Title: Shortcoming or malfunctioning? The channels of representation in Spain.

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Abstract: Political representation has become dynamic, shifting, and elusive. The growing gap between the political elite and the citizenry has generated alienation, and moved people away from politics. At the same time, it has shown the shortcomings of representative institutions. Nevertheless, democratic legitimacy, in Spain, remains relatively high, regardless of the current situation of crisis.

However, in the literature, the lack of confidence on representative institutions has been said to increase the level of unconventional participation, boosting the incentives for institutional innovations. Societies are developing faster than their institutions of government; as a result, representatives are increasingly pressured to redefine their relationship with the citizenry. But they cannot stand alone in their task; they may need of social movements.

For example, the 15-M movement has pointed out some of the deficiencies of the system. The usual response to the shortcomings on representation has been to turn to an institutionalization of citizen participation, channeling popular discontent into the system. But the question to be addressed is:

- How are discredited representatives going to be able to convince an increasingly informed and prepared citizenry to join the institutional arrangements they design?

The aim of the paper is to reconsider the role that representatives and social movements are playing, taking into account the challenges that unconventional participation is posing, and specifically the idea of "representative claims" as understood by Michael Saward.
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“The story of democracy is nothing if not a history of innovation” (Saward, 2000: 3).

**Introduction**

“They don’t represent us!” This seems to be the basic agreement reached by a part of the citizenry during the deliberations that followed the 15-M demonstrations. Since then, different groups have taken diverse paths of action. However the critical discourse arisen as a result of this slogan has remained.

Spain is facing an enduring crisis which is not only economic, but also political. Within this scenario citizens have been closely watching their representatives, waiting for a solution which has not yet come. Crisis makes people rethink their lives, and thirty years of neoliberal governance appear to be facing troubles. Specific events are contributing to this mood, for example, the mobilization of people in protest on an ever larger scale (Pugh, 2010). In this sense, we have to rethink what we mean by political representation today. How are we going to develop the mechanisms needed to ensure their functioning. And also, which role is going to be attributed to the citizenry.

However we can state that we are facing another crisis of representation. In Spain the function of the parliament is being questioned, while the level of support for democracy remains high. In this sense it looks like we are facing a crisis of performance, rather than a crisis of the model. It is not representative democracy in itself what is been questioned, but the specific functioning of their institutions. Therefore, we may have to address the question about how can we reestablish the communicative links between the citizens and the representatives. The criticisms are not focused on the legitimacy of democracy, but on how democracy is functioning. And the perceived performance of the parliament is one of the most worrying examples of this crisis (CIS, 2013)\(^1\).

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\(^1\) [www.cis.es](http://www.cis.es) (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas/Centre of Sociological Research of Spain)
Not only is the confidence in parliament declining steadily and fast, but also the political confidence, in general, and its future expectations. Recent data shows that people’s confidence in the current political situation is below 20%, in 2013; and the percentage of people having the confidence in future improvements does not reach a 40% of respondents.

The average level of confidence in political parties is 1.83 out of 10; and the number of people who respond that their confidence in parties is 0 or 1 has more than tripled from ten years ago.


The preference for a democratic form of government above any other form of government (e.g. an authoritarian government) remains high, although there are signs of a diminishing in the preference for a democracy and a small increment in those who think that the kind of regime does not make a difference for them. Nevertheless the lack of a strong far-right party at the national level decreases the possible articulation of these preferences in Parliament.


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The intensity of the crisis has generated a sense of dissatisfaction with the functioning of the traditional institutions of a representative democracy, a discontent even higher when we talk about traditional political parties (Cavero and García Guitián, 2012).

The Parliament was, until recently, a respected institution. Probably it was not considered as extremely useful, but was associated with the functioning of democracy. Today this is not the case (Tudela Aranda, 2013). We might have the impression that the representative link, the means of communication between the citizenry and the representatives (often depicted by the media and the citizenry as “the political class”), is broken. It is really important to reestablish and reinforce the bonds that tie those exercising the task of representation and those who are represented.

In this sense, the strength shown by some social movements in Spain, for example, the 15-M movement and the citizens “Mareas”3 (formed mainly by professionals of the public sectors in education, health services, but also by other collectivities), as well as their widespread backup in society, has revealed that there are “representative claims” within society, not fulfilled by the traditional makers of those representative claims (the political parties); which have been, in part, substituted by social movements (Saward, 2012) in their role of channeling citizen participation.

The group of people exercising the role of representatives might be more than we think of at first: there are more representatives than those elected in the polls. Here I introduce an aspect, borrowed from Michel Saward and extremely useful in our analysis: “a conception of representation which stresses its dynamic, claim-based character, its performative aspects as well as its narrowly institutional ones, and its potential for radical extension, [this] can open up new ways for us to think about political inclusion and a more pluralistic representative politics” (Saward, 2006: 299). Representative claims are made, offered, disputed, and accepted, often and in greatly varied ways, well beyond the narrow confines of electoral politics, without undermining the importance of this domain (Saward, 2006).

Mark Warren stresses that consolidated democracies face today an important challenge, a generalized unease with regards to the functioning of formal institutions. Those institutions are accused of underperformance (Warren, 2009).

This deficit in terms of representation is reflected in the public opinion. Citizens are now more prone than decades ago to distrust political institutions, and in particular, parliaments. In the Spanish case, this loss of confidence has been just partially reflected on voting, nevertheless the voting intention to both parties has falling from joint intention of a 79.3% in January 2009 to a 59.7% in July 2013. Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate the current situation and think how we can contribute to reestablish the confidence in representative institutions.

Source: [www.porcentual.es](http://www.porcentual.es) Voting intention to the Conservative Party (PP) and the Socialist Party (PSOE).

More than a decade ago: “apparent voter apathy and –as some would have it- voter ignorance force[d] us to rethink legitimacy of democratic regimes and decisions, and to look for ways in which a more informed citizenry could be fostered through new (and revived older) forms of information, deliberation and association” (Saward, 2000: 4).

Nowadays, with the surprising revival of social movements, and citizen activism across southern Europe, the need might be to collaborate in the design of participatory channels which might aid the recovery of the system’s legitimacy.

Societies are developing faster than their institutions of government, and as a result, representatives are more pressured to redefine their relationship with the citizenship. “Saward’s idea of a cultural field of representation is interesting and important since it invites us to examine the ways in which claims-makers draw on existing cultural resources, or attempt to reshape or create new resources, as they make claims on behalf of particular objects” (Thompson, 2012). That is why we may argue that it is better prepared to examine the particularities of a given context, as the 15-M movement claims address the Spanish context.
The Social Movements and the Public Sphere. The Disease or the Cure?

The triumphalism of liberalism has been accompanied by a shift towards governance. After the creation of a representative system designed to establish an uneasy balance between the pressures of social and political democratization and the rule of political elites, the representative system seem to have downplayed its democratic aspect (Mouffe, 2000). Representatives are relying less on citizen’s desires, and are more prone to portray their decisions on the basis of technical arguments. In this sense: “the world of liberty is giving way to a situation where political matters are exposed as technical problems. It is not anymore open communication and free deliberation what decides how we are to live, but the needs of system reproduction” (Vallespín, 2012a: 134).

Firstly, we need to say that when we talk about strengthening the communication channels between the representative institutions and the citizenry, and recovering the participative aspect of democracy we need to recognize that, in the current model, the mechanisms of participation are many. However, it is not only about the real existing mechanism of participation, but also about the citizen’s perception of their possibilities of participating and, above all, affecting the political decisions. Against this argument, Sánchez Cuenca maintains that, even though the necessity of introduction of more mechanisms of democratic control, there is an element of hypocrisy in society, because Spanish people has been traditionally reluctant to participate in any political party or association, and have shown low levels of interest in politics.

Nonetheless, the citizenry has experienced a sense of a lack of control on the mechanisms of accountability. The equality of representative relations has been highly vulnerable to distortions by political and economic institutions with enough power to constrain the representative institutions, a situation mainly criticized since the rise of the economical crisis, and not so much before.

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4 “El mundo de la libertad da así paso a una situación en la que las cuestiones propiamente políticas acaban planteándose como problemas técnicos. No es ya la comunicación abierta y la libre deliberación lo que decide como hemos de vivir, sino las necesidades de reproducción del sistema.” (Vallespín, 2012: 134).

The 15-M has pointed also at these relations between the political crisis and the economic constraints put forward by the elites in the motto: “It’s not a crisis, is a fraud”. Following this path, Della Porta maintains that “the concern voiced by the protestors addressed the financial crisis; but even more the failure of democratic governments to live up to the expectations of their citizens” (Della Porta, 2012b: 37). The very democratic quality of representative democracies was in fact contested, showing the deterioration of representative liberal democracies. In addition, in a pool conducted by Transparency International, 83% of respondents in Spain felt that political parties were corrupt or extremely corrupt.6

Therefore we may summarize that the 15-M has pointed out to a triple crisis: firstly, a crisis of sovereignty, in the sense that citizens have realized that their parliament and their government have been unable to decide in very important issues, such as the deficit limitation imposed in the Spanish Constitution without public deliberation and participation; secondly, a crisis of legitimacy, where bank system rescue has been put first, instead of “rescuing the citizenry”; and third, a crisis of representation, where representatives have been portrayed as a political class looking for their own interests and of those in power, helped by corruption.7

If this has been the diagnosis, the recipes of the so called, «Indignados» movement “is calling for different social and economic policies and indeed greater citizen participation in their formulation and implementation” (Della Porta, 2012a: 274). Through different demonstrations, the movement started depicting the images of “their represented”. Although 15-M had spokespersons they specifically claimed not to be representatives of the movement, but individual citizens “representing themselves” (resembling the idea of citizen representatives in Warren, 2006). The idea of horizontality and, specially, the rejection of the function of representation was a particular feature of the movement.

However, we can affirm that, even though spokespersons of the movement did not present themselves as representatives, when talking to the media, or writing manifestos, they were “making claims” not only about themselves, but also about the movement,

and sometimes referring to “the people” or “the citizenry”, which became the represented object. Through these claims, the movement was able to attract many people, breaking with the idea of a disaffected citizenry uninterested in politics.

In addition, during the first weeks of mobilization, many citizens (mainly in the cities) took part in the assemblies divided in different commissions (legal, infrastructures, short and long term politics, respect, etc) where public deliberation was the main tool to propose and debate ideas (Della Porta, 2012b).

By “occupying” the public spaces with the motto “take the street” the force expressed by social movements in the public sphere was somehow challenging our preconceived ideas about what it means to do formal politics. Relying on the Habermasian conception of the public sphere (Habermas, 1985), we may say that, aided by the media, the periphery of the system (integrated by many kinds of groups and social organizations) was able to constrain the functioning of the center (the traditional electoral and representative system), altering and affecting the conformation of the public opinion and, therefore the performance of the center (Vallespín, 2012b), specially being able to introduce the need of a new legislation on evictions in the public agenda.

Inspired by the idea of a deliberative democracy which they linked to the concept of a «Real Democracy», the 15-M has tried to link social movements to deliberative democracy in an attempt to challenge the traditional understanding of political representation. In this sense, we may say that the 15-M has been attempting to put forward a “notion of a deliberative democracy [that] has its roots in the intuitive ideal of a democratic association in which the justification of the terms and conditions of the association is made through public argumentation between equal citizens” (Cohen, op.cit. in Hamlin and Pettit, 1989: 131).

Through public deliberation in the squares spread in different cities and neighborhoods they were questioning the traditional division between the public and the private sphere

9 http://madrid.tomalaplaza.net/category/comisiones/ Accessed 05-05-2013
10 http://www.democraciarealya.es/blog/tag/toma-la-calle/ Accessed 05-05-2013
11 “[l]a noción de una democracia deliberativa tiene su raíz en el ideal intuitivo de una asociación democrática en la que la justificación de los términos y condiciones de la asociación se realiza por medio de la argumentación pública entre ciudadanos iguales”.

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(a traditional feature of social movements since the feminists’). Another feature of the demonstrations and the movement claim-making was that they were explicitly against negotiating with the representatives, but at the same time the strategy was not (during the first months) of violent confrontation. The main idea of the demonstrators was to recover the public sphere in order to use it as a deliberative space where something which resembles a constitutional assembly may arise. However, it is important to note the lack of cross-ideological composition of the movement; this social movement has been backed up mostly by people on the left demanding a broadening in the channels of citizen representation and participation, as well as recovering the deliberative potential of democracy. This was made through citizen’s assemblies. (The average self-placement in the ideological spectrum of those participating in the movement was 3, and 2.58 among those more active in participating in different commissions) (Calvo, 2011).

The participation in the public sphere of the groups surrounding the movement was seen as being able in the long term, not only to aggregate the preferences of those participating, but also transforming them (Castiglione and Warren, 2006), and even to reach concrete decisions. With this move, the place of representation shifted from the parliament to civil society being, to some extent, more diverse (Saward, 2010: 144), as well as more deliberative.

The aim was to conceive the squares as a space open to all forms of political expression and clearly distinguished from the formal parliamentary law making process with its own canons of deliberative rationality (Habermas, 1985). “The occupations represented not only occasions to protest but also experimentations with participatory and deliberative forms of democracy, where the very meaning of democracy was contested” (Della Porta, 2012b: 37).

In this sense, what is being defended is that the development of devices of deliberative democracy within, or surrounding, our representative systems may well aid to achieve a balance and improvement (Cebrían Zazurca, 2012: 24) between the traditional features of a representative democracy, based on the functioning of political parties, and the watchful eye of a citizenry involved in the functioning of the political system.

12 http://www.falternativas.org/content/download/17957/496394/version/
The 15-M discourse on democracy is articulated and complex, taking up some of the principal criticisms of the ever-decreasing quality of representative democracies, but also some of the main proposals inspired by other democratic qualities beyond representation, that are based on electoral accountability. These proposals resonate with (more traditional) participatory visions, but also with new deliberative conceptions that underline the importance of creating multiple public spaces, egalitarian but plural (Della Porta, 2012b: 37).
**The Shifting Role of Representation**

Contemporary democracies are facing increasing troubles to engage citizens with representatives, nevertheless, social movements seemed to have, to a certain extent, replaced them. There is a consensus in the decline in affiliation to political parties, as well as the rising distrust in politicians. In the Spanish case, political parties and politicians are among the less trusted institutions.

Traditionally, literature has distinguished between the ideas of representation and participation in the political realm. In this sense, representation has been understood as the feasible model of democracy in modern societies, whereas participation has been interpreted as a complement to the former. Luckily, this discourse is evolving.

Nowadays, there is more people questioning what has been understood as political representation till today; “the elements of the standard account of political representation are mainly a part of the specific narrative about liberal democracy” (Pollak et al. 2009: 26), however they are just one of the possible alternative definitions we may adopt. The excessive attention paid to legislative and constituency representation has forgotten to examine what happens in representation processes that spill beyond legislatures (Saward, 2006). Since the seminal study of Hannah Pitkin (1967), representation has focused on the representatives rather than on the represented, who have been taken as unproblematically given (Saward, 2006: 300).

However, present studies have opened the path to resume the study of representation; it has been defined as a practice or a performance (Ankersmit, 2002; Plotke, 1997; Saward, 2010), where the focus is less placed on the role played by the representatives or other political actors, and more concerned with the process of communication taking part between the maker of a representative claim, the object represented, and those receiving the claim and accepting it. This definition of representation decreases the reliance on authorization through elections and reduces its legitimation based on the traditional concept of representation.

It is precisely through the formulation of a representative claim, by naming it, how the thing or the person is “called into being” (Severs, 2012), the expression of a representative claim makes possible the existence of the thing or the person represented. This implies highlighting the performative aspect of representation, where the chain of
legitimation through elections (or other kind of selection mechanisms) is downplayed in favor of the acceptance of a representative by the audience or the constituency represented.

Representative democracy is not exhausting the wider and often less stable domain of democratic representation of which it is a part (Saward, 2012). Hence, what we are seeing is the redefinition of what, until today, has been traditionally said to be legitimate representation, elected and unelected actors have succeeded to a degree in making accepted representative claims (Saward, 2012), and in this sense, the “indignados” movement has been particularly skilful in the frame of their claims. In June 2011 the 15-M was positively valued by a 70% of the citizenship\(^{13}\), although mainly of those on the left and among the youth.

Mark Warren and Dario Castiglione (2006) have pointed out the need to study and conceptualize the new forms of non-electoral representation, because those forms increase the opportunities to participate. And through the increase in participation and the active engagement of citizens the legitimacy of the decisions is enlarged.

Legislatures, constituencies and institutions are an important matter in democratic politics, but they are not all that matters to political representation. In this sense, we need to expand the limits of the representative democracy in order to include the dynamics and activities of those political actors who play a representative role without being elected (social movements, but also interest groups or celebrities).

Different actors may present themselves as representatives of different audiences, therefore, we may have to look at the “claims to be representative” and the possible acceptance by different audiences. By this move, representation becomes something related, but different, from elections. Elected representatives are usually accepted by their constituencies (or even by other audiences), and non elected representatives might be accepted by different groups of people (Saward, 2006). The focus of the traditional theory of representation on the representative rather than on the represented has meant to take the latter as unproblematically given (Saward, 2006: 300).

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Accessed 30-07-2013
Representation has a constitutive or creative dimension (Thompson, 2012), because by portraying the object represented (e.g. “the people from below”) the thing, as has been said, is “called into being” (Severs, 2012), is created. Non-elected actors, as the citizens taking part on public demonstrations and square deliberations, become claim-makers portraying a constituency, attempting to influence an audience, regaining the public space and wishing to make a deliberative politics (Freire, 2011: 53). This idea allows representation to spill beyond legislatures, leaving the idea of representation as a product of elections, and accepting it as a dynamic relation (Saward, 2006). Understanding representation in a more dynamic and contingent form, helps us to link the aesthetic and cultural character, highlighting the importance of the “performance”, and as has been said, taking the non-electoral representation seriously.

In this sense, social movements as the 15-M, or citizen platforms as the “Citizen Mareas”, might claim to represent their supporters, and in fact, they may be able to do it. This may be viewed as new and extra modes and styles of representation capable of filling the gap between traditional studies and current politics. Therefore we may understand the idea of “representative claims” as a basic shift in the frame of reference we had in our approach to representation; a shift implying a systemic-societal view (Saward, 2012: 5) including governmental bodies, but also interests groups and social movements.

The main idea, that wants to be put forward, is that attempting to widen the meaning of the concept of representation, blurring its categorical distinction form the idea of participation, may aid to develop more fruitful analysis about the current situation. By denying the “representativeness” to non-elected actors we are just abandoning a field of study; accepting it does not imply renouncing to question afterwards their legitimacy.

Representative claims, in this sense, try to come across sterile distinctions between representation and participation (Pollak et al. 2009: 26), opening the concept in an attempt to grasp new forms of political engagement. Representation, then, is more than a matter of elections and parties, representation has become dynamic, shifting and elusive (Saward, 2010) and, as a result, has become more useful in order to capture the potential legitimacy of a different kind of claim-makers, such as the citizens involved in social movements.
The potential of the critics made by social movements, as the 15-M, for the re-elaboration of the concept of representation depart from its capacity to develop ideas within discursive, open and public arenas, where citizens play an active role in identifying problems and elaborating solutions. There is an attempt to transform the public sphere into a place where “normal citizens” made representative claims, later on accepted or rejected by the audience present there.

In this sense, there is the pretension of becoming the representative of those who accept to be represented by the claim-maker. The set of claims accepted by the audience become, as a result, another discourse within the public arena, a kind of public opinion with the partial legitimacy received on the assembly. This discourse, sometimes spread by the media, is trying to influence the normal functioning of the formal institutions, and (if accepted by a relevant audience) is endow of legitimacy.

Of course, within the movement, there have been different strands calling for a substitution of the representative system, in order to build a direct democracy; however, others have tried to put forward a deliberative sphere where citizens share their common concerns, producing a critical discourse attempting to influence the functioning of the representative institutions. In both cases what citizens seems to try to recover is the democratic aspect of liberal democracies, which has been somehow neglected.

Adopting a shifting role, representation is able to include new actors in the functioning of representation (such as the lobbies or the social movements), which, in the long run may be able to include a wider range of claims, improving the system performance and their assessment by the citizen; mainly because the crisis of representation is due to a perceive underrepresentation of some citizen concerns14.

“Contemporary democracies have evolved in ways that increasingly undermine the adequacy of the standard model [of representation]” (Castiglione and Warren, 2006: 1) and, as a result, by taking into account the less stable domain of unconventional participation, and the potential for democratic deliberation it has, the 15-M movement, aided by the acceptance of the representative claims arisen as a result of their deliberations, may help the representative democracy to become more deliberative

14 “Three in for citizens (74%) consider that the Parliament does not represent the majority of the Spanish and a higher percentage (80%) does not consider to be represented himself” “No nos representan” José Pablo Ferrándiz EL PAÍS http://blogs.elpais.com/metroscopia/2013/02/no-nos-representan.html Accessed 20-02-2013
(Cebrían Zazurca, 2008: 9). Nevertheless, the lens of participatory democracy tends to obscure the increasingly important concept of representative relationships among citizens – usually among the active few and the passive many (Warren, 2006).
Challenging the Conventional Idea of “Participatory Democracy” Through Citizens’ Deliberation.

“Today’s democracies are all representative in structure with some direct elements such as initiatives and referenda, as well as some forms of citizen engagement” (Warren, 2006: 50), however participatory methods imply somehow that citizens represent themselves, or others, within these processes. It is true that this idea contradicts one the definitions of representation: “make present something literally absent” (Pitkin, 1967), however, as Mark Warren (2006) maintains, this is increasingly common in practice, but almost untheorized in democratic theory.

Traditionally, conventional participatory democracy has been linked with citizens being involved with political institutions which channeled the wishes of being active in politics; and the term unconventional participation has been applied to the extra-parliamentary modes of protest (Ekman and Amna, 2009). However, the once “unconventional” modes of participation are now considered much more “conventional” (Kriesi, 2008).

At the same time, the easiness in expressing representative claims by citizens themselves is challenging the conventional idea of representation. Through the social networks, as well as in the assemblies, 15-M participants were making representative claims accepted or rejected by other citizens and, as a result they were able to become “citizen representatives”, even though they were not elected (Warren, 2006). It was through the act of communication in the public sphere how they present themselves and their claims as representatives.

The traditional understanding of representation as a direct relationship between the represented and the representatives has never been so. Elections are the tool of legitimation of representative democracy, but they do not secure a good performance of the representatives, they are just a formal mechanism of authorization. In this sense, “many conceptions of «representation» downplay the significance of active communication. According to them, the meaning of «representation» emphasizes the separation that makes representation necessary, but not ongoing. Some suggest that similarities between the represented and the representative obviate the necessity of their talking with each other too much” (Chalmers, 2013: 67). However, the lack of mutual
understanding between representatives and citizens seemed to be at the heart of the crisis of representation in Spain.

Broadening the scope, and taking representation as something elusive, which has to do with the acceptance by the represented of the representative character of claims made by others, we may found an alternative to the shortcomings in the channels of representation, that we are facing.

The lack of dissent present in Spain for a long period seemed to imply the acquiescence of the people. Inactive citizens showed an apathy which fostered the resort to the liberal conception of representation; by putting forward the idea of a non-objection criterion: “The non-objection criterion allows a kind of latent presence for the represented, such that their silence can be taken as a form of assent. However, it also means that where that silence is broken, and explicit objections are voiced, representation starts to break down” (Runciman, 2007: 95).

Within this scenario, one of the main strengths of the social movements arisen as a result of the 15-M demonstrations has been the ability to depict the desires and aspirations of a part of the society which was disenchanted with the traditional representatives. They were in part able to break the silence and the acquiescence.

By the making of claims such as “we are the 99%”, “they don’t represent us”, “we are not left Vs right, but down Vs up”, “the next unemployed be an MP”, “our dreams doesn’t fit in your polls” or “we are not commodities in the hands of politicians and bankers”, many disaffected citizens, felt a connection between the movement claims and their own critiques towards the system (as has been previously said, it is important to remind that a 70% of the citizenry valued positively the movement, and followed the information about the 15-M with interest).

Therefore, the interest of the study of the claims made by social movements is that by taking into account the representative claims arisen as a result of the mobilizations we are expanding the field of representation, including what happens in the state and the society, and also blurring the univocal distinction between representation and participation:

“Representation is primarily a dynamic quality of political life spread unevenly across societies, taking in a range of “public” and “private” actors and
organizations. Representation in the state is one part of a larger highly diverse and boundary-crossing topography of representational practice. Instances of more settled representation in the state are instances of societal representation. Because political representation is a diffuse and uneven quality of practices and institutions encompasses the institutions and practices of conventional representative government — above all, in democratic terms, governments responsible to elected parliaments based in geographical constituencies — we can say that representative democracy can only be chosen (normatively) or selected as a focus (analytically) from within a field defined by wider societal democratic representation” (Saward, 2010: 141).

The idea that is trying to be defended is that the existence of counterrepresentative movements that challenge the electoral and parliamentarian representative process on the political scene, and its possible exclusions, is of a vital importance for a democratic regime to remain vivid, and for citizens to identify with it.

The 15-M has functioned as an example of political collective action showing “what happens when collective actors unite their forces in order to oppose the elites, authorities and adversaries in defense of their claims or the claims of those they say they represent” (Tarrow, 2011: 29). As important as the number of people attending the demonstrations might be the polls confirming the back up of a majority of the population (Tudela, 2013: 94). Anyway, in an attempt to generate an alternative space of deliberation in the political realm, the 15-M has been able to get together a portion of the population which, as a result of their collective reflection, may well have a different perception of the importance of politics.

As a result of a study conducted in the city of Salamanca among the participants an 86% feel that they were expressing their indignation, but also more than a 75% thought they were also learning about the system’s injustices and the functioning of a social movement; and to achieve consensus.

The fact that decisions were taken by all was valued as important or very important by a 95%, which shows this willingness to deliberate and also the moral predisposition towards agreement usually requested by theorists such as John Rawls or Jürgen Habermas.

15 http://www.falternativas.org/content/download/17957/496394/version/ accessed 08-05-2013
Therefore, we may argue that it is true that traditionally the Parliament has been said to represent the general will, whereas citizens has been said to represent particular interests (Tudela, 2013); however, 15-M did not think so, and portrayed the Parliament as a self interested institution where “the political class” defend their own interests, in contrast to a civil society assembled in the squares making an effort to exchange arguments in order to conform an agreed position on different topics; the question about to what extent this ideal was effectively achieved in the assemblies have to be left for another study. Whatever happens, we must be aware that “participating in public talks is not synonym of practicing a deliberative democracy; the group of informal exchanges that happens in the life-world and communicates to the system-world in the form of public opinion is not [technically] a deliberation” (Arias, 2012: 77).

 Nonetheless, it is important not to downplay the relevance of the communicative currents that, derived from those discussions, have affected the public sphere in different ways, framing the parliamentary agenda especially on the evictions debate. “Civil society discussions and agreements may [have been] transformed in guidelines which would then be conveyed to representatives” (Wojciechowska, 2010).

 At this point we may return to the question we made at the beginning:

- How are discredited representatives going to be able to convince an increasingly informed and prepared citizenry to join the institutional arrangements they design?

 Well, it seems very difficult to transcend the climate of distrust towards the representative institutions in Spain. Nevertheless, “the introduction of strong deliberative mechanisms between citizens, and the set up of an efficient communicative system between the citizens and the institutions - first and foremost, the parliament – would noticeably improve the democratic deficits”16 (Cebrián Zazurca, 2008: 9).

 Therefore the set in motion of deliberative forums, such as the 15-M ones or others, have to be “directed towards the democratic-deliberative exercise of the members of

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16 “La introducción de fuertes mecanismos deliberativos entre los ciudadanos y el establecimiento de un sistema de comunicación eficiente entre estos ciudadanos y las instituciones –primordialmente, la institución parlamentaria- mejoraría sensiblemente los déficits democráticos”
society, as well as it is a function of political accountability and a guide for representatives” (Cebrián Zazurca 2012: 68).

As it is reminded by Bernard Manin (1997) the citizens are, in the representative system, the source of political legitimacy.

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17 “encaminada al ejercicio democrático-deliberativo por parte de los miembros de una sociedad, así como [es] una función de control político y de guía para los representantes”.
Conclusions

After all, we may summarize that the possibility of reestablishing the confidence in the current channels of representation in Spain is going to be difficult. Of course, it may be aided by an economic recovery; however, the dominant merely aggregative conception of representation as “counting heads” is inadequate to overcome this impasse of distrust in the representative institutions (Saward, 2000: 5). “Globalization and the emergence of diverse modes of governance in various countries in recent years has led many theorists of democracy to look anew at civil society rather than the state as a key site of democratic practice” (Pugh, 2010: 7).

Through the claim-making approach we believe that the possibility of understanding what is happening in the realm of representation beyond institutions is more likely to succeed. Part of my goal is to place social movements at the representative stage, understanding them as “makers of representative claims” (Saward, 2006: 301), because these instances of societal representation might be better prepared to cope with a diffuse style of deliberation, freed from the procedural constraints of the ideal theories.

In this sense, “representation is a protean phenomenon, happening in multiple spaces and possessing many faces. To make these points is not to deny, for example, the presence or importance of relatively stable institutions of representative democracy based on election. It is rather to emphasise that representative democracy does not exhaust the wider and often less stable domain of democratic representation of which it is a part, and to stress that representation is a matter of claim and reception rather before its particular modes of practice in certain institutional structures” (Saward, 2012).

Parliamentary democracy does not exhaust the instances of democratic representation, and MP’s need to understand that the crisis of representation we are suffering stems from the fact that there is a lack of perception of their role towards society. Elections are an important tool of legitimation in every democratic system; nevertheless, the deliberations happening in the public sphere, the representative claims put forward by citizen representatives that have been discussed and deliberated on citizens’ assemblies, and widely accepted by relevant audiences (Saward, 2010) should be channeled into the formal institutions of representation; at least to be discussed, if proceed to become a law.
It does not seem very likely that we see an institutionalization of the citizen movements arisen as a result of the 15-M, mainly because of their rejection to collaborate and being part of the institutional politics in a wider sense, and also as a result of their loose association of grassroots organizations. Nevertheless, their involvement in the public sphere might be use to find, if not the cure, at least a “mend”, to bridge the gap between the citizenry and their representatives through the use of deliberative practices able to introduce coherent discourses in the public sphere and the institutions.

The regulation of political participation of social groups in the legislative process means, among other things, a great opportunity to draw the veil of informal participation which is currently happening” (Tudela, 2013: 108)\(^1\), however it is not likely to take place as a result of the 15-M movement mobilizations, mainly due to their resistance to become co-opted by the traditional institutions.

The arrangements will, probably, not be institutional; however, if social movements are prepared to develop coherent representative claims about the citizens’ wishes; and the political institutions are prepared to assume those claims and reflect them in their parliamentary functioning, the crisis of performance might not give way to a crisis of the model.

Again, what wants to be stressed is that attempting to widen the meaning of the concept of representation, by the blurring of its clear-cut distinction from the idea of participation, may aid to develop a more successful investigation about the current political situation in Spain, and probably in the surrounding environment.

As has been previously said, by simply slighting the importance of the role played by non-elected actors, we, political theorists, are just abandoning a field of study; by accepting it we are not renouncing to question their legitimacy subsequently.

Summarizing, the current functioning of representative democracies presents certain underperformance which shows a situation of crisis where the legitimacy of the system is not questioned by the citizenry…already.

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\(^{1}\) “La regulación de la participación de los colectivos sociales en el procedimiento legislativo supone, entre otras cosas, una gran oportunidad de correr el velo de la participación informal que se realiza en la actualidad” (Tudela, 2013: 108)
Bibliography


