizensuk.org/living_wage

116 <http://neweconomyorganisers.org> and <http://www.neweconomics.org>

117 <http://www.waronwant.org>

118 <http://www.foei.org>

119 <http://independentaction.net>

120 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-27783331>

MAPPING MULTIPLIERS OF NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE UK

OCCUPY LONDON, UK UNCUT, 38 DEGREES

are large groups without, or at least bigger than, anyone who speaks on their behalf.

JEREMY CORBYN

is the current leader of the Labour Party who is appealing for a 'new politics' as well as continuing to publicly endorse trade unions, the anti-nuclear movement, anti-war coalitions. He seeks a different kind of relationship between the Labour Party and social movements. He is more willing to speak at rallies than any other previous leader of the Labour party.

CAROLINE LUCAS

is the only Green member of Parliament in the UK. She is charismatic and down-to-earth, has even been arrested since being an MP (at an anti-fracking demonstration). Effectively she speaks for over 1,000 000 people who voted green at the last election.

MHAIRI BLACK

is 21 years old and the youngest member of Parliament and represents SNP. She describes herself as a 'traditional Socialist'. Her [first speech](#) in Parliament has been viewed more than 10,000 000 times on youtube.

RUSSELL BRAND

is a super-vlogger and political commentator who told British people not to vote, but later endorsed Ed Miliband, the Labour candidate.

THE NEW ECONOMICS FOUNDATION, THE CENTRE FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL STUDIES (CLASS) & THE FABIAN SOCIETY

are the think tanks most closely connected to new currents of civic engagement. Film directors who produce political documentaries, dramas and feature films on TV: Jimmy McGovern, Mike Leigh, Nicholas Kent, Penny Woolcock, Ken Loach, Shane Meadows and Adam Curtis

BOB AND ROBERTA SMITH

are artists arguing against education reform, mixing art and protest.

MARK MCGOWAN

is an artist taxi-driver who rants from his taxi from a leftist perspective. He has 50,000 + subscribers

THE GUARDIAN NEWSPAPER AND ITS COLUMNISTS

are interested in exploring left-wing politics. Zoe Williams wrote a book called 'Get it Together' in 2015 which explores new campaigning organisations on the left of British politics. Giles Fraser is a polemicist and vicar who resigned from St. Paul's Cathedral over plans to remove Occupy protesters from in front of the cathedral in 2011. George Monbiot, Paul Mason as well as Gerry Hassan and Pat Kane in Scotland write sympathetically about new political movements. Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist as well as a blogger, campaigner journalist, author and advisor to Jeremy Corbyn.

OPEN DEMOCRACY

is an online news and comment site funded predominantly by trusts, foundations and partnerships with universities.

MAPPING MULTIPLIERS OF NEW FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN EUROPE

CROATIA

BAZA ZA RADNIKU INICIJATIVU I DEMOKRATIZACIJU (ORGANISATION FOR WORKERS' INITIATIVE AND DEMOCRATISATION, BRID)

is committed to the protection and promotion of workers' rights, democratic decision-making processes among workers and economic democracy. It was established in 2012 by student activists and works closely with trade unions all over Croatia also functioning as a platform for wider connection of civil society actors.

ZMAG (GREEN NETWORK OF ACTIVIST GROUPS)

is an association that gathers organic gardeners, promoters of environmentally friendly technologies, permaculture designers, academic researchers and social activists. ZMAG publishes an annual report of best practices in green economy.

MREŽA HRANE (NETWORK FOR FOOD)

is a Rijeka-based platform connecting social supermarkets and civil society organisations that advocate for the development of legal conditions for donating food to the most vulnerable members of society. The platform is coordinated by [Centar za kulturu dijaloga](#) (Centre for culture of dialogue).

ZADRUGA ZA ETIČNO FINANCIRANJE

(COOPERATION FOR ETHICAL FINANCE)

is a cooperative for ethical finance, managing the process of creating the first social bank in Croatia, EBanka, which will be owned by its clients.

ARE YOU SYRIOUS?

a former initiative and now registered organisation, collects food, clothes and other utensils needed by refugees. Donations are delivered to improvised camps, closed borders or shelters.

OKUS DOMA (TASTE OF HOME)

The Centar za mirovne studije (Center for peace studies) started, a culinary-cultural-research project introducing the culture, customs and countries of origin of refugees and migrants in Croatia. The team consists of refugees, asylum seekers and volunteers/activists. A crowdfunding campaign helped to establish a social cooperative with the aim to start a catering business and culinary exchange projects.

POGON

the Zagreb Centre for Independent Culture and Youth is based on a new model of civil-public partnership. It is co-governed by the City of Zagreb and [Operacija:Grad](#) (Alliance Operation:City). It is part of a platform engaged in establishing new models for socio-cultural centres. The platform is coordinated by ACT Grupa, a consortium of organisations and individuals that promote corporate social responsibility, social and solidarity economy, social entrepreneurship and civil society.

KOOPERATIVA – REGIONALNA PLATFORMA ZA KULTURU

(KOOPERATIVA – REGIONAL PLATFORM FOR CULTURE)

is a regional network of organisations working in the field of independent culture and contemporary art in South-Eastern Europe. Kooperativa was founded in 2012 by 21 independent cultural organisations active in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Slovenia and Serbia.

FRANCE

COLLECTIF POUR L'ACTION CITOYENNES

(COLLECTIVE FOR CIVIC ASSOCIATIONS)

was created in 2010 to fight against the coming down of associations to their sole economic aspect, and to defend the contribution of associations to the construction of a united, sustainable and participative society.

P2P FOUNDATION

is an international organisation that studies, documents and promotes peer-to-peer practices. It started to develop its French branch in 2015.

COOP DES COMMUNS

was founded in Spring 2016 to promote and develop bridges between the realm of the Commons and that of social and solidary economy. (No website)

ASSOCIATION VECAM

was created in 1995. In anticipation of an increasing digitalisation of human production, it wished to feed citizens and civil society's reflection on the matter. The question of Commons has also become central in VECAM's interventions and projects. It has stimulated a French-speaking network around the Commons and around its [le Temps des Communs'](#) initiative.

SYLVIA FREDRIKSSON (@S_FREDRIKSSON)

is dedicated to the promotion of the Commons and works on the challenges of citizen appropriation of technologies as a lever of emancipation for civil society. She specialises in hypermedia and has worked on exploring and designing local urban utopias.

NICOLAS LOUBET (@NICOLASLOUBET)

is the co-founder of Cellabz, Bluenod, Knowtex, Umaps. He develops innovation labs in the blockchain field, carries out monitoring and managing of creative communities, innovative ecosystems, decentralised events, and tools for collective knowledge.

BENJAMIN CORIAT

is a French economist and professor at the Paris 13 University (University of Economic Sciences and Management). He situates himself within the Regulation School of thoughts. He is part of the administration council of the Économistes Atterrés ("the appalled economists") and researches the Commons.

FABIENNE ORSI

is an economist and researcher at the Research Institute for Development at the SESSTIM, in Marseille. With the launching of the project ANR on "Intellectual Property, Commons, Exclusivity" in 2010, she got involved in a pluridisciplinary research on the Commons in the field of knowledge with a focus on governance of the Commons and property.

LIONEL MAUREL

is a blogger, legal expert and librarian. His blog posts deal with the redefinition of copyright in the digital era. He is one of the founders of SavoirsCom1, a collective of librarians defending a common domain for information.

VALÉRIE PEUGEOT

currently works at the Orange Labs (social and human sciences), in Paris. She has been involved in non-profit activities for 15 years in the fields of European policies, social impact of globalisation, participative democracy, and social and democratic use of ICT (Information and Communications Technology). She links the activist and institutional realm.

GREECE

PLACE IDENTITY

hosts Politeia 2.0, a platform for political innovation focusing on redesigning policy-making processes in Greece by mapping and connecting civil society initiatives promoting bottom-up problem-solving at a local level. The NGO organises citizens' workshops, collaborative trainings as well as conferences. It also connects internationally with similar initiatives to exchange best practices in social and digital technologies for citizens' engagement and advancement of the Commons.

CITIZEN UNION OF KALLIGA SQUARE

was formed in 2011. The initiative is active in Kypseli, one of the central neighbourhoods of Athens. Through major demographic changes during the last two decades the area started to have a negative image of being dangerous. Thus, the initiative focusses its activities on Kalliga Square to work towards the urban regeneration of their neighbourhood through solidarity and cultural exchange.

FOTINI KYPSELI (BRIGHT KYPSELI)

acts in the same neighbourhood. The local initiative tries to give light, both literally and metaphorically, to Kypseli. They illuminate entrances of apartment buildings and shop windows with LED lamps. Additionally, they started to build partnerships with NGOs working with vulnerable groups.

YOGA TO THE PARK

was started by two passionate yogis who taught yoga to friends in unfamiliar locations, such as parks, squares and beaches in 2011. Instead of money, they accepted donations of food, clothes, medicines, and services. After not being given permission to offer yoga classes in public space anymore, the group established a social enterprise.

GENERATION 2.0 FOR RIGHTS, EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

promotes equal civil rights regardless of gender, nationality, religion or any kind of social category. The NGO focusses on the integration of second-generation Greek citizens as well as on economic migrants and refugees in Greece.

FEAST THESSALONIKI

is the first crowd-funding initiative in Greece. During their events food and wine from local restaurants as well as wineries are offered and five selected teams present their idea, asking for funding. The audience that paid a small entrance fee to attend the dinner votes for the idea which will get supported through this money.

IMPACT HUB ATHENS

is a co-working space and community of professionals, artists, social entrepreneurs, and creative minds that work, collaborate and innovate together towards creating an ecosystem of sustainable initiatives with the purpose of social change. Running since 2013 it is part of the global network of 85 Impact Hubs.

URBAN DETAILS

was an artist-run initiative that activated an abandoned building in the neighbourhood of Kypseli and transformed it into a temporary art space. Together with the presented artworks an intense schedule of parallel activities was run including guided walks in the neighbourhood and a discussion series.

HUNGARY

CITY MARKETING DIVISION (PROGRAMME OF THE CITY OF BUDAPEST FOR CULTURAL, SPORT AND URBANITY-ORIENTED CITY DEVELOPMENT)

tries to unite the bottom-up and top-down approach.

KÉK – CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE CENTER

is an independent cultural centre engaged in different urban projects. [Lakatlan](#) for example aims at finding innovative solutions for the community-based regeneration of vacant urban properties.

COMMUNITY GARDENS

also became more visible in Hungary recently.

CYCLOMANIA

is a community bike shop. The social enterprise is situated in Budapest.

SZÍNES VÁROS – COLORFUL CITY

is the Hungarian association which colours public spaces.

A VÁROS MINDENKIÉ (THE CITY IS FOR ALL)

are people who are affected by housing poverty and their allies, who all work together for housing rights and for an egalitarian and just society.

KÖZÉLET ISKOLÁJA (THE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC LIFE)

is a community-based training, research and development centre that develops democratic culture in Hungary by improving the citizenship skills of people living in social exclusion, supporting social movements and groups that fight for social justice.

NÓRA RITÓK / IGAGZGYÖNGY FOUNDATION

is active in Eastern Hungary for the integration of children living in deep poverty. The foundation aims at improving living conditions through gardening, community development, fellowship programmes and employment opportunities.

SZIMBIÓZIS FOUNDATION/ LÁSZLÓ JAKUBINYI (SOCIAL FARMING)

is a programme for inclusive micro-communities in the countryside with social, educational and healthcare functions. It aims at the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, creating employment and space for social enterprises.

NESST HUNGARY

is the oldest and most effective social incubator focused on creating employment.

HUMÁN PLATFORM

unites professional associations, NGOs and individuals working in the field of health care, culture, education and social care. HP is dedicated to represent and protect professional values, improve quality of life and foster social solidarity.

MIGRATION AID

is a volunteer civil initiative to help refugees arriving to Hungary reach their assigned refugee camps or travel onwards.

JURÁNYI INCUBATOR HOUSE

is a space for performing arts in Budapest.

XKK- THE COMMUNICATION AGENCY FOR SOCIAL CAUSES

aims at using the power of communication to advance social causes and to reach youth in Hungary.

DEMOKRATIKUS IFJÚSÁGÉRT ALAPÍTVÁNY

(FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRATIC YOUTH)
promotes youth development through youth service, democratic debate and professional development on a national and international level.

POLAND

KOMITET OBRONY DEMOKRACJI

(COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENCE OF DEMOCRACY)

is a grass-roots civic movement founded in 2015 in Warsaw. Its goal is to protect the rule of law, democracy and European values in Poland. They mobilise people online via Facebook and offline in protest marches.

RAZEM (TOGETHER)

is a political party founded in Spring 2015 by activists of leftist youth organisations and politicians who left the green party ("Zieloni 2004").

KLUBY GAZETY POLSKIEJ (CLUBS OF GAZETA POLSKA)

are centered around the right-wing weekly Gazeta Polska. The development of the Clubs was related to the Smolensk plane crash in 2010 and members of the Clubs are involved in organising monthly commemorations.

MARSZ NIEPODLEGŁOŚCI (MARCH OF INDEPENDENCE)

is an annual march of nationalists held on November 11th on the Polish Independence Day.

INICJATYWA PRACOWNICZA (WORKERS' INITIATIVE)

was formed in 2001 first as an informal group of worker activists; in September 2004, IP was established as a formal but independent and grass-roots trade union, seeing itself in the anarcho-syndicalist and revolutionary syndicalism tradition.

KONGRES RUCHÓW MIEJSKICH

(CONGRESS OF URBAN MOVEMENTS)

is the most important platform for Polish urban movements.

MIASTO JEST NASZE (THE CITY IS OURS)

is a local movement in Warsaw. It is also very active and popular on Facebook, which is used for the critique of the local government, sharing information and spreading progressive ideas about urban politics.

POLSKI ALARM SMOGOWY (POLISH SMOG ALERT)

is a network of local organisations fighting to improve air quality.

KOMITET KRYZYSOWY HUMANISTYKI POLSKIEJ

(CRISIS COMMITTEE FOR POLISH HUMANITIES)

was founded after the announcement of the liquidation of the philosophy department at the University of Białystok (2013). The dynamics of the activities extend beyond that local struggle and criticise the reforms of science introduced in 2011.

PORTUGAL

PORTUGAL PARTICIPA – CAMINHOS PARA A INOVAÇÃO SOCIETAL

aims at promoting processes of participatory democracy to produce transformative change in society by empowering communities as well as individual and collective prosperity.

ASSOCIAÇÃO RENOVAR A MOURARIA

was created in 2008 and works on cultural, social, touristic and economical dynamisation of Mouraria neighbourhood in Lisbon.

VIVACIDADE. DRESS UP THE CITY VOIDS

is a community engagement project through place-making that develops temporary urban interventions in city voids. The the cross-sectorial collaboration between a municipality, an NGO and a cultural enterprise promotes urban change by implementing participatory processes that join citizens, artistic and academic communities for collective and collaborative solutions for abandoned spaces.

LATA 65

has been offering Lisbon's senior citizens an opportunity to explore street art firsthand since 2012. The popular urban art workshop has been developed with the intention to use street art as a bridge between generations, to spread creative expression throughout the city's most neglected areas and to shift perspectives on old age.

COMMUNITY GARDENS

The concept of community gardens spread out all over the country in the last 10 years, mainly promoted by the municipalities, *environmental NGOs* and some *companies of waste management*. The main goals are related to providing land for self-sufficient small scale farming, leisure and health, and environmental education (reforestation, control of invasive species and respect for nature).

ZERO DESPERDICIO (ZERO WASTE)

is a citizens' initiative with the overall goal to promote the use of all surplus prepared food products, distributing them among people with food shortages under controlled conditions of hygiene and food safety, thus avoiding waste.

TIME BANKS

are a recent concept in Portugal. The first time bank agency in Portugal was created in 2002. Today, there are more than 1900 Time Bank members of whom 74% are women. Currently, there are 28 agencies working in various parts of Portugal.

COLORADD

is a social innovation initiative. Their app is a sign code for aiding colour blind people to recognise colours, while contributing to their social integration and welfare, turning communication more efficient, responsible and inclusive.

THE MAP OF INNOVATION AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN PORTUGAL

is a research project that will discover and map innovative initiatives by seeking to create knowledge, using a methodology which closely involves local communities.

CIDADANIA 2.0

is a conference and online platform about tools and networks for a better dialogue in society.

SPAIN

LA HIDRA COOP

is a Barcelona-based social enterprise that offers training, consulting and research services. They contribute to designing, implementing or evaluating social policies, cultural projects and educational plans in relation to public, private or autonomous institutions.

LA FUNDACIÓN DE LOS COMUNES

is a statewide network of collectives that spans different cultural areas and comprises culturally and politically driven groups working for a process of social democratisation. They are engaged in concepts of self-management, horizontal decision-making, the socialisation of material and immaterial resources and support for the Commons.

LA CASA INVISIBLE

is a Málaga-based social centre engaged in the Commons and other participatory projects.

COLABORABORA

is a Bilbao-based cooperative of social initiatives dedicated to the Commons, cultural activism, and social innovation.

COOP57

is a cooperative of financial services engaged in ethical funding and by that fostering social economy.

GOTEO

is an open source online platform for civic crowdfunding and collaboration on citizen initiatives and social, cultural, technological and educational projects.

BASURAMA

is a Madrid-based artist collective dedicated to research, cultural and environmental creation and production whose practices revolve around the reflection of trash, waste and reuse in all its formats and possible meanings.

MEDIALAB-PRADO

is a citizen laboratory for the production, research and broadcasting of cultural projects that explores forms of experimentation and collaborative learning that emerge from digital networks. It is part of the Department of Culture and Sports of the Madrid City Council.

INTERMEDIAE

is a laboratory for projects and social innovation in Madrid, specialised in visual culture and driven by participation. It investigates new ways of involving different audiences in art and culture.

LA HARINERA ZGZ

is a creative space in Zaragoza. The centre is dedicated to social innovation, active participation, empowerment, and the transformation of urban space through creativity.

PANDORA MIRABILIA

is a Madrid-based cooperative of women with feminist and interdisciplinary perspectives. They are active in research, social intervention and consultancy.

MARINA GARCÉS

is a Barcelona-based feminist writer and philosopher.

JOAN SUBIRATS

is a Barcelona-based academic involved in urbanism and the Commons.

SWEDEN

OPENLAB “UTVECKLA DIN STAD”

is a centre where students, educators and researchers from Stockholm are working on challenges faced by the citizens of Stockholm. The goal is to produce proposals for solutions to complex social challenges through new interdisciplinary collaboration between traditional knowledge areas.

RÄTTVISEFÖRMEDLINGEN (EQUALISTERS IN ENGLISH)

was one of the early adaptors of social media driven activism and was an initiative to correct the inequalities between men and women in different sectors and professions. It has grown to a multi-platform movement with around 100,000 followers/participants, now driving issues of representation in many fields and more areas than gender inequality.

THE INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT @SVARTKVINNA (BLACK WOMAN)

was started in the Spring 2014 by Fanna Ndow Norrby. She collects every day stories of sexism, racism, prejudice, comments and behaviour faced by black women in Sweden. Her stories were edited into [a book](#) in late 2015.

@MAKTHAVARNA (PEOPLE IN POWER)

on [twitter](#) and [instagram](#) was started by Gülsen Üzz and Zahra Farag and is “a separatist platform for racialised people with an intersectional perspective on antiracist feminism.” It is a curated account that features a new person posting every week.

LEWEND TASIN: THE CREOLE REPORT (IN SWEDISH)

presents new concepts for youth identity, rooted in postcolonial theory and understanding of complexity, power and potential.

ADAM TENSTA, JASON “TIMBUKTU” DIAKITÉ,

ALEXANDRA PASCALIDOU

are relevant actors in the anti-racist space. Stories in Swedish can be found in the profile piece [#Hatet](#) “the hate”.

STREET GÄRIS (STREET GIRLS)

was initiated by Ailin Moaf Mirlashari as a What’s App group chat and Facebook group for young women (and non-gender binary) living in Swedish suburbs. It is now a network and an NGO, whose mission is “to empower each other through sisterhood, inspiration and knowledge sharing.”

KAJSA BALKFORS

is active in [the Art of Hosting community](#), a global network with Nordic roots, building a community of co-creative leadership and hosting skills.

NAVID MODIRI

is involved in [Samtalsaktivisterna](#) and [Sverige 3.0](#) to make change through having and hosting conversations that matter.

KARIN BRUCE

is active in [LärOlika möten](#). The initiative brings together people from different parts of society and with various backgrounds. In several meetings participants share their thoughts on different topics to broaden their networks and get a wider understanding of society.

FÖRORTEN I CENTRUM

and founder Saadia Hussain use mural art for social change.

SANDRA KINNAMAN NORDSTRÖM’S THE GOOD TALENTS

uses entrepreneurial skills to find and develop talent in youth in underserved communities.

JÄRVASKOLAN

is an entrepreneurial initiative to build local capacity for equal education to start “the best school in Sweden”.

UNITED KINGDOM

OCCUPY LONDON, UK UNCUT, 38 DEGREES

are large groups without, or at least bigger than, anyone who speaks on their behalf.

JEREMY CORBYN

is the current leader of the Labour Party who is appealing for a 'new politics' as well as continuing to publicly endorse trade unions, the anti-nuclear movement, anti-war coalitions. He seeks a different kind of relationship between the Labour Party and social movements. He is more willing to speak at rallies than any other previous leader of the Labour party.

CAROLINE LUCAS

is the only Green member of Parliament in the UK. She is charismatic and down-to-earth, has even been arrested since being an MP (at an anti-fracking demonstration). Effectively she speaks for over 1,000 000 people who voted green at the last election.

MHAIRI BLACK

is 21 years old and the youngest member of Parliament and represents SNP. She describes herself as a 'traditional Socialist'. Her *first speech* in Parliament has been viewed more than 10,000 000 times on youtube.

RUSSELL BRAND

is a super-vlogger and political commentator who told British people not to vote, but later endorsed Ed Miliband, the Labour candidate.

THE NEW ECONOMICS FOUNDATION, THE CENTRE FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL STUDIES (CLASS) & THE FABIAN SOCIETY

are the think tanks most closely connected to new currents of civic engagement.

Film directors who produce political documentaries, dramas and feature films on TV: Jimmy McGowan, Mike Leigh, Nicholas Kent, Penny Woolcock, Ken Loach, Shane Meadows and Adam Curtis

BOB AND ROBERTA SMITH

are artists arguing against education reform, mixing art and protest.

MARK MCGOWAN

is an artist taxi-driver who rants from his taxi from a leftist perspective. He has 50,000 + subscribers

THE GUARDIAN NEWSPAPER AND ITS COLUMNISTS

are interested in exploring left-wing politics. Zoe Williams wrote a book called 'Get it Together' in 2015 which explores new campaigning organisations on the left of British politics. Giles Fraser is a polemicist and vicar who resigned from St. Paul's Cathedral over plans to remove Occupy protesters from in front of the cathedral in 2011. George Monbiot, Paul Mason as well as Gerry Hassan and Pat Kane in Scotland write sympathetically about new political movements. Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist as well as a blogger, campaigner journalist, author and advisor to Jeremy Corbyn.

OPEN DEMOCRACY

is an online news and comment site funded predominantly by trusts, foundations and partnerships with universities.

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WHAT IS GOING ON WITH 'PROJECT EUROPE'? PEOPLE FROM VERY DIFFERENT WALKS OF LIFE, POLITICALLY ENGAGED OR OTHERWISE, ARE QUESTIONING ITS LEGITIMACY IN THE FACE OF MULTIPLE CRISES. YET, THERE IS ALSO A FLOURISHING OF ACTION ON THE PART OF CITIZENS THAT ARE RE-AFFIRMING THEIR COMMITMENT TO AN ASPIRATIONAL IDEA OF EUROPE AS THE PRACTICE OF A COMMUNITY OF VALUES. IN THIS VOLUME CIVIC ACTIVISTS FROM NINE COUNTRIES EXPLORE LATEST TRENDS IN CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AS WELL AS THE IDEAS AND MOVEMENTS THAT HAVE INSPIRED THEM TO ACT.

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