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## The 'bubbling up' of subterranean politics in Europe

### Project Report

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# The 'Bubbling Up' of Subterranean Politics in Europe

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Civil Society and Human Security Research Unit  
London School of Economics and Political Science

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THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

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This report presents the initial findings of the ‘Subterranean Politics’ research project, based on seven contextual case studies carried out by researchers from partner institutions across Europe; for a full listing please see the page on Contextual Research Reports. We would especially like to thank all those who gave their time to take part in the focus groups and interviews carried out by the field teams. It is also important to stress – partially on their behest – that their comments and our extrapolations do not necessarily reflect the views of all those involved in the loosely affiliated groups and movements that we see as characteristic of ‘Subterranean Politics’. Indeed, the importance of avoiding the imposition of an overriding ideology on fellow activists is a core belief of many of those interviewed. Although the majority of those we spoke to consented to the use of their names, we have preserved anonymity for consistency in this initial report. The individual case studies will be published as part of an edited volume on subterranean politics to be published by Palgrave in 2013.

We would also like to thank Dominika Spyratou and Pippa Bore in the Civil Society and Human Security Unit of the LSE for their tireless assistance.

All errors and omissions remain our own.

Mary Kaldor

Sabine Selchow

Sean Deel

Tamsin Murray-Leach

# Contextual Research Reports

This report was based on the following studies:

## Trans-European Study 1

*European progressive activists: Obstacles on the road towards an “Alter-Europe”*

Geoffrey Pleyers (University of Louvain)

Bartolomeo Conti (CADIS, Paris)

## Trans-European Study 2

*European alternatives: Trajectories of mobilisation and policy projects for responding to Europe’s crisis*

Mario Pianta (University of Urbino)

Paolo Gerbaudo (American University in Cairo)

## Germany Study

*The ‘Swarm Intelligence’: Mapping Subterranean Politics in Germany*

Helmut K. Anheier (Hertie School of Governance)

Anne Nassauer (Berlin Graduate School of Social Science)

## Hungary Study

*Hungary at the Vanguard of Europe’s Rearguard? Emerging Subterranean Politics and Civil Dissent*

Professor Jody Jensen (ISES)

Erin Saltman (UCL)

Hajnalka Szarvas (Corvinus University)

## Italy Study

*2011: A year of protest on social justice in Italy*

Professor Donatella della Porta (European University Institute)

Dr Lorenzo Mosca (European University Institute)

Dr Louisa Parks (European University Institute)

## Spain Study

*The 15-M Movement: a bet for radical democracy*

Jordi Bonet i Martí (Centro de Estudios y Documentación Internacionales de Barcelona, CIDOB)

## London Study

*Politics, Process and the Absence of Europe: Subterranean Politics in London*

Sean Deel (LSE)

Tamsin Murray-Leach (LSE)

Maro Pantazidou

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# Executive Summary

This is one of those rare moments in history when subterranean politics ‘bubbles up’ to the surface. What we mean by subterranean politics is politics that is not usually visible in mainstream political debates. The current demonstrations, protests and occupations, or new social initiatives of various kinds are probably less joined up, more heterogeneous and not even bigger than similar phenomena that our research on Global Civil Society has tracked over the last decade. But what is special about subterranean politics in 2011 and 2012 is their ‘resonance’, the way that they strike a chord in mainstream public opinion.

The Subterranean Politics in Europe project pursued a dual strategy. First, we set out to map initiatives for reforming or transforming the European Union. Secondly, we investigated a variety of social mobilizations and collective activities across Europe that we call ‘subterranean politics’, in order to find out what they are about and how they relate to ideas about Europe. Since there was very little overlap between the two prongs of the strategy, our findings about European initiatives are included in Appendix A, while the main body of the report focuses on subterranean politics.

In order to research subterranean politics, we undertook seven contextual case studies – four national studies (Germany, Hungary, Italy and Spain), one global city (London), and two trans-European studies (one focused on trans-European grassroots initiatives and one focused on trans-European initiatives and anti-austerity movements). Our main findings are:

## **It is all about politics**

The most important finding that emerges from our project is that what is shared across different types of protests, actions, campaigns and initiatives is extensive frustration with formal politics. Terms associated with subterranean political actions such as ‘angry’, ‘indignant’ or ‘disappointed’ are an expression of this frustration. By and large, protests are not about austerity per se but rather about the failures of democracy as currently practiced.

## **It is about democracy, but not democracy as usual**

What we see in all the public displays of subterranean politics are projects of collective re-imagining of democracy, of its practices and, importantly, of its relation to everyday life. Our interviewees stressed the subjective experience of participating in politics and pioneering new experiments of democracy. This applies both to the assemblies and new techniques of consensus building in public squares and campaigning for the recent referendum in Italy, which was seen as an example of direct democracy.

## **2.0 Culture**

The role of the Internet is critical at the level of mobilisation, much of which was coordinated over social networks. But above all the experience of living with the Internet has had a profound impact on the culture of politics. Many activists are preoccupied with Internet freedom, particularly issues of anti-piracy. The term 'swarm intelligence', which is used to describe collective actions based on horizontality, replaceability and leaderlessness, is characteristic both of online activism and of the occupation of squares. Concern with process, accountability and transparency for many subterranean actors is more important than a programme of specific demands.

### **Europe is invisible**

Europe does not play a relevant role in the debates and protests that we have studied. In the few instances in which it is 'visible', it tends to be regarded as part of the problem as much as part of the solution. While many of our interviewees regard themselves as European in terms of life experience, and many are concerned with and aware of global issues, Europe as a political community or a public space only seems to exist for a small 'expert' minority.

The implications of these findings are twofold. First, it is important to bring together 'expert activists', who have put forward European initiatives, with subterranean actors in order to discuss the political, rather than the financial, crisis of Europe and, in so doing, to make Europe more visible by 'problematizing' it. Through a critical and active debate on politics, Europe may regain its potential as a political space for the re-imagination of democracy. Secondly, it is important to monitor, research and understand the evolution of subterranean politics. Specific proposals include supporting the European Citizens' Initiative and establishing an online constitutional assembly.

# 1 Introduction

In this project, we set out to find the currents of opinion or new political initiatives that have the potential to prevent Europe from falling apart. What we discovered was a fundamental mismatch or chasm between what we describe as mainstream politics, elite trans-European policy making circles, including what are sometimes depicted as ‘expert’ activists, and what we are calling subterranean politics – various forms of grassroots activism and protest. At the level of mainstream politics, the crisis is portrayed primarily in financial terms and there has been a proliferation of conferences, reports, appeals and manifestoes that put forward proposals about how to reform the European Union and save the Euro. At the level of subterranean politics, our research revealed a shared trans-European concern among very disparate groups across Europe about the failure and indeed corruption of political elites, especially but not only at the national level, and about the lack of meaningful participation. Moreover, among the groups and individuals engaged in subterranean politics, what was remarkable was the invisibility of Europe; the absence, by and large, of any mention of Europe, let alone debates, initiatives and campaigns.

What is special about this moment is that subterranean politics is bubbling up to the surface, as can be seen most dramatically in the success of non-mainstream political parties from across the political spectrum – the Pirate Party in Germany and Sweden, Jobbik in Hungary, the True Finns in Finland, the 5 Star movement in Italy, or Respect in Bradford, England, for example. Contemporary protests are somehow striking a chord in the mainstream in a way that was not true of earlier protests, causing ripples of discomfort in established institutions, challenging dominant ways of thinking and unsettling normal assumptions about how politics is done. It is a moment that is both hopeful and dangerous because subterranean politics includes both xenophobic and populist movements as well as more emancipatory tendencies. Our conclusion is that because of the way politics is perceived at subterranean level, saving the Euro will not solve the crisis and that in order to identify solutions, it is necessary to investigate and understand what is going on at subterranean levels.

Our enquiry followed a dual strategy. First, we set out to map new European initiatives. And secondly, we studied a variety of recent social mobilizations and collective activities across Europe, such as Occupy LSX (London Stock Exchange), the 15-M Movement in Spain, or the *Wutbürger* protests in Germany. We wanted to know what they were about and how they relate to ideas of and debates about Europe. In this report, we focus on the second prong of the strategy because, as it turned out,

there was very little overlap between the two prongs. Our findings about new European initiatives are included separately in the appendix.

We use the term ‘subterranean politics’ because other more conventional concepts like civil society and social movements trigger pre-conceived notions of what we are talking about. *Civil society* tends to include professional NGOs and trades unions that we regard, by and large, as part of the policy elite and also carries normative baggage. *Social movements* imply a particular form of activism, whereas our concern was to capture a wider range of different political phenomena, some of which do not easily fit into the social movement theoretical apparatus. By ‘subterranean’ we refer to phenomena that are not usually visible in mainstream debates. Because other research is currently being undertaken on populist movements and parties<sup>1</sup>, our focus has been what might be termed the more emancipatory forms of subterranean politics.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Demos’s *Populism in Europe* project (<http://www.demos.co.uk/projects/populismineurope>) and Counterpoint’s *Reluctant Radicals* project (<http://counterpoint.uk.com/research-projects/reluctant-radicals-2/>).

# 2 Researching Subterranean Politics

On May 11, 2011 between 0.8 and 1.5 million people demonstrated all over Spain under the slogan 'Real Democracy Now'. Inspired by the Arab Spring, the demonstrations led to the idea of occupying squares in Spain, in Greece, and later in cities across Europe (see Figure 1), as well as the United States, Israel and Chile. But the occupation of squares was not the only form of social mobilization taking place in Europe in 2011 and 2012. On February 11, 2012, Europe saw mass protests against the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), a new international legal agreement seen to threaten internet freedom and communication privacy, with 25,000 people joining in Germany alone. During 2011, there were numerous protests against austerity in the UK and Greece. In Greece, these protests were dominated by traditional social actors – the trades unions and far left parties – but they also involved many people who had never demonstrated before. In the UK, new groups sprang up that distanced themselves from organized civil society groups such as trades unions or the National Union of Students, as well as from far left parties. They included the student movement, which reacted against the Coalition Government's decision to raise student fees, and UK Uncut, which campaigns for alternatives to austerity using direct action or civil disobedience. In the German city of Stuttgart, citizens from all walks of life and ages started to demonstrate against a large-scale train station development project that had been in planning since the 1990s and was officially launched in 2009. Italy, too, has seen protests against infrastructure projects during the past years, such as the high-speed train in Val Susa (No TAV), along with work protests and campaigns against cuts in education. In Hungary, both right and left took the streets and the airwaves in unprecedented numbers: the largest include Jobbik, the new far right party (see further Bartlett et al 2012), Milla, which has almost 100,000 Facebook supporters and campaigns for freedom of the press, and the Two-Tailed Dog Party, a mock political party that makes fun of mainstream politics and has some 80,000 Facebook followers (Hungary Study). And since 2009 Pirate Parties – standing for the strengthening of civil rights, direct democracy and participation (in the form of what they call 'liquid democracy' or delegated voting), reform of copyright and patent law, free sharing of knowledge, data privacy, transparency and freedom of information – have conquered parliamentary seats across Europe.

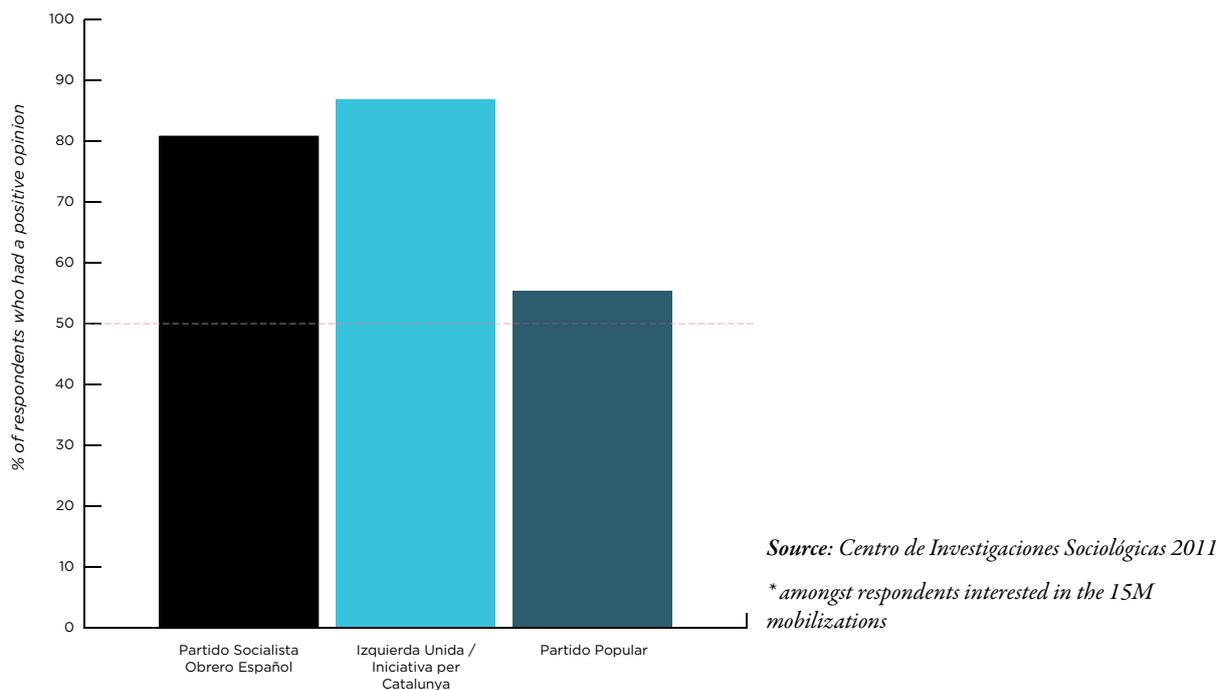
Figure 1: 'Occupy'-related protests in Europe



Source: *The Guardian*

What is peculiar about these very different socio-political phenomena and social mobilizations is their specific ‘resonance’. Actually, the whole of the past decade has been a decade of large-scale social mobilization worldwide, as we have tracked in the Global Civil Society Programme at the LSE (see GCS Knowledgebase URL). The anti-Iraq war protests in 2003 brought some 11 million people to the streets (see further Global Civil Society 2003, p. 3, 26-7); the social forums, the main focal point of the alter-globalization movement, have spread worldwide and especially in Europe since 2001, regularly mobilizing hundreds of thousands of participants around issues of social and economic justice, labour rights, environmental sustainability, and participatory democracy (Pianta 2002; Glasius and Timms 2005); environmental campaigns like the Climate Change Action camps in the UK, Belgium, France, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and elsewhere took place during this period (see further Newell 2006), not to mention a blossoming of all sorts of online activism and forms of political consumerism (Bob et al. 2008).

**Figure 2: Positive opinion of the 15M movement by political party support\***



The current social mobilizations across Europe are probably smaller, less widespread, and less interconnected than similar phenomena in previous years. Yet what is noteworthy about them is that, unlike previous mobilizations and protests, they seem to have struck a chord in the mainstream; they generate a sense of public excitement wherever they happen. This is what we mean when we speak of their specific ‘resonance’. A good example to illustrate this point is the way that the train-station-protests of citizens in Stuttgart triggered a new German term, *Wutbürger* (‘angry citizen’), which was eventually even elected by the Gesellschaft fuer die deutsche Sprache (URL) as the ‘word of the year 2010’, singling it out as the word that shaped public discussions in a particularly important way

during that year. Similarly, it was the press, not the activists themselves, that coined the word ‘*Indignado*’, a noun rather than a verb or an adjective, to describe the Spanish 15 May movement, identifying it with the best seller *Indignez-Vous* written by the French World War II resistance hero, Stéphane Hessel (2010). The interest of the Spanish press reflected widespread popular support for the movement: according to a poll published in the newspaper *El Pais* on June 26, 64% of those polled backed the movement and 74% considered that it was a peaceful movement aimed at revitalising democracy. Figure 2 shows that over half of those who vote for the *Partido Popular* (the ruling conservatives) express support for the movement.

**Figure 3: The Church of England and Occupy: timeline of the church’s response to the Occupy LSX protest camp**



Also exemplary is Occupy LSX (London Stock Exchange), the occupation of the square in front of St Paul's Cathedral in the City of London from October 2011 until February 2012 by some hundred people. There had been similar camps in the UK previously, such as the Climate Change Action camps or the long-running camp in Parliament Square in protest against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with, arguably, similarly prominent public displays and degrees of spectacle. What is particularly interesting about Occupy LSX, however, is the way in which it caught public attention and stimulated debate. For instance, it caused soul-searching within an institution that could hardly be more established: the Church of England (see Figure 3, above) and led to the resignation of two high-ranking Church of England officiates and a chaplain. In addition, Occupy LSX activists were invited to write an article for the *Financial Times*, an established bastion of the free market, as part of

a series charting the pitfalls of capitalism (Dewhurst, Dombi and Colvin, 2012), something of which earlier anti-Washington consensus activists could not even dream. What is more, academic analyses and commentaries of Occupy LSX were already being undertaken while the protest was still under way.

In Italy, the 2011 referendum concerning future development of nuclear power, the privatization of water, and the possibility for government ministers to not appear in court when accused of crimes marks another example of what we term increased ‘resonance’. Italian civic groups not only collected sufficient signatures to hold a referendum according to the Italian constitution; amazingly, they managed to mobilise sufficient voters to turn out for the referendum (more than 50%) and then win. The success of the 5 Star Movement, which won 10% of the vote in the municipal elections, is another example of the ‘bubbling up’ of subterranean politics in Italy. The 5 Star Movement is a populist, anti-corruption, Eurosceptic, ecologist party started by the comedian and blogger Beppe Grillo. Between one-third and one-fifth of its votes came from people who had never voted in previous elections. And, across Europe, national Pirate Parties continue to win parliamentary seats, most recently in the elections in the German state of Saarland. What is noteworthy in the case of the success of the Pirates in Saarland is not only the fact that they ‘suddenly’ conquered the *Landtag* with an astonishing 7.4% of votes (see Figure 4) - overriding established parties like the liberals (FDP), who lost 8.0% of their votes - but that 20% of their vote was based on previous ‘non-voters’ (Appelrath et al 2012).

**Figure 4: Berlin and Saarland state elections** (*difference from previous elections*)



Sources: *Die Landeswahlleiterin für Berlin 2011; Die Landeswahlleiterin, Statistisches Amt Saarland 2012*

Our project investigated these various kinds of socio-political phenomena, social mobilizations and collective activities that have been bubbling up all over Europe. In order to capture and emphasize the peculiar notions of ‘resonance’ and ‘striking a chord’, we decided to interpret them as public displays of subterranean politics. We believe that this idea opens up a creative space of exploration beyond the scope of traditional concepts, such as ‘social movement’, ‘(advocacy) networks’ and ‘civil society’, which are usually employed in studies with similar aims. As we know, concepts provide us with frames that guide our view on what we (set out to) observe. As such, they inevitably guide and restrict what we see and, at the same time, of course they also to some extent already give meaning to what we observe. Understanding the current socio-political happenings as public displays of subterranean politics frees us from the conventional assumptions that underlie the concept of ‘civil society’ (e.g. Anheier 2007; Keane 2003; Kaldor 2003). It allows us to include political parties like the Pirate Party, which would normally be excluded from the term ‘civil society’. At the same time, it enables us to go beyond the specific methodologies associated with terms like ‘social movements’ or ‘(advocacy) networks’.<sup>2</sup> And, importantly, it emphasizes the peculiarity of the ‘resonance’, ‘bubbling-up’ and ‘striking a chord’ of these phenomena as one of their distinct features.

In order to grasp and explore the public displays of subterranean politics in Europe, we gathered data through six original contextual case studies, conducted in:

- four national political cultures (Germany, Italy, Spain and Hungary)
- one global city (London)
- two trans-European contexts (one focusing on trans-European grassroots networks and the other focusing on alternative European initiatives as well as trans-European anti-austerity movements).

We chose the country case studies to include both Eurozone and non-Eurozone countries and countries that are more or less affected by the current financial and socio-economic crisis.<sup>3</sup> The case studies were conducted by local research teams under the leadership of experienced scholars. The use of local research teams was essential for the project, as they had to be familiar enough with the respective socio-political context in order to be able to determine in their specific contexts what was to be considered as public displays of subterranean politics. Each of the teams used a set of social science research methods (ranging from interviews and surveys to media analysis) that they considered appropriate in their context (see Appendix C).

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2 This does not mean that these concepts did not play any role at all in our analyses. For instance, the concept of ‘social movement’ and the established methodologies around it (e.g. della Porta and Caiani 2009) did help us in our systematic data gathering. Yet, it was not our *guiding* frame, in the sense that we did not set out to study ‘social movements’.

3 Given the limited time frame of this project, our choice of case studies was also affected by the availability of local research teams. Thus, we did not include Greece as a case study because we were not able to identify a suitable research team in the available time. Likewise we had originally intended to undertake a UK study, but eventually had to restrict ourselves to the city of London; as our research revealed this case study then told us more about global culture rather than specifically about UK culture.

In addition to the original data that we gathered through the case studies, we made use of existing data sets, such as the survey data from protest demonstrations in seven European countries that the ECRP-funded Protest Survey Project has been collecting, *The Guardian* Datablog's extensive list of Occupy-related protests throughout the world (see Figure 1), and European public opinion and demographics surveys including Eurobarometer and Eurostat data. We also established our own web-platform (Subterranean Politics URL) to collate and categorize new European initiatives as described in the appendix (see Appendix A). Furthermore, we engaged with a research project undertaken by the MA in Architectural Design studio at the University of Sheffield, entitled *Representations of Civil Society*, directed by Teresa Hoskyns and Nishat Awan; the research will be presented at the Berlin Biennale 2012.

Four main questions guided our data gathering and empirical research:

1. What are instances of public displays of subterranean politics in each case?
2. What are the specificities of these public displays of subterranean politics across Europe?
3. What are the public displays of subterranean politics about?
4. What role does the idea of 'Europe' play in the public displays of subterranean politics?

# 3 Findings

Our research findings can be summarised under the following four headings:

1. It's all about politics
2. It's about democracy, but not as usual
3. 2.0 Culture
4. Europe is 'invisible'

## It's All About Politics

The most important finding that emerges from our project is that what is shared across different types of protests, actions, campaigns and initiatives is extensive frustration with formal politics as it is currently practiced. The terms 'angry', 'indignant' or 'disappointed' are an expression of this frustration. The German case study is particularly interesting in this respect. German society is far less affected by austerity measures than other European societies: its economy has recovered relatively quickly from the financial and economic crisis and it has experienced continued, albeit slow, growth and prosperity. Yet, despite the relatively positive situation in Germany, there is a striking public display of subterranean politics in Germany just as in other European contexts. This is because current protests are not so much simply about austerity but about *politics*.

The authors of the Germany Study observe that protesters here are 'driven by a general distrust of political institutions and by deep seated notions of scepticism and distrust about the way political decisions are made.' Interestingly, a survey among protesters against 'Stuttgart 21', the large-scale infrastructure project in the city of Stuttgart, found that 80% of them gave a general dissatisfaction with the current political and social situation in Germany as one of their motivations for joining the protest, while the same percentage (80%) explained that they were satisfied with their own, personal social situation (GID URL; Germany Study). They objected to the nature of the planning process of this major project and the lack of acknowledgement of citizens' concerns. What needs to be kept in mind here is that there was nothing 'wrong' with the planning process of this *specific* project as such; rather, the dissatisfaction was about the *general* nature of how projects of this kind are handled in Germany, namely, as the Germany Study explains, as 'technocratic processes, in which at most juristic

considerations interfere but citizens' concerns are sidelined.'<sup>4</sup> The case of *GuttenPlag*, another public display of subterranean politics described in the Germany Study, illustrates how this frustration is not only about processes but also about the nature of the current political elite in general. *GuttenPlag* was a platform through which activists revealed a total of 10,421 plagiarized lines in German Defence Minister Karl Theodor Freiherr von und zu Guttenberg's doctoral thesis, and, by doing so, played a key role in his 2011 resignation (Moore and Selchow 2012: 33). It was arguably a reaction to a (perceived) corrupt political elite. And, of course, the occupation of squares also spread in Germany.

But even in other European contexts, which are much more affected by austerity than Germany, those who have engaged in the activities we have studied cite concern with the failures of democracy as the reason for engagement and protest rather than austerity per se. For instance, the 15-M Movement in Spain, which triggered the spread of Occupy in Europe, was not simply a reaction to austerity policies. Rather, as the Spanish Study highlights, it was inspired by the occupation of Tahrir Square, as the symbol of the Arab Spring. This concern with *politics*, that is, the general frustration with current political practices, was apparent in the symbols and the slogans that were used in the 15-M Movement such as the widespread use of Egyptian flags and slogans such as 'Apolitical? Super-political', 'A Cairo in each neighborhood', and 'It isn't the crisis, it's the system' (Spain Study).

Indeed, what is so remarkable about our research is that a deep disappointment with the political system as such was found in every single one of our case studies, even though there was little connection between them. 'There's a lot to be said about frustrations with political processes' Martin from Occupy LSX told us, 'this is a screwed up system in terms of allowing people to have a say, policies for the common good, informed debate [and] critical media coverage,' (London Study). And the Indignados/Italian Revolution group put it as follows: 'We know very well that whoever has or will in the future be in government will never be on the people's side, nobody has ever listened to our needs, and in this system nobody ever will' (Italy Study). In Italy, the No TAV group, which campaigned to block the building of a high speed rail link between Turin and Lyon, declared: 'it is a day of mourning for democracy in Italy. The caste (political elite) is deaf, blind and cruel: while the country goes bankrupt, political and economic oligarchies are inflicting contested choices on local populations and institutions, countering with heavy deployment of police forces' (Italy Study).

Statistical data on trust in government and political parties supports the contention that it is frustration with politics that is what motivates the protestors and what resonates with a wider public. The table below shows that between 62% (Germany) and 80% (Italy and Spain) of their respective populations tend not to trust government. Lack of trust in political parties is even higher, ranging from

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4 'In Berlin and Frankfurt large-scale projects were planned to further develop the airports, which affect surrounding neighborhoods. While the airport development in Berlin had been planned for years, German flight control announced in September 2010 that the development of two parallel runways to increase the capacity of the airport would not be possible. As a result, deviating air routes were necessary, and airplanes now fly over previously unaffected neighborhoods' (Germany Study).

78% (Germany) to 86% (UK). Interestingly, trust in the Internet is considerably higher than trust in government or political parties.

**Table 1: Trust in Political Parties, national government and the Internet: % of the population**

	Political Parties		National Government		The Internet	
	Tend to Trust	Tend Not To Trust	Tend to Trust	Tend Not To Trust	Tend to Trust	Tend Not To Trust
<b>Europe</b>	14	81	24	70	37	39
<b>Germany</b>	15	78	32	62	27	43
<b>Hungary</b>	15	80	26	68	41	32
<b>Italy</b>	9	84	12	80	37	40
<b>Spain</b>	12	84	16	80	34	40
<b>UK</b>	11	86	21	74	34	46

*Source: Eurobarometer 76 (Autumn 2011)*

Of course, issues of austerity and banking regulation are important, as is the issue of anti-piracy. However, what is crucial to understand is that in protesters' analyses there is a clear link between politics and corporate and financial power as well as corruption. According to the manifesto of the 15 May movement: 'In Spain most of the political class does not even listen to us. Politicians should be bringing our voice to the institutions, facilitating the political participation of citizens through direct channels that provide the greatest benefit to the wider society, not to get rich and prosper at our expense, attending only to the dictatorship of major economic powers and holding them in power through a two-party system headed by the immovable acronym PP & PSOE' (Spain Study). As the Italy Study stresses, Italian groups in particular are concerned about mafia involvement and corrupt politicians, which they blame, for example, for the waste disposal crisis in Campania and the failures to respond adequately to the earthquake in L'Aquila. According to the ARCI (Italian Cultural and Recreational Association), which is active in many of the Italian protests: 'The authoritarian tendency that has overturned the constitutional principle whereby the popular will is expressed through elected assemblies and the constant relationship between institutions and intermediate societal bodies; the affirmation of an idea of power that sees institutions used for private purposes; distrust and disengagement where anti-politics thrives' (Italy Study).

Particularly interesting is that this kind of analysis applies not just to respective national governments but also to the political class in general, including politicians from both the left and the right. This sentiment was to be found in the manifesto of the 15 May movement: 'Some of us consider ourselves progressive, others conservative. Some of us are believers, some not. Some of us have clearly defined ideologies, others are apolitical' (Spain Study). Or, as one of the activists at Occupy LSX said: 'Questioning the workings of parliamentary politics is not an anti-conservative, not an anti-liberal argu-

ment: it's a systemic argument' LSX (London Study). Another stressed the deep distrust of mainstream political parties, including the left, when he explained that 'Occupy is a symptom that there is no real left anymore...Leftist politics and advanced late capitalism are not really compatible. So the political system we've got now is entwined with huge business and things that are at odds with Leftism' (London Study). It is this distrust of the political elites and mainstream parties that is expressed by protesters and shared by the general public across Europe and that seems to explain the rise of new parties not only on the far right but across the political spectrum. The Pirate Party describes its rise as a 'some sort of red light, something that is blinking' (Germany Study).

Even though trades unions and established NGOs have taken part in many events, especially in Italy and Spain, some of our interviewees were also very wary of what they saw as traditional civil society. They want to shed 'pre-conceived labels, that would restrain the field of possibilities' (Cécile, Paris, Trans-European Study 1). They emphasise the 'newness of what they are doing 'different from the communists, alter-globalization activists, anarchists, bobos or greens.' (Augustin, Brussels, Trans-European Study 1). In both Spain and the UK, activists distance themselves from the World Social Forum (WSF), which they see as dominated by the traditional left. 'Traditional left is involved in the WSF, which may explain the clash in process between the WSF and Occupy. WSF hasn't really taken on the assembly structures of Occupy; decisions still made bureaucratically and behind closed doors.' (Sam, Occupy, London Study).

In Italy, Hungary and the UK, these discourses about the systemic failures of democracy are also linked to deep-seated concerns about the manipulation of the media. In Hungary, Milla (one million for press freedom) is one of the largest grassroots groups, established to campaign against the new media law in Hungary. In Britain the scandal about the way in which journalists hacked the phones of newsworthy people to discover details of their private lives exposed the links between politicians and the media empire controlled by the press baron Rupert Murdoch, as well as corruption, particularly among police and journalists. In Italy, a number of groups, like Articolo 21 and Valigia Blu, are devoted to defending journalists' rights and providing alternative sources of information. The No TAV movement is explicit about the threat to democracy from media manipulations: 'Between the real country, lived on the street and recounted on the web, and the virtual country lived in armchairs and recounted by newspapers and TV, is an abyss to the point of two antithetical universes with no contact between them. All the people who don't have the ability, the time or the wish to tap into the information battle on the internet, and who make up the vast majority of the population, remain relegated to a virtual world, built ad hoc to marginalise them from reality (...)' (Italy Study).

The disaffection with political elites and how decisions are reached, that is, a sense of political blockage, is something that is shared with populist parties on the right. Indeed, populists have joined demonstrations against austerity, for example. The Hungarian Party Jobbik explains: 'We are not communists, because our spiritual centre is not class domination. We are not fascists, because our

spiritual centre is not state domination. We are not national socialists, because our spiritual centre is not racial domination. But it is also very important for everyone to understand this correctly: we are not democrats either, in the sense [this word] has come to mean today, because money and profit are not in our spiritual centre either.' (Hungary Study)

Indeed, what distinguishes populist movements and parties from many of the groups described in this study is the practice of democracy, which is our second main finding.

## **It's about democracy, but not as usual**

Our second important finding is that there is not simply dissatisfaction with a particular fault within the (formal) system of representative democracy but with the nature of what has come to be practiced as 'democracy' more generally. 'They call it democracy and it isn't', was one of the slogans among protesters in Spain (Spain Study). Consequently, what we see in all the public displays of subterranean politics are projects of collective re-imagining of democracy, of its practices and, importantly, its relation to the everyday, to human lives. Another slogan in the Spanish protests read, 'We are not merchandise in the hands of politicians and bankers' (Spain Study).

A striking conclusion from all the case studies is the importance of the subjective experience of participating in politics in a new way, of reconstructing democracy out of one's own actions. Pleyers (2010) describes this type of politics as prefigurative action; the attempt to practice the kind of democracy that the participants imagine. This has been the primary attraction of Occupy, which experiments with forms of participation like daily assemblies and consensus decision-making and insists on horizontality and leaderlessness. This experimentation was pioneered by the Spanish movement and copied all over Europe, as well as in other parts of the world. According to the Spanish study: 'The main innovation of the 15-M repertoire was not the camps, nor the fact of congregating at a city square, nor the organisation of meetings but the mixture of these three components: gathering at a city square indefinitely to turn it into a permanent dialogue and enunciation space. ... The occupied squares became, therefore, a 24-hour citizen agora where the exchange of ideas and their expression was possible. Another component of the repertoire ... is the non-violent character of the movement', which helped to popularise demands and increase the wave of sympathisers (Spain Study).

The Spanish example quickly spread and was replicated in other places, and new techniques for dialogue were developed. The human microphone technique, for example, allows people to communicate with a large group without the use of amplification equipment: every person at the scene can say 'mic check'. If the people around the speaker repeat this, the speaker knows that she/he has the group's attention and can start talking. The whole group repeats the short sentences by the speaker and thereby amplifies what she/he is saying. Hand signs – adapted from sign language – are used to show the listeners' position on what is said. Activists refrain from applause, as it would interrupt the

speaker and create too much noise. Different hand signs are used to show ‘approval’, ‘disapproval’, ‘out of frame’, ‘we understood your point - you are repeating yourself’, ‘what you are talking about belongs to a separate working group’ etc. Our respondents argued that these techniques prevent people from speaking too long and encourage debate and discussion.

‘Process is what this form of politics is all about,’ said Sam from Occupy London. The whole point of the occupations is to change society by changing one’s own practices. ‘We don’t represent anyone. Everyone can come and bring her own ideas, her own expertise, as an individual. Actually, it’s really the idea of questioning the authority...’ (Cecile, an indignada in Paris, Trans-European Study 1). Several German interviewees from Occupy stress that it was videos of the Spanish Assemblies on YouTube that motivated them to join. ‘My heart was beating. I couldn’t understand a word of what they were saying but I thought: awesome! They meet in a public square and they talk to each other.’ And in Italy, the Assemblée San Giovanni explains that ‘doing the thing that you wish to say is the best way of saying it. In this case, thousands of citizens are calling for democracy by practicing it in the first person in the square and sharing this practice with thousands of others who feel the same need.’

The campaign for the referendum in Italy is also considered a new example of practicing democracy. Mobilising for the referendum (and winning it) showed how change can be achieved by citizens. It was seen as a form of direct democracy, the ‘rebirth of civic passion’ (Italy Study).

For some of our interviewees, distancing from traditional social actors is associated with a distancing from traditional forms of protest. Some respondents suggested that the failure of the demonstrations against the Iraq war in 2003, which brought some 11 million people to the streets worldwide, symbolised the inadequacy of classic approaches. Novel forms include ‘attention-generating tactics’ like sit-ins in high street shops or cyber attacks as well as long-term appropriation of public space. UK Uncut, for example, which targets corporations that avoid tax, began with a sit-in at Vodafone’s flagship store in London’s Oxford Street; they also staged a ‘sports day’ in Topshop, on the same street, to highlight the fact that the store’s tax avoidance could cover the amount being cut from school sports’ budgets in austerity measures (London Study).

Another important aspect of current public displays of subterranean politics is the importance of occupying *physical spaces* as a way of reclaiming public space. Physical space has considerable importance, both in terms of message and in terms of autonomy. As one interviewee from Occupy LSX put it: ‘The presence of the camp: the physical, the material and the symbolic has been so important – you can’t ignore it; the bankers that pass by can’t ignore it; it is already creating an alternative to the main system and demonstrating the alternative’ (London Study). The occupation of squares or temporary sit-ins are a way of constructing temporary autonomous zones where prefigurative politics can be practised. As the Hungary study shows, in Hungary, for example, retaking and occupying public

space has become a key battleground.<sup>5</sup>

The attached maps of occupied squares (see Appendix B), produced by Teresa Hoskyns' research project at Sheffield University, provide a graphic illustration of the importance of a physical space in which to practice democracy. The spaces for assemblies, education and information, media, health and safety, and food are visible in all the maps. The map of Occupy LSX, by Carl Fraser, a PhD student at Sheffield, also shows how public space is being eroded under the impact of neo-liberal policies. The occupiers originally planned to establish their camp in Paternoster Square in front of the London Stock Exchange. However, because the square is privately owned, it was closed off to them. In the end the camp was established on the border between space owned by the corporation of London and space owned by the Church of England, as shown in the pink dotted lines, which could be negotiated by the protestors. The sketch of Syntagma Square in Athens, by Sheffield MA student Marinela Pascua, shows the physical manifestation of the distinction between 'traditional' protest and new types of occupation. Traditional protest against what is going on in parliament is based in the upper part of the square in front of the Parliament, while the practice of democracy by occupiers is shown in the lower part of the square.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.0 Culture

Our third finding has to do with the role of the Internet in recent public displays of subterranean politics, or, more precisely, with the ethos of web 2.0. The growing relevance of the Internet in everyday life, especially social networking applications, such as Facebook, and micro-blogging sites, such as Twitter, is undisputed. There is also a growing body of studies that demonstrates the significance of these applications in and for contemporary *political activism*, that is, their relevance for social mobilization and collective action (see further Khondker 2011). Whether or not it is useful to speak of Facebook and Twitter revolutions (Shirky 2010), to claim that there is something different *in kind* about these tools and their use that actually determines the main nature of recent 'revolutions' is up for debate (see further *Global Civil Society* 2012). Nevertheless it is clear that these tools are fruitfully used to mobilize and organize. So, given the general omnipresence of social networking tools, it is not surprising that all our case studies found that they were relevant in stimulating and organising collective action. The 15-M movement in Spain was started by a bloggers network (Spain Study). Similarly, Facebook was instrumental for the mobilization to occupy the London Stock Exchange

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5 The Fidesz government tried to forestall any opposition demonstrations in Budapest on the national holiday, March 15th marking the 1848 Revolution, by reserving the entire downtown area for the day; the Administration and Justice Ministry and Budapest city council were granted permits to occupy public areas for the entire week surrounding the national holiday. These permits are valid for 2013 and 2014 as well. Milla had already announced plans for a large rally on March 15th, but did not receive permission from the police for the demonstration. Milla countered, however, reserving prime demonstration space for the next 100 years from 2014 on. As a consequence, the government relented, and they were granted permission for a demonstration organized on 10 March 2012 (Hungary Around the Clock 2012).

6 An interesting aspect of all the squares is the way they have integrated the homeless, giving them jobs preparing food or providing protection.

while UK Uncut initially developed through Twitter (London Study).

However, much more important than the widely documented use of various online applications as a tool for networking purposes is to understand the role of the Internet, or more precisely, the *ethos of web 2.0*, as a 'cultural context' that evolves from, plays back into and is manifest in contemporary subterranean politics and its actors. David Gauntlett nicely explains the nature of web 2.0: instead of being about 'searching and reading', as was Web 1.0 with its static web presentations, Web 2.0 is about 'writing and editing' (in Moore and Selchow 2012: 33). In this sense, web 2.0 is not simply about specific technological innovations and applications but about an ethos of how to 'do things'. It is about 'the disappearance of the signature' (Pierre Levy quoted in Lister et al 2003: 17). That is, it blurs the distinction between authors and readers, bringing about the notion of collective production and reproduction.

It is this ethos that turns out to be a salient feature of subterranean politics in our case studies. First, there is of course the preoccupation with Internet freedom and open content as issues of debate that are more or less explicitly present, as in the case of the Pirate Parties, the various occupations and, of course, the hactivist group *Anonymous* that the German case study highlights as a distinct example of subterranean politics. But it is also evident in broader organisational forms. The Germany Study uses the concept of 'swarm intelligence', referring 'to actions by individuals based on simple rules. By these actions, groups fulfil tasks that would not have been achieved by the individual alone. Groups working with swarm intelligence are self-organized, adaptive and when one individual drops out, another individual can take their place. Problems are solved by the group as a whole, without hierarchies or leaders. Every member can participate in the solution of a problem just as much as any other member' (Germany Study). A good example of 'swarm intelligence' highlighted by the Germany Study is the *GuttenPlag* (2011) platform, described above.

While the Germany Study uses the metaphor of 'swarm intelligence' to refer to collective efforts that focus on quantitatively large tasks, stressing the idea of getting something done, which would not have been possible alone, the logic of 'swarm intelligence' can also be found in more fundamental ways in the organisation of current displays of subterranean politics. The various occupations of squares are prime examples of swarm intelligence in the sense of collective action, horizontality, replaceability and leaderlessness. This does not mean that these principles are fully practiced; as one of the activists of Occupy LSX explains,

*anyone that [sic] pretends Occupy is a completely leaderless movement is just denying reality. There's a core group of maybe 20 people, maybe 30 people that are basically coordinating the work that's happening: facilitating amongst working groups outside of the open forum processes – background work.*

(Occupy LSX activist, London Study)

Yet the idea of horizontality is an important ideal for these actors, as they strive to achieve a culture of inclusion that places limits on the ability of individuals to use implicit authority to dominate others or determine the group's priorities. The fact that these activities are shaped by what we can call a 2.0 culture of collectivity, openness and inclusion, which then plays back into the broader mainstream culture to transform it, is illustrated by the statement of the (then) Secretary of the Pirate Party in Germany, Marina Weisband, who explained that the goal of the party is 'to make itself redundant' by having set into motion a cultural change towards openness and transparency (Spiegel Online 2012). This statement suggests that there is something specific about how people see their own political role and involvements. It seems to be about contributing to change without necessarily leaving a distinct and identifiable personal mark. Contemporary political actors come in and out of activism, whether online or in a square, taking seriously their contribution (often based on their professional experience as designers, web developers, marketing specialists) but being happy to have their contributions taken up and transformed by others, giving up 'their signature', coming back and again joining the rewriting of the new 'product'.

It is important to understand this cultural context if we are to avoid misleading assumptions about the nature of the current public displays of subterranean politics. It is commonplace, among the mainstream, to dismiss this kind of activism as not being constructive because there are no clear demands. This is what David Cameron has said about Occupy LSX (BBC URL) and many say in reference to the Pirate Parties or the 5 Star Movement in Italy, who do not have a clear party programme. Indeed, this is also one of the problems highlighted by some of the activists themselves, as seen in the following quote from an *Indignado* from Brussels: 'A general idea able to unite the movement was missing. We said "Something is wrong", this was the first and fundamental idea. But then, "What do we make to fix it?" There, there were so many different trends, so many ideas. There were people from everywhere and thus it couldn't work anymore' (Trans-European Study 1). Yet, we need to be careful with assessments which are pre-committed to traditional conceptions of what politics is or, rather, what it should look like. That is, we need to be open to understand the (potential) cultural dimension of these current public displays of subterranean politics; the absence of a specific demand need not be dismissed as a shortcoming, but rather as a manifestation of a different, 2.0 culture that (potentially) transforms (the idea of) politics and the nature of political actors and that is about processes rather than outcomes.

## Europe is 'Invisible'

Our fourth main finding is that Europe is 'invisible' in current public displays of subterranean politics. That is, it does not play a relevant role in the debates and protests that we have studied. In the few instances in which it is 'visible', it tends to be regarded as part of the problem as much as part of the solution. While many of our interviewees regard themselves as European in terms of life experi-

ence, Europe as a political community or a public space only seems to exist for a small ‘expert’ minority (see especially Trans-European Study 1).

The question of Europe was almost never raised by our interviewees and only tended to be addressed in answer to direct questions. Even after insisting on the question of Europe, answers were often contradictory and evasive (Trans-European Study 1). One sentiment that came out of the engagement with protesters from the Indignados movement was the perceived remoteness of Brussels.

*Europe is something I don't know well. I have a vision that I have formed here and there. I think it is a structure that is very interesting. It's something that may be used and that can bring a lot of nice things. But the problem is that it is very remote from people. I don't feel at all concerned with Europe.*

(Activist, Trans-European Study 1)

This remoteness of Brussels was also expressed by UK Uncut and Occupy LSX activists:

*In Scotland, London is too far away. Living in Glasgow, if I wanted to protest the national government, I had to go to London. Now, I can go to Edinburgh. It changes things. Brussels is another world away.*

(Scottish UK Uncut activist, London Study)

*One of the difficulties of judging the EU is that a lot of its effects are not very visible. Some of the arguments would be different if you had a stronger empirical basis.*

(German Occupy LSX activist, London Study)

The London Study provides an interesting picture in this respect because Occupy LSX consisted of a mixture of activists from all over Europe. The questions that the researchers of this study asked were designed to elicit answers about Europe even though Europe was not explicitly mentioned (see London Study). Nevertheless European issues were almost never raised. This was true for UK-born as well as for overseas-born activists. While the latter somewhat more quickly identified with Europe and were more likely to identify European connections to the national and global issues with which their activism was concerned, their level of engagement with the debate on the future of Europe in the context of their engagement with Occupy LSX was still practically non-existent:

*I think Occupy is thoroughly confused when it comes to Europe, and that's not very surprising given how little people know or care about Europe as an entity.*

(German Occupy LSX activist, London Study)

*I don't really have particular feelings [about the EU] ... it sounds like apathy or something, but to be honest I don't really care. I care about the results ... for me the policies count, and the restructuring counts, and not if it's in the EU or just in Germany or wherever ... I would rather focus on the visions than the targets."*

(German Occupy LSX activist, London Study)

Similarly the German and Spanish case studies report that Europe and the EU are simply not crucial issues for activists. Spanish interviewees explained the absence of Europe in terms of the absence of previous Spanish discussions about Europe as a space for political action, the lack of clearly defined policies and of a clear address where political decisions are made, and the erosion of social Europe (Spain Study).

This does not mean that there were no expressions of solidarity beyond borders or that protestors were only concerned with local and national issues. On the contrary, the slogan ‘we are all Greeks now’ to be found on many protests or Hungarian support for the No TAV campaign in Italy (Hungary study) are all indications of concerns beyond the local. The Spanish study emphasises what it describes as the multi-scalar character of the movement – global (with links to Chile), state, regional and local. Many of those interviewed in other contexts also emphasised the importance of the global.

*[Occupy LSX is about] creating roots in the locality. [There is a] long lasting tension between the local and the global. [It is about] [t]argeting the City of London because it embodies the relationship between the local and the global.*

(UK Uncut activist, London Study)

A Global Day of Action was organised on October 15 to coincide with the G20 summit, and although it had a European dimension and even included a march of *indignados* from different countries to Brussels, the European aspect of the event received hardly any public attention.

Moreover, in all the public displays of subterranean politics, inter-textual references are clearly evident. Indeed, one of characteristics of 2.0 culture is greater awareness of what is going on in other places. As one German interviewee put it: ‘Previous protest groups were looking backwards to learn from the past and forward towards a utopian future. Today, with the help of the Internet, people can look sideways and see what is going on in other places’ (Germany Study). For instance, the protest space in Barcelona’s Plaza Catalunya was divided into three areas; those concerned with democracy were in ‘Tahrir’, those concerned about economic issues were in ‘Iceland’ and those concerned about justice were in ‘Palestine’. On the marches in Spain, you could see Egyptian and Icelandic flags rather than traditional trades union or party flags. In Germany protesters show their shoes in reference to the ‘shoe attack’ on George W. Bush in Iraq.

Some activists made the point that the global is more relevant for them than the European.

*I care about the global level, the community level, the regional level... but Europe, does it still makes sense among all these levels? And even more, isn't it in some way a quasi-racist concept? Why should we care about Europe and not the Mediterranean region? ... We have many links with French-speaking Africa for instance. Why shouldn't we be in solidarity with them? Why*

*more with the Danes than with the Senegalese?*

(French Indignada, Trans-European Study 1)

*We may feel European, but people like me, we think of us as the global citizens.*

(Polish activist, Trans-European Study 1)

This conclusion that Europe is simply not present in the current bubbling-up of subterranean politics is reinforced by interviews with what the Trans-European Study called ‘expert’ activists (Trans-European Study 1). These ‘expert’ activists highlighted the difficulty of mobilising support for their initiatives.

*It has become impossible to develop a real discussion on Europe... In Germany, there are only a few small groups, who are really interested in working on European strategies and to develop alternative proposals, not only concerning protests*

(ATTAC-Germany and Transform activist, Trans-European Study 1)

There are, of course, a few occasions when Europe is visible, but on those occasions, Europe tends to be portrayed negatively. Thus, there were European flags with stars replaced by swastikas to be seen in Syntagma Square (Trans-European Study 2). In Hungary, where pro- and anti-EU sentiments are sharply polarised, the EU is often described as a new form of colonialism following the tradition of the Hapsburgs and the Soviet Union and, on one demonstration, the EU was represented as a wolf (Hungary Study). Very often, these extreme negative portrayals are displayed by the xenophobic right. Nevertheless, when pressed by directed questions, our interviewees tended to view the European Union as part of the problem. In both Germany and Greece, there are references among the activists to the Troika (the IMF, the European Central Bank, and the European Commission). In the first declaration of the assembly of Syntagma Square, it was stated that ‘we will not leave the squares until those who compelled us to come here leave the country: the government, the Troika, the IMF memoranda and everyone who exploits us’, though actually this was a rather rare mention of the European Union (Trans-European Study 2). In some Occupy Germany working groups, the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) and the Lisbon contracts have been discussed. On 4 February 2012, Occupy Frankfurt organised a protest against the ESM, arguing that the decision to establish the ESM was taken without any sort of public or democratic participation (Germany Study).

But to say that the EU is a neo-liberal bureaucratic and undemocratic project is not the same as being anti-EU or to deny the possibility of an alternative model for Europe. Attitudes on this point seem to depend both on different national cultural contexts and on generational differences. In terms of national contexts, more pro-EU sentiments were expressed by those who have experienced the transition to democracy in Eastern Europe and Spain, though they were also found in Italy. Kasia, a young Polish activist, sees the EU as more transparent and accessible than Polish governmental institutions: ‘I am very often in Brussels and I lobby in the European Parliament. I very much like Brussels because

the politicians and the officials there act in more transparent way. In Poland it is more difficult to get in touch with higher level officials and there is a huge lack of transparency in our democratic process’.

More negative attitudes were expressed in the UK although, as mentioned above, there was a difference between those born in the UK and those born overseas. While UK-born Londoners were more sceptical that the EU could change, those from other countries expressed hope for an alternative model:

*an EU that looks different could be a very good model towards providing alternative views for the global organisation of participation, trade, social policy, monetary spending, fiscal solidarity. The EU could be a very very good model, but it would have to look very different.*

(German Occupy LSX activist, London Study)

Particularly interesting in this respect was the case of Floyd, a resident of London for twenty years and an active campaigner on behalf of the Zimbabwean diaspora. However, it’s important to stress that his response about the relevance of campaigning politically did not emerge until he was asked if he personally felt European:

*Yes, I do feel European, because wherever we’ve [the Zimbabwean community] had problems ... the European Court of Human Rights has come to our aid ...*

(London Citizens community organiser, London Study)

He went on to explain that, in his opinion, due to colonial history and long-established trading links between Zimbabwe and Europe, ‘the European level is [...] closer to us, and is more influential’ than either emerging countries like China or the nations of African Union (‘we tried that and it hasn’t worked’), and that Europe therefore seemed like a more effective ‘platform’ from which the diaspora could engage with the Zimbabwean government. He also cited an example: in approaching the United Nations Security Council to support a resolution against Mugabe, it had been most important for the diaspora communities to get the support of European diplomats. Thus Floyd tied his beliefs to the relevance of European institutions to having directly benefitted from these institutions.

In terms of how views changed according to generational divides, there was a marked difference between older activists, who saw Europe as a political project concerned with overcoming the legacy of twentieth century wars and promoting the social model, and younger activists, who take Europe for granted. Older activists who remember a different kind of Europe still think it possible to press for a Europe of peace and solidarity.

*[Young activists] are more critical to Europe because they grew up in an increasingly neo-liberal Europe, which contributed to their precarious conditions.*

(long-time, pro-European French activist, Trans-European Study 1)

By contrast, younger activists feel European but regard the EU in a much more problematic way.

*Europe is a given fact for my generation. We travel, we grew up in it. We don't have problems criticizing European institutions and democracy in Europe as older activists may have. It's easier for us.*

(activist, Trans-European Study 1)

*Being European is something already incorporated by young people today... I have a feeling that young people are European in their mind. For my younger brother, the Euro is not a change; it is normal. To cross borders just like that, it is normal for him. It is amazing, he has friends in England, in Germany...*

(French activist, Trans-European Study 1)

This cultural sense of being European is even shared by British activists.

*I totally feel European. London is a European city; I feel more affinity with Europeans at activist meetings. Growing up in an open border EU has played a great role – [the] EasyJet culture. This is what Europe means for me, and those ties are stronger than the political structures.*

(English UK Uncut activist, London Study)

# 4 Implications

The first implication of our findings is that the notion of ‘subterranean politics’ is very useful. It sensitizes analysts to the underlying wiring of politics that is too often left out by established conceptual frames. Yet, it is this ‘subterranean politics,’ which ‘bubbles up’ and is the source of social transformation. There is a parallel here with the end of the Cold War. After the 1989 revolutions, there was much handwringing among analysts of the Communist world about why they failed to predict the revolutions; they tended to conclude that the revolutions sprang from nowhere and were unpredictable. But an alternative explanation is that they were looking in the wrong place; they had developed sophisticated techniques for studying the elite but they failed to study society. Those who were engaged in dialogue with the opposition knew something was going to happen even if they did know exactly how, when or in what form. Indeed, E.P. Thompson, who pioneered history from below, predicted the end of the Cold War as early as 1982 (Kaldor 2003: 70). Those who monitor and investigate subterranean politics are much more likely to develop insights into the potential for change than those who focus on elite policy debates. One specific aspect of this, which has emerged from our research and analysis of contemporary subterranean politics, suggests the need to take into account what we have called the 2.0 culture that shapes contemporary political actors in profound ways.

A second implication is that Europe will only become visible within subterranean politics by becoming the subject of a political debate, by being problematized. If we accept the finding that public displays of subterranean politics are manifestations of a political crisis, rather than a response to austerity policies or the economic crisis, and once we understand that these concerns are not simply about faults in the formal structure of representative democracy but about a profound re-imagining of politics and democracy, which comes out and plays back into a distinct culture (of the Internet), then it is possible to propose exciting new ways to open up Europe. Europe has to be linked to a new notion of ‘democracy’ – to establish itself as a creative space to re-imagine democracy.

The older generation are more positive about Europe and the EU because they remember an idea of Europe that was supposed to offer an alternative to war and dictatorship and to symbolize democracy. But the EU has lost this (symbolically powerful) position, perhaps because of the way democracy has come to be associated, at least in some of the new democracies, with a kind of ‘bandit’ capitalism. In order to put Europe and the EU back on the agenda, it needs to be re-invented as a space for the re-imagining and re-invention of politics, as it once was – only that it now needs to be a space

for alternatives to the existing liberal democracies, as opposed to a space in contrast to dictatorship and conflict. Europe needs to be made ‘visible’ in subterranean politics by linking it to the profound concern about *politics* and political cultures that we have observed in this project. Many of the initiatives proposed by mainstream groups, described in the appendix, propose reforms of the European Union that will establish something like a bigger nation-state. Yet if the European idea is to have any purchase within the type of politics we have described, it needs to be envisaged as new type of polity aimed at protecting and enabling democracy at local levels, a new model of governance appropriate in a 2.0 era. On the one side, it has to be seen as a form of insurance against those ‘global bads’ that undermine democracy at local levels, such as financial speculation, and as a framework for promoting global goods that are decided on the basis of new forms of inclusive decision-making. On the other side, it needs to become (again) a space for re-thinking politics.

So what might this mean in concrete terms?

## Fostering a change in public and political discourses

First, there needs to be a change of public and political discourses. Current discourses are shaped by a focus on economic and financial concerns. While these are of course important, they tend to dominate the public debate. Our analysis of subterranean politics suggests that solving the Euro-crisis will not be a solution to the crisis of Europe. And vice versa, it may not be possible to solve the financial crisis without addressing the political crisis. At the moment there is little public and political understanding of this, because protests are (mis)framed as being concerned about austerity. Instead, what is needed is a change of discourse that brings in ‘politics’ as a starting point for positive change. This has to be done within the context of political frustrations about existing political processes and practices on local and national levels and re-imaginings of how political participation could and should look.

This could be achieved in several ways, such as:

- Public debates, events and conferences, which focus on the *political* crisis in Europe as opposed to the financial or economic crisis. In particular, there need to be discussions between subterranean and mainstream actors about the role of Europe as a new type of entity aimed at protecting and enabling democracy at local European levels and as a new model of governance appropriate in a 2.0 era.
- Bringing together representatives from the European initiatives listed in the appendix with subterranean actors for whom Europe seems at present irrelevant, so as to stimulate debate

about Europe at subterranean levels. Some kind of trans-European Assembly or Convention is needed, on the model of the Helsinki Citizens Assemblies or the European Social Forums.

- Commissioning of research papers and policy briefs that deal explicitly with the *political* crisis of Europe, offer alternative political models of Europe and address policy makers as well as ‘expert’ activists.
- Online initiatives that could bring together mainstream and subterranean actors in a discussion about the future of Europe. One idea is that the proposed European Civil Society Observatory, for which the Civil Society and Human Security Research Unit has been commissioned by the European Union to prepare alternative models, could include an online constitutional assembly for the European Union.
- Supporting campaigns that address Europe through innovative democratic processes, such as the Initiative for European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI), “the first transnational instrument of participatory democracy in world history” (ECI URL). Since 1 April 2012 the ECI enables EU citizens, who are able to muster one million signatures, to ask the European Union to introduce new legislation. Some civil society groups are concerned that the bar of 1 million is too high and that also needs to be addressed.

## **Further systematic mapping of ‘subterranean politics’ and establishing it as a concept**

Secondly, systematic research is needed about subterranean politics with the aim of establishing it as a new social science concept, so as to orchestrate a sea change in the focus of political analyses. Our project illustrates that there is value in looking at the world through the (still) experimental notion of ‘subterranean politics’.

This might include:

- Commissioning studies falling into three categories:
  - Establishing ‘subterranean politics’ as a political scientific concept and demonstrating its added value
  - A systematic mapping and monitoring of ‘subterranean politics’ across Europe
  - Investigations into the nature of contemporary subterranean actors in the context of 2.0-culture
- Bringing together various research projects across Europe that focus on ‘bottom-up’ politics, including studies of civil society, social movements, riots, online activism, and populism.

The current 'resonance' of subterranean politics, the 'bubbling up' of political forces into the mainstream can have both negative and positive consequences. There is a real risk that if Europe remains invisible, perceptions of the European Union will be captured by populist parties, who already stress their euro-scepticism. Such euro-scepticism could easily appeal (reluctantly perhaps) to those who do not debate and discuss Europe but nevertheless have inchoate notions of Europe as a neo-liberal bureaucratic project in which decisions are opaque and undemocratic. But at the same time there is an extraordinary opportunity to reconstruct democracy on a trans-European scale by building on and taking seriously subterranean experiments.

# **Appendix A: European Initiatives**

Geoffrey Pleyers distinguishes two logics of action among progressive activists. One is what he calls the 'way of subjectivity': it is prefigurative, bottom-up, experimental and creative. The other he describes as the 'way of reason', in which activists stress the importance of scientific knowledge and of putting forward specific policy proposals. Their 'conception of social change is institutionalized and top-down, as it aims to address policy makers, global institutions and regulations' (Trans-European Study 1). Such activists include intellectuals and cultural figures, NGOs like ATTAC, The Tax Justice Network, Finance Watch or the Committee for the Cancellation of Third World Debt, as well as trades unions. As one interviewee put it: 'We try to mobilize expertise and apply it in relevant policy and advocacy sorts of processes, rather than mobilizing citizens and have the outcry [sic]. We believe that once we create enough public information, people will mobilize themselves. ... We need to see what other specific policy proposals, on the EU level, on the global level, and elsewhere, which will make lasting change, which will make governments work for the benefit of the people' (Matti, Tax Justice Network).

In terms of how European issues are framed, there is a striking contrast between those we might term 'expert activists' (the way of reason) and the more grassroots activists (the way of subjectivity). Expert activists tend to operate within an elite trans-European political culture. From this group, there has been a proliferation of European initiatives as well as conferences and meetings to discuss European alternatives. Policy-oriented organisations like the Corporate Europe Observatory, the European Trade Union Institute, the Permanent Forum for Civil Society, and the Spinelli Group are particularly active in bringing together policy researchers, academics, journalists, and politicians in dialogue to discuss the future of Europe, usually in terms of treaty, policy, or institutional reform. European trades unions are also active and have organised global days of action, bringing over 100,000 people to Brussels to protest austerity.

To supplement the two trans-European studies, we attempted to map the main 'expert initiatives' based on internet research. This approach has a number of shortcomings. Firstly, it excludes initiatives that do not have a visible web presence. However, since most trans-European organising is done online, we hoped this would not impact the results too heavily. Moreover, given that there are 23 official languages of the European Union, our research will be limited to familiar western-European languages, though many of the initiatives collected have been translated and published in up to 15 languages. Despite these caveats, we hoped to collect a sample of expert initiatives that would give an impression of the nature of organising across Europe. The initiatives we mapped were entered into a web-based knowledgebase created for the project (Subterranean Politics URL), which will continue to be updated as a knowledge resource to researchers and activists. The initiatives were then coded according to thematic issues (See Table A.1).

Expert initiatives include:

A series of proposals for concrete measures to solve the European debt crisis, for example Eurobonds

or a financial transaction tax. By and large, these proposals are put forward by former politicians or industrialists. One example is the Spinelli Group's manifesto 'Against the Temptation of a Franco-German coup d'Etat'. Members of the group include Jacques Delors, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, as well as Italy's new Prime Minister Mario Monti. Another is the 'Manifesto to put Europe back on its feet' issued by the Italian industrialists' confederation daily *Il Sole 24 Ore*. George Soros, together with 95 other signatories, published a letter in the *Financial Times* calling for a binding agreement to establish a European Treasury.

There are a number of initiatives coming from progressive economists which critique the policy response to the crisis and put forward alternative remedies. These include the 'Manifesto of the Appalled Economists', EconNuestra, a letter to the G20 finance ministers in support of a financial transaction tax signed by 1,000 international economists, and conferences and publications from the EuroMemorandum Group.

Many cultural, religious and intellectual figures have issued appeals that call for a different conception of Europe beyond the market. For example, Mikis Theodorakis, the renowned songwriter and composer, and Manolis Glezos, politician, writer and World War II resistance fighter, issued the 'Common Appeal for the Rescue of the Peoples of Europe' last October, which invoked the cultural and democratic legacy of Europe and opposed it to the 'empire of money' which has come to dominate. This appeal formed the basis for the later solidarity campaign for the people of Greece that spread throughout Europe. In France, Alan Badiou, together with others, wrote the manifesto 'Save Greece from its Saviours!' It likewise summons the ideal of European democracy which is threatened by a neo-liberal onslaught, and it calls on a community of intellectuals and artists to 'multiply articles, media appearances, debates, petitions, demonstrations' to save the people of Greece from imposed impoverishment (Badiou 2012). Ulrich Beck and Danny Cohn-Bendit call for a 'Year of Volunteering' in order to reconstruct European democracy from the bottom up in 'We are Europe! Manifesto for re-building Europe from the bottom up'. While British Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, in 'Has Europe lost its soul to the markets?' calls on religious leaders to reassert the role of religion in society to act as a bulwark against untrammelled markets – invoking the story of the Golden Calf to remind us why the Sabbath was established in the first place: to preserve a day for things which do not have a market value (Sacks 2011).

There are also more specific proposals for reconstructing democracy and European public space coming from a younger generation of expert activists. A group of young Europeans – regeneration Europe – issued a founding appeal called 'Ending the Honeymoon: constructing Europe beyond the market', which takes as its premise the opportunities that growing up in the EU have offered to younger generations and posits a new grammar for Europe based on trust, shared aspirations, and a new idea of the public to counter the dominant – and disappointing – language of economic rationality. 'Another Road to Europe', initiated by intellectuals close to the Italian newspaper *Il Manifesto*,

calls for a new type of European polity committed to social justice, sustainable growth, democracy, human rights and peace. Avanti Europe, which includes members of the European Parliament, is about giving a voice to European citizens and engaging critically with policy-making at the European level without suggesting a retreat to the nation-state.

Finally, some appeals conceive of alternatives through the idea of the 'commons' or 'common goods', by which they mean to capture an idea of both tangible and intangible goods that, they argue, can no longer be usefully understood in economically dichotomous terms of public versus private. This has particular resonance in Italy and Spain where issues of water privatization, for example, have become salient topics among subterranean political actors. This is the motivation of the 'Commons Sense' campaign, which is launching a European Citizens Initiative around this idea. The idea was also discussed at a February conference in an occupied theatre in Rome called 'Minimum Income, Common Goods and Democracy', which brought together a wide network of organizers and participants including newspapers, academics, NGOs, and even the Municipality of Naples.



The Common(s)	Markets over politics, criticism of	Neoliberalism, criticism of	Environment	Labour Rights	Solidarity	Federal Europe	Minimum Income	Cultural Europe	Civic Europe	Faith	Peace
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## The European Citizens' Initiative Campaign



On 1 April 2012, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) regulation, introduced in the 2009 Lisbon Treaty following years of campaigning efforts by a coalition of democracy advocates and more than 120 NGOs, came into force.

The regulation makes it possible for citizens' organizations to request consideration of new EU legislation by the European Commission following the collection of one million signatures supporting the initiative. According to The ECI Campaign, the coalition behind the introduction of the regulation, the ECI aims to be an effective tool for citizens and civil society groups to directly influence the agenda of EU legislative bodies. As the campaign director, Carsten Berg, suggests, the ECI sets a precedent for democratic innovation beyond the nation state: 'It is the first transnational instrument of participatory democracy in world history. With it, Europe enters a new territory of citizen participation. It is the result of nearly a decade of work which will open up new perspectives for democracy building in Europe.' (European Citizens' Initiative, 2012)

The ECI regulation remains a work in progress even though citizens' initiatives can now be officially registered, and The ECI Campaign continues to pressure the European Commission over the details of its implementation. While the campaign's early efforts focused on the inclusion of the ECI in the EU Constitutional Treaty and later into the Lisbon Treaty, later lobbying focused on negotiating the rules governing the process of collecting signatures in order to make them more 'citizen-friendly'.

These efforts are still underway. The ECI Campaign suggests that, in its present form, the restrictions imposed by the ECI regulation make it 'relatively easy for citizens' groups to launch an ECI, but extremely difficult to complete one successfully', especially for grassroots groups (ibid). Since the regulation may favour well-funded and professionalized lobbying groups over smaller groups that rely on volunteer efforts, the ECI Campaign will focus future campaigning efforts on "monitor[ing] the practical use of the ECI and work[ing] to remove all its burdensome restrictions" (ibid). The ECI regulation will be officially reviewed in 2015, providing another opportunity for the campaign to demand changes that will increase the ECI's potential for realizing participatory democracy in Europe.

# **Appendix B: ‘Mapping Occupy: Representations of Civil Society’**

**A Research Project of the University of Sheffield  
MA Architecture Design Studio**

Directed by Teresa Hoskyns



Figure B.1: Occupy LSX and the Use of Public Space, by Carl Fraser

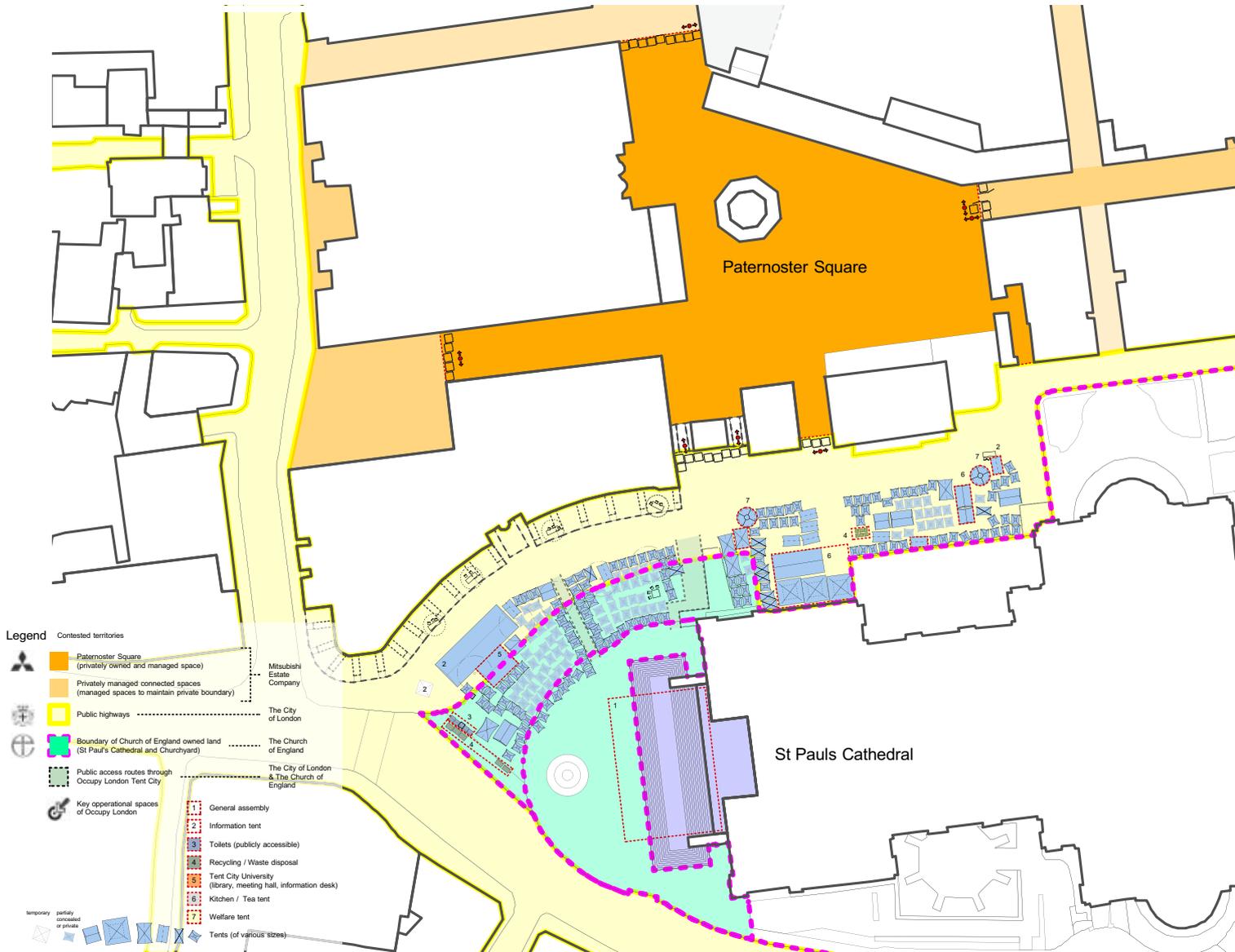
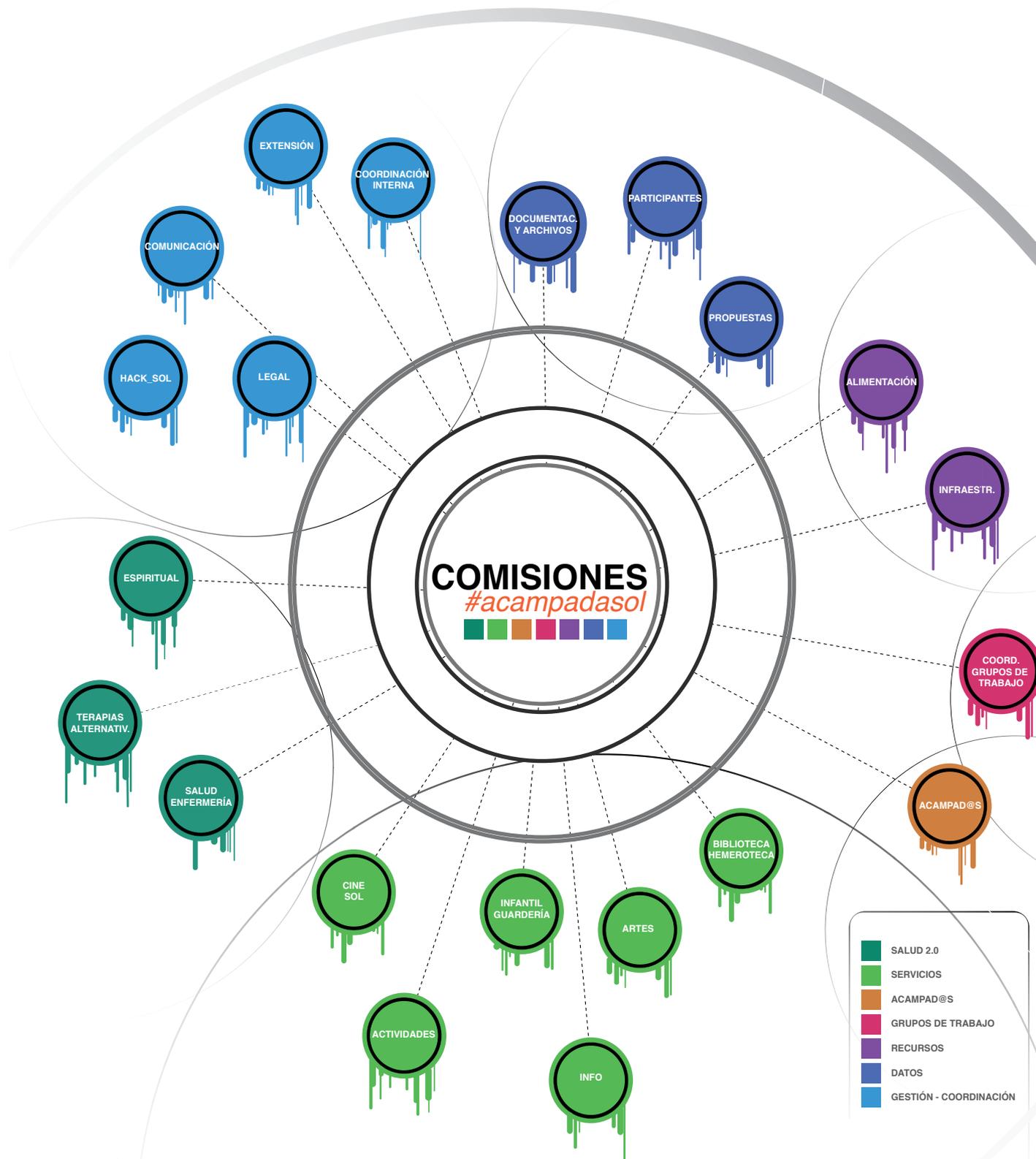


Figure B.2: Organigrama 2.0: Mapping Occupy Spain

ASAMBLEAS PROPIAS DE GRUPOS DE TRABAJO Y COMISIONES





organigrama  
comisión de grupos de trabajo  
*#acampadasol*

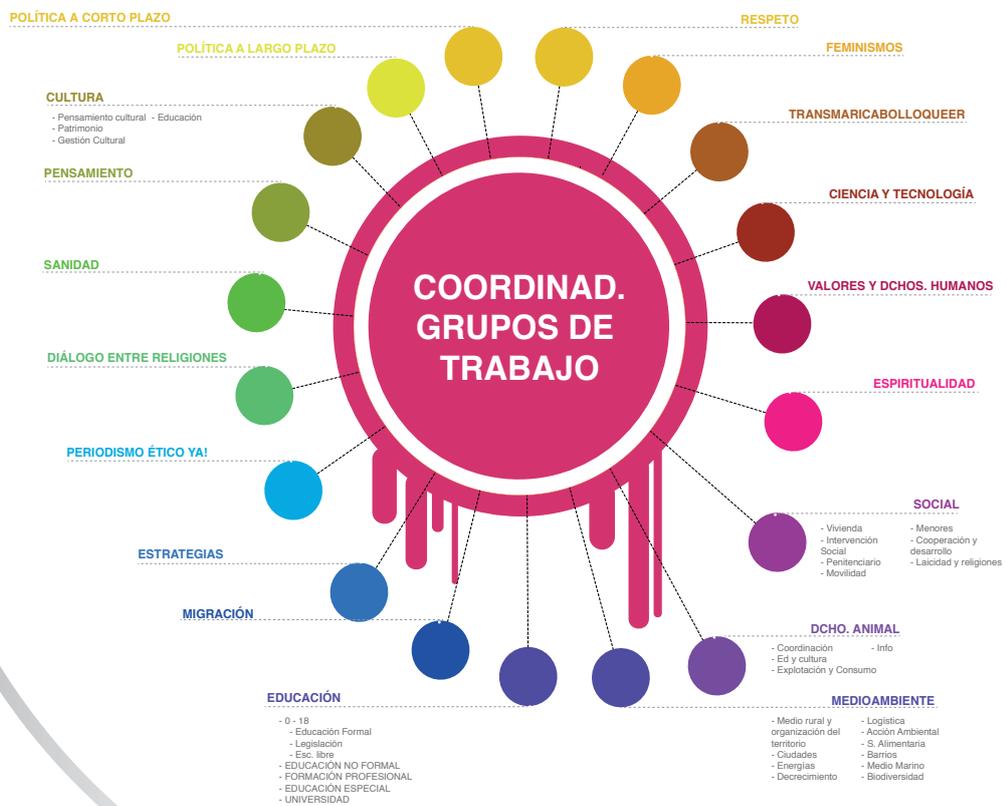
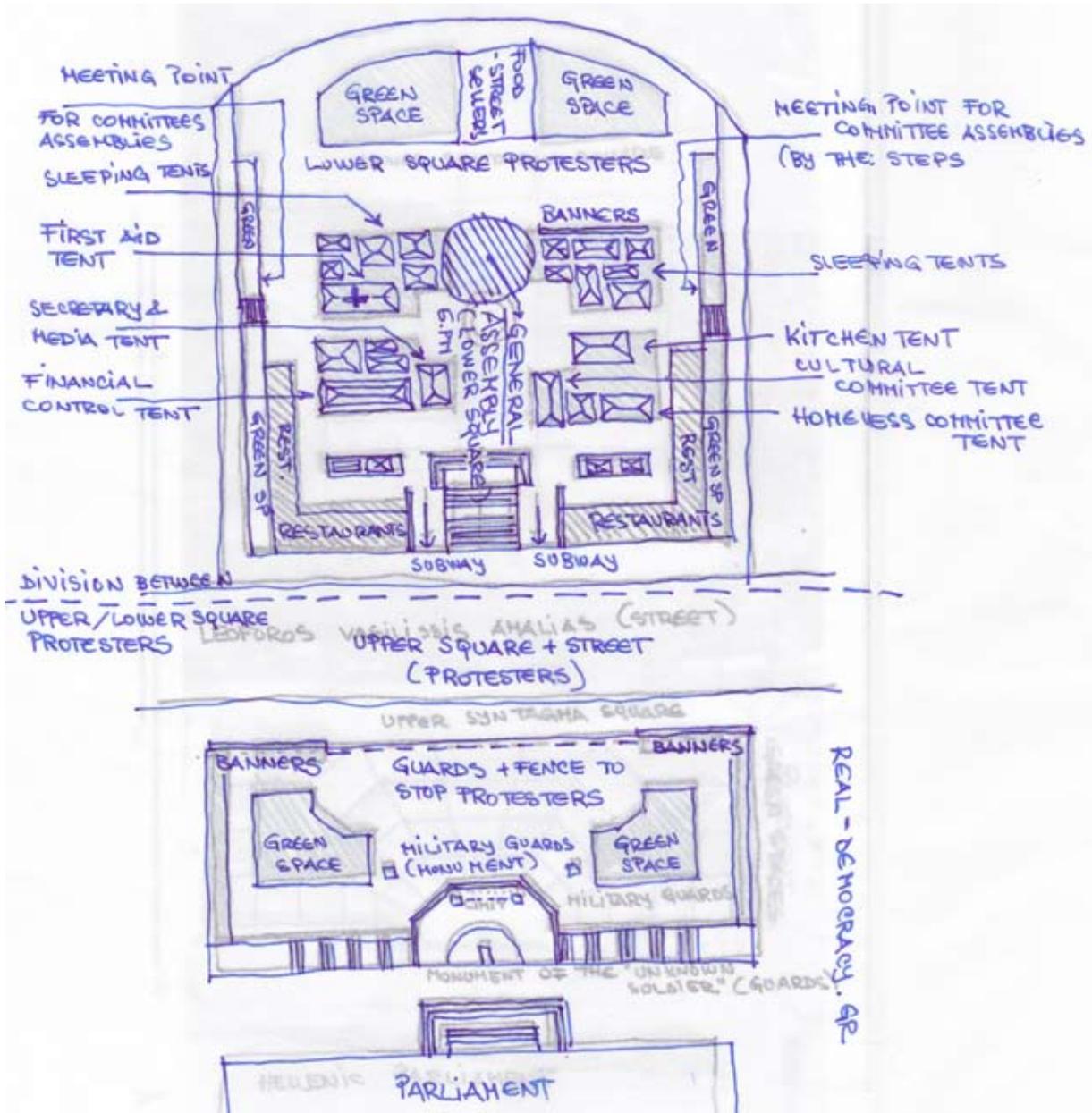


Figure B.3: A Sketch of Syntagma Square, by Marinela Pascua



# **Appendix C: Research Teams**

Context	Lead researcher	Team	Institution	Displays of subterranean politics	Approach / Method(s)
Italy	Professor Donatella della Porta	Dr Lorenzo Mosca and Dr Louisa Parks	European University Institute (EUI)	organisers of protest events held in Italy during 2011, from trade unions to social centres, from women's groups to environmental organizations, from precarious workers to anti-crisis groups.	Protest event analysis using media reports from La Repubblica; frame analysis of subterranean groups' websites
Spain	Jordi Bonet i Martí		(Centre Internacional de Documentació Política de Barcelona, CIDOB)	the 15-M Movement (indignados)	frame analysis of the mobilisation, supported by media analysis, analysis of the movements' texts, and interviews
UK	Sean Deel, MSc, Tamsin Murray-Leach, MSc, and Maro Pantazidou, MA	Jon Wiltshire, BA	London School of Economics	Occupy London, UK Uncut, the student movement and London Citizens	online mapping and media analysis, semi-structured interviews and participant observations

<b>Context</b>	<b>Lead researcher</b>	<b>Team</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Displays of subterranean politics</b>	<b>Approach / Method(s)</b>
<b>Trans-European initiatives</b>	Professor Mario Pianta	Dr Paolo Gerbaudo	University of Urbino and the University of Cairo	pro-European initiatives across Europe	framing analysis of “trajectories of mobilisation” of the major events led by social movements since 2008 and documents produced by these movements
<b>Trans-European Activists</b>	Dr Geoffrey Pleyers	Dr Bartolomeo Conti, Madeleine Sallustio, BA	University of Louvain and CADIS, Paris	indignados/ occupiers, local activists, expert activists and protest/ movement activists	semi-structured interviews and focus groups
<b>Germany</b>	Professor Helmut K. Anheier	Anne Nassauer, MA	Hertie School of Governance	Wutbürger, Anonymous, Guttenplag, Occupy Berlin	Interviews and participant observation (Occupy) and content analyses of web, print and audio-visual content.
<b>Hungary</b>	Professor Jody Jensen	Erin Saltman, MA and Hajnalka Szarvas, MA	Institute for Social and European Studies (ISES)	Left- and right-wing Hungarian protest movements	media analysis, participant observation, and interviews

# Meetings of the Subterranean Politics Research Group

## December 8th, 2011

- Mary Kaldor (LSE)
- Sabine Selchow (LSE)
- Sean Deel (LSE)
- Tamsin Murray-Leach (LSE)
- Mario Pianta (University of Urbino)
- Geoffrey Pleyers (University of Louvain)
- Helmut Anheier (Hertie School of Governance)
- Erin Saltman (UCL, representing ISES)
- Lorenzo Mosca (European University Institute)

## January 20th, 2012

- Mary Kaldor (LSE)
- Sabine Selchow (LSE)
- Sean Deel (LSE)
- Tamsin Murray-Leach (LSE)
- Mario Pianta (University of Urbino)
- Geoffrey Pleyers (University of Louvain)
- David Budde (Hertie School of Governance)
- Jody Jensen (ISES)
- Erin Saltman (UCL, representing ISES)
- Jordi Vaquer (CIDOB)
- Jordi Bonet e Martí (CIDOB)

## March 17th, 2012

- Mary Kaldor (LSE)
- Sabine Selchow (LSE)
- Sean Deel (LSE)
- Tamsin Murray-Leach (LSE)
- Mario Pianta (University of Urbino)
- Geoffrey Pleyers (University of Louvain)
- David Budde (Hertie School of Governance)
- Hajnalka Szarvas (ISES)
- Erin Saltman (UCL, representing ISES)
- Louisa Parks (EUI)
- Jordi Bonet e Martí (CIDOB)

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