

Report on Conference Panels

Active citizenship in Southern Europe.

Framing protest, political participation and civic engagement

The two panels took place at the 'PSA 64th Annual International Conference' in Manchester (14-16 April 2014) and were organised on behalf of the ECPR *Standing Group on Southern European Politics*.

When we put together the panel proposal for PSA, we decided to look in more detail at the implications of new structured forms of mobilisation that are aimed at delegitimising existing political structures. The growth of popular dissent towards public institutions in Southern Europe provides evidence of the fact that non institutionalised and bottom up forms of political participation are emerging and result in pressures that are currently producing a radical process of social and political change. 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 aiming to contest the urban development of Gezi Park or the former Spanish protests that took place in 2011, offer evidence of the highly politicised nature of mobilisation and also of the changing nature of active citizenship in Southern 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 systems.

Some of the key questions that we raised by looking at these current events and which oriented our decision to organise this panel are the following: 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 panels therefore explored new dynamics that shape protest, political participation and civic engagement in Southern Europe, with a number of papers focused on the transformation of the concept of active citizenship. They included recent empirical work carried out by a number of scholars currently engaging in these debates: *Dr Daphne Halikiopoulou* (University of Reading) and *Dr Sofia Vasilopoulou* (University of York) presented their work on 'The mechanisms of nationalist resistance: left and right wing protest in Greece at times of crisis'; *Prof. Ayhan Kaya* (Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey) delivered a paper on the recent protests that took place in Turkey in a paper titled 'Right to the City: Insurgent Citizens of the Occupy Gezi Movement'; *Dr. Jennifer Clarke* (University of the Peloponnese, Greece), presented the results of her field work 'The crisis and active citizenship in Greece: Qualitative insights from the field'; Mrs *Stavroula Chrona* presented her work on 'Enhancing new forms of active citizenship via social media platforms: the case of Gezi Park movement in Turkey'; *Mr Jonas Van Vossolle* (Ghent University, Belgium), offered an overview of the impact of the crisis in Portugal, with a paper on 'Divergent narratives on democracy in the Portuguese social conflict. A dialect materialist approach'; *Ms. Anastasia Garyfallou* and *Dr. Jacquélien van Stekelenburg* (Vrije Universiteit, Belgium) presented a paper on 'Politics of Interest versus Politics of Representation. The Moderating role of Political Socialization in the Greek Crisis';

Dr. Cristiano Bee his analysis on ‘Active citizenship in Italy. Bottom up processes of political participation and civic engagement in the euro-crisis’.

The discussion that followed the presentations was very engaging, with questions that were raised in regards to the new opportunities and challenges emerging through both structured and non structured forms of mobilisation. In particular, the discussion regarding the papers covering Greece, Portugal and Italy was more specifically focused on the effects of the financial crisis in changing political structures, with a particular angle on the emergence of forms of populism that encompass different political spectrums as well as the rise in euroscepticism in traditionally pro-european countries (such as for example Italy). The discussion covering the papers regarding Turkey, more specifically looked at the emergence of a form ‘insurgent citizenship’ fostered for example by social media (ICTs) that is radically questioning existing political ideologies and domains.

All papers provided evidence of the radical processes of transformation that are currently undermining political arenas and leadership in Southern Europe, and ultimately radically changing societies in our countries. The key outcome of the panel suggests the need for further research in the area of political engagement and participation by focusing in particular on cross-sectional comparisons while also identifying the key factors that generate differences in patterns of citizenship that result as an outcome of the on-going political processes.

In light of the European elections results and the protests that took place in Turkey in commemoration of Gezi events in 2013, we believe that research on forms of political participation and engagement is now of key significance and should continue with the aim to bring into light both the underlying factors and also the explanations of the modes of citizenship that emerge and drive current and future forms of political participation.

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