Active citizenship in Southern Europe. Framing protest, political participation and civic engagement

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Panel convenors: Cristiano Bee (University of Surrey), Stavroula Chrona (University of Surrey).

(Standing Group on Southern European Politics, ECPR)

These panels aim at gathering empirical information regarding *non-institutionalised* forms of political participation and civic engagement in Southern Europe. Active citizenship is traditionally seen as the dynamic engagement of the civil society with the institutional levels. As research shows, it is considered essential for providing input legitimacy to current systems of governance. However, recent events prove evidence of the fact that non institutionalised bottom up processes and pressures that are currently characterising a number of Southern European countries bring in new elements to the analysis of active citizenship. This is a key issue that, we believe, requires further investigation, by looking into more details at the implications of new structured forms of mobilisation aimed at a profound social and political change, and ultimately at delegitimising existing political structures. The present context, therefore, is marked by a number of political, social and cultural dynamics that signify resurgence of political participation in apparently non organised ways that in reality follow very structured patterns. The recent protests against the politics of austerity that took place in Greece, for example, show the emergence of forms of mobilisation that are clearly contextual to the enhancing of the euro-crisis and the effects it has produced. These have the aim to radically challenge, and ultimately change, the current political system. On a different pattern, the Turkish protests that started on 28 May 2013 to contest the urban development of Gezi Park or the former Spanish protests that took place in 2011, prove evidence of the highly politicised nature of mobilisation and also of the changing nature of active citizenship in Europe. In all cases, even if these initially appeared to be unorganised forms of contestation, they then became structured bottom-up processes entailing a wide mobilisation from the civil society with the aim of challenging the current political system. These panels explore new dynamics that shape protest, political participation and civic engagement in Southern Europe and focus around the transformation of the concept of active citizenship.

Some of the key questions that the panel seeks to answer are:

- How can we explain the new power assumed by social media in structuring political mobilisation?
- How successful are recent protests in achieving their aims?
- What are the motivational factors underlying political participation and active citizenship?
- What are the key social and public problems that motivate the civil society to engage in social movements?
- What are the institutional policy responses to growing protests in Southern Europe?
- How are traditional media portraying current and past protests?

The panel was proposed on behalf of the ECPR Standing Group in Southern European Politics.

Section 1 (Wednesday 16th April 11:00-12:30)

Paper 1

The mechanisms of nationalist resistance: left and right wing protest in Greece at times of crisis

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Abstract

This paper focuses on radical nationalist protest in Greece from the onset of the 2009 Eurozone crisis. Economic crises tend to reinforce nationalism and intensify nationalist rhetoric. This paper argues that the Greek response to the current economic crisis is shaped around a nationalist rhetoric centred around a language of liberation, restoration of national sovereignty, resistance to foreign domination and struggle against external impositions. It is directed against those foreign powers that many Greeks hold responsible for the continuation of the crisis, alluding similarities between the current German involvement in Greek economic affairs with the Nazi invasion of the 1940s. This paper empirically analyses the nationalist rhetoric put forward by protest movements of both the right and the left, and contends that nationalism serves as a mechanism of resistance and as such provides the common denominator of left and right-wing protest at times of crisis. Although the right and the left are divided on domestic issues, they are united by drawing upon a common cultural reservoir and a resistance based on nationalism.

Paper 2

Right to the City: Insurgent Citizens of the Occupy Gezi Movement

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Abstract

Occupygezi movement bears various characteristics similar to the preceding global social movements ranging from Tahrir Square to Occupy Wall Street and *Indignados* movement in terms of the strategies and tactics employed by the young generations to challenge the growing impact of neoliberal forms of governmentality posed in the form of hegemonic organizations, charismatic leadership and consumerism. It is also similar to the others in the sense that it provided us with a *prefigurative form of politics* as it symbolized the rejection of vanguardism of the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in all walks of life engineering with his intention of raising 'religious and conservative youth'. Lefebvre's path-breaking notion of "the right to the city" is probably the most meaningful theoretical intervention to be used to explain the Occupy Gezi movement (Lefebvre 1996; see also Harvey 2012). What happened in Gezi Park was a revolt of the masses against the ever-lasting authority of the state in shaping the public space as well as the city. The revolt was spontaneously organized by the youngsters of every kind, who were mobilized through the new social media such as Twitter and Facebook. The selection of the Gezi Park, which is located at the very centre of the city was also symbolically important as it was meant to be the space restored from the hands of the corporate world collaborating with the neo-liberal state. Hence, Occupy Gezi movement has become a civil-political venue in which the youngsters of every kind have communicated with each other in a deliberative form and became active citizens in a way that has proved the merits of the ongoing Europeanization processes. As in Tahrir Square and Zucotti Park (Calhoun, 2013), the

demonstrators of Gezi Park also made a point of cleaning up after collective action to demonstrate the capacity of "the people" to govern themselves. Occupygezi movement was also meant to be an attempt to reassemble the social, which had been polarized in different spheres of life between the so-called secularists and islamists. It was revealed that most of the demonstrators were not involved in any organized demonstration before (Konda, 2013). Against the segregation and isolation of everyday life Occupy offered participatory structures and open communication. It invited the passive citizens to experience an active sense of what Hoslton (2008) calls 'insurgent citizenship' by which they could see what an inclusive and egalitarian society might look like. Gezi movement was about creating alternative pathways for political organization and communication to prefigure the real democracy and active citizenry to come. The Movement introduced millions of citizens all around the country to the experience of direct democracy. It radicalized an entire generation of previously discouraged and apathetic youth, and it built test zones for imagining and living out a post-capitalist utopia organized outside profit, competition and corporate world. This paper will concentrate on revealing the ways in which the Occupy Gezi movement transformed the young city dwellers of Istanbul from being passive citizens to active citizens. In doing so, the paper will also dwell into the impact of the social media on this process of transformation.

Paper 3

The crisis and active citizenship in Greece: Qualitative insights from the field

Dr. Jennifer Clarke, University of the Peloponnese, jclarke@uop.gr

Abstract

Civil society and active citizenship in Greece have long been viewed as under-developed (eg. Sotiropoulos 2004), especially by comparison to that in other EU-15 states. In surveys, Greece has tended to have a comparatively low ranking for the relevant social indicators, such as levels of generalised trust and associational membership (eg. Jones et al 2008, Panagiotopoulou and Papliakou 2007). Whilst the current financial crisis has undoubtedly brought about profound social shocks, it is not yet clear what the implications of this context are for this fragile civil society sphere. On the one hand, levels of charitable giving and formal volunteering appear to have fallen to a new low, meaning that Greece now ranks lowest of 146 countries in the Global Giving Index (Charities Aid Foundation 2012), placed below even the world's least-developed countries. On the other hand, anecdotal evidence suggests that the crisis has also stimulated new forms of civic participation, such as supporting soup kitchens and food distribution networks or offering professional services for free (Hope 2012, Russo 2012). A recent survey also suggested that indicated that there has been an increase in the number of Greeks taking part in volunteer projects and solidarity activities since 2010 (Human Grid 2013). One of the challenges in understanding this issue is that the relevant variables are notoriously difficult to assess quantitatively, given that measurements are highly sensitive to the way in which questions are structured (Frane 2006). The aim of this paper, therefore, is to offer much needed qualitative insights into the effects of the crisis on active citizenship in Greece. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with representatives of approximately 20 Greek volunteer-based organisations/ movements, the paper will explore the effects of the crisis on volunteering, charitable giving and other forms of engagement with civil society. Inter alia, the study will seek to understand how the profile of actively engaged citizens has changed since the beginning of the crisis, and the factors that motivate their engagement and/ or disengagement. The impact of new technologies on

forms of engagement is a further issue that will be explored. The paper will draw on Sabatier's (eg 1998) Advocacy Coalition Framework approach as a theoretical framework to structure the conceptual analysis.

Paper 4

Enhancing new forms of active citizenship via social media platforms: the case of Gezi Park movement in Turkey

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Abstract

This paper seeks to understand the role of social media in the enhancement of public participation in the case of the Gezi protests in Turkey. The civil unrest eroded over the governments' project of building a replica of military barracks at Istanbul's Gezi Park. What in the beginning was a protest to protect the park in a range of a few days became an anti-government movement that lasted for over four months. As Göle argues the Gezi movement opens up the path for the creation of new forms of citizenship in the country that go beyond the traditional dichotomies that used to characterize the socio-political arena (2013, p. 7). This paper focuses on the role that social media -and in precise Twitter and Facebook- played in the shaping of the social dynamics that the Gezi movement unveiled and which appear to challenge the long established social and political norms. Specifically I look at the posts that have appeared on the two social media platforms between June and September 2013. Doing a discourse analysis I categorize them into different streams such as: spread of news within and outside the country, solidarity from within the country, international solidarity and support, calls for participation, opinionated and oppositional messages. This paper argues that the social platforms played a dual role in the Gezi movement. First they offered the space of disseminating information regarding the protests both at the national and international level. Second they became a channel for communication amongst the protesters and those in support of the movement, which resulted into a large number of participants joining the demonstrations throughout the country. This paper suggests that the social media in the case of Gezi Park protests became a tool for bringing to the forefront a form of active citizenship that urges for greatest democracy and civil rights within the country.

Section 2 (Wednesday 16th April 13:30-15:00)

Paper 1

Divergent narratives on democracy in the Portuguese social conflict. A dialect materialist approach

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Abstract

The euro-crisis has provoked a wide-spread social crisis in the peripheral regions of the Euro-zone. This crisis, tied with rising mass protests and technocratic governance across these areas, has brought with it a serious problem of legitimacy for democratic institutions. The re-emergence of class-

conflict in Portugal, due to structural problems of European capitalism, has been reflected into divergent views about democracy among the protestors and those responsible for implementing austerity measures reflect their opposing interests in the Portuguese social conflict. This paper will apply Zizek's (2006) interpretation of dialectic materialism, to argue for the central thesis of this paper; that the capitalist crisis, and class struggle in particular, is destroying the existing consensus about democracy in the European periphery, Portugal in particular. The paper analyses the different discourses about democracy, comparing interviews with protestors and a high representative of the Troika. Policy-makers, particularly involved with restoring sound finances and calming financial markets, tend to associate democracy with voting and governing procedures. Though the protestors against these liberal policies have been very diverse, from the newest social movements like the indignado's to the trade-unions, usually there seems to be a consensus among them to associate democracy with social rights, equality and the Portuguese revolution. This divergence of belief systems rotating the poles of the class conflict explains why democracy seems to be an empty concept in a period of crisis and it suffers from a loss of legitimacy. It may explain how it is that some institutions are considered to be democratic by one side of the conflict, and at the same time, anti-democratic- and thus legitimate to be overthrown or neglected- by another.

Paper 2

Politics of Interest versus Politics of Representation. The Moderating role of Political Socialization in the Greek Crisis.

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Abstract

The present study addresses the focal question whether political generations in Greece, the generation of the parents (the Polytechnics) and the youth (the 700€ generation) experience the crisis in a similar way and envision social change towards the same direction. Or on the other hand, if they promote diverse political repertoires, that of "politics of interest" and "politics of representation" respectively, due to their diverse political socialization. To this end, the Greek crisis was approached as a unique natural experiment, with field survey conducted in major Greek capitals, combined with online survey addressed to Greek citizens. In total, 603 responses were collected, of which 203 were employed in advanced analyses between the Polytechnics (n = 95, Mage = 57.37, SD = 5.97), and the 700€ generation (n = 108, Mage = 22.14, SD = 2.01). Results support hypotheses, with the Polytechnics, being more solidified as a political generation, reporting higher trust in institutions and proposing reform to exit the crisis (politics of interest). Whereas, the 700€ generation expresses low trust in institutions, proposing revolution as to overcome the crisis (politics of representation). Nevertheless, there seems to be a confusion between low and high 700€ identifiers, possibly due to the fact that the 700€ generation appears to be a political generation "in the making".

Paper 3

Active citizenship in Italy. Bottom up processes of political participation and civic engagement in the euro-crisis

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Abstract

The overall debate regarding active citizenship in Italy is linked to the discussion concerning the enhancement of participatory democracy that started in the 90s. In a political context marked by political scandals and by growing failure in the public administrative system, the political discourse surrounding active citizenship is enhanced and shaped as a proper policy response to establish a better transparency and improve the overall performance of the bureaucratic system. In this paper I overview two interlinked perspectives that emerged in the academic literature and that describe quite convincingly the debate concerning active citizenship in Italy. A first perspective looks at the top down development of institutional models and practices of public communication. This emerged in the 90s and entailed the restructuring of the public administration structures. A second perspective looks at the development of civic activism as a more and less established – and institutionalised- instrument of engagement of the civil society. This is a bottom up process that is well rooted in the Italian socio-political context and can be considered as a micro-verse of the broader instruments, practices and principles that can be defined as political participation. The paper particularly looks at this second perspectives and unpacks mechanisms of active participation in the current euro-crisis, with a specific focus on the values, orientations and claims of activists of social NGOs working in areas such as anti-discrimination, gender policy and integration policy. The paper reports results of a discourse analysis of policy documents published in the period of time 2008-2013.