

A high-angle, wide shot of a massive crowd of people participating in a protest or demonstration. The crowd is dense and fills the entire frame. Many individuals are holding up white rectangular signs on poles, some of which feature portraits of people. The participants are dressed in a variety of casual clothing, including jackets, sweaters, and hats, suggesting a cool day. The overall atmosphere is one of a large-scale public gathering. The text 'SUBTERRANEAN POLITICS IN EUROPE' is overlaid in a bright pink banner across the middle of the image.

# SUBTERRANEAN POLITICS IN EUROPE

Edited by **Mary Kaldor**  
and **Sabine Selchow**



## Subterranean Politics in Europe

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Subterranean Politics in Europe

Edited by

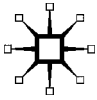
Mary Kaldor

*Professor of Global Governance, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK*

Sabine Selchow

*Research Fellow, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK*

palgrave  
macmillan



Selection, introduction and editorial matter © Mary Kaldor and Sabine Selchow 2015

Individual chapters © Respective authors 2015

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2015 978-1-137-44146-1

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The authors have asserted their rights to be identified as the authors of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2015 by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-57348-6 ISBN 978-1-137-44147-8 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781137441478

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Subterranean politics in Europe / [edited by] Mary Kaldor (professor of global governance, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK), Sabine Selchow (research Fellow, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK).

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Europe—Politics and government—1989— 2. Europe—Social conditions—21st century. 3. Political activists—Europe—History—21st century. 4. Protest movements—Europe—History—21st century. 5. Social movements—Europe—History—21st century. 6. Radicalism—Europe—History—21st century. 7. Political culture—Europe—History—21st century. I. Kaldor, Mary. II. Selchow, Sabine. D2024.S83 2015

322.4094—dc23

2014037981

# Contents

<i>List of Boxes, Figures and Tables</i>	vi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	viii
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	ix
1 Introduction – In Search of Europe’s Future: Subterranean Politics and the Other Crisis in Europe <i>Mary Kaldor and Sabine Selchow</i>	1
2 In Search of European Alternatives: Anti-Austerity Protests in Europe <i>Mario Pianta and Paolo Gerbaudo</i>	31
3 2011: Subterranean Politics and Visible Protest on Social Justice in Italy <i>Donatella della Porta, Lorenzo Mosca and Louisa Parks</i>	60
4 The ‘Swarm Intelligence’ and Occupy: Recent Subterranean Politics in Germany <i>Anne Nassauer and Helmut K. Anheier</i>	94
5 The 15-M: A Bet for Radical Democracy <i>Jordi Bonet i Martí</i>	119
6 Hungary at the Vanguard of Europe’s Rearguard? Emerging Subterranean Politics and Civil Dissent <i>Jody Jensen</i>	141
7 Political Blockage and the Absence of Europe: Subterranean Politics in London <i>Sean Deel and Tamsin Murray-Leach</i>	168
8 Alter-Europe: Progressive Activists and Europe <i>Geoffrey Pleyers</i>	200
Conclusion: Towards a European Spring? <i>Ulrich Beck and Mary Kaldor</i>	231
<i>Index</i>	239

# Boxes, Figures and Tables

## Boxes

2.1	Blockupy Frankfurt!	40
2.2	The first European strike – European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)	43
2.3	The European Appeal: ‘Another Road for Europe’	53
2.4	European Progressive Economists Network (Euro-pen)	56
3.1	No TAV	73
3.2	Common goods	74
3.3	Freedom of information	76
3.4	The influence of the <i>Indignados</i>	80
4.1	Anonymous Germany: An overview	101
4.2	GuttenPlag: An overview	102
4.3	Occupy Germany: An overview	104
5.1	The genesis of the 15-M	122
6.1	Timeline of dissent	155
7.1	Occupy London	176
7.2	UK Uncut	178
7.3	UK student protest movement	180
7.4	London Citizens	182
8.1	Blockupy: A pan-European anti-austerity protest in the counter-globalisation tradition?	217

## Figures

3.1	The different phases of the research design	62
3.2	Protest events in Italy by month, year 2011 (absolute values)	66
3.3	Type of actor involved in protest events (multiple responses, % of cases)	67
5.1	Configuration of actors involved in the 15-M	126

## Tables

2.1	Major Europe-wide anti-austerity protests	36
3.1	Types of union involved in protest events (multiple responses, % of cases)	67

3.2	Type of social group involved in protest events (multiple responses, % of cases)	68
3.3	Repertoire of action (multiple responses, % of cases)	69
3.4	Issues of protest (multiple responses, % of cases)	70
3.5	Targets of protest (multiple responses, % of cases)	70
3.6	Level of protest targets (multiple responses, % of cases)	71
3.7	Selected actors (absolute values)	71
3.8	Visions of Europe by age of the organisations (mean values)	81
3.9	Diagnostic frames on Europe	82
3.10	Prognostic frames on Europe	84
3.11	Mobilisation frames on Europe	85
5.1	15-M frames	129
5.2	Comparing the alter-globalisation and the 15-M	135
6.1	Mapping major Hungarian grassroots/activist organisations	159



# Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the generous support of the Open Society Foundations. In particular, we would like to thank Rayna Gavrilova, Heather Grabbe and Ellen Riotte at the Open Society European Policy Institute (formerly OSI Brussels) for their help and enthusiasm throughout. Jordi Vaquer, of the Open Society Initiative for Europe, also contributed significantly to the research process.

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.

This book draws on the ‘Subterranean Politics’ research project. The full reports from the seven contextual case studies are available to academic researchers working on related topics; please see the website for further details: [www.subterraneanpolitics.eu](http://www.subterraneanpolitics.eu). In addition to the contributors to this volume, we would like to note the researchers who worked on the initial studies: Dr Bartolomeo Conti (CADIS, Paris), Maro Pantazidou (IDS), Erin Saltman (UCL) and Hajnalka Szarvas (Corvinus University).

We would also like to thank Dominika Spyratou, Pippa Bore and Jon Wiltshire (intern) of the Civil Society and Human Security Unit of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) for their tireless assistance.

# Contributors

**Helmut K. Anheier** is Professor of Sociology and Dean at the Hertie School of Governance. He also holds a chair in sociology at Heidelberg University and serves as Academic Director of the Center for Social Investment. He received his PhD from Yale University in 1986. From 2001 to 2009, he was Professor of Public Policy and Social Welfare at UCLA's School of Public Affairs and Centennial Professor at the London School of Economics. He founded and directed the Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics and the Center for Civil Society at UCLA. Before embarking on an academic career, he served as social affairs officer to the United Nations. He is currently researching the role of foundations in civil society and focuses on concepts and methods in civil society and globalisation studies. He is the founding editor of the *Global Civil Society Yearbook* and editor of the Cultures and Globalization series (with Raj Isar). His recent publications include *Foundations and American Society* (with David Hammack, 2009) and *Nonprofit Organizations: Theory, Management and Policy* (2005).

**Ulrich Beck**<sup>†</sup> was Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Munich and Visiting Centennial Professor at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He was a prolific author; his most notable books translated into English include *Risk Society* (1992; originally published in German in 1986), *Reflexive Modernization* (1994, with Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash), *The Normal Chaos of Love* (1995, with E. Beck-Gernsheim), *The Reinvention of Politics* (1996), *Democracy Without Enemies* (1998), *World Risk Society* (1999), *Individualization* (2000), *Power in the Global Age* (2005), *The Cosmopolitan Vision* (2006), *Cosmopolitan Europe* (2007, with Edgar Grande), *World at Risk* (2008), *German Europe* (2013) and *Distant Love* (2014, with E. Beck-Gernsheim). Described as 'the most influential sociologist of his generation' by Lord Anthony Giddens, Beck died aged 70 on 1 January 2015, as this book went to press.

**Jordi Bonet i Martí** is Lecturer in Organizational Psychology at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso (Chile). He completed his PhD in social psychology at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and his

undergraduate studies at Universitat de Barcelona. His research interests lie in the area of community development, urban policies, minority rights and discourse analysis. In recent years, he has focused on feminist methodology through his participation in the creation of SIMREF (Seminari Interdisciplinari de Metodologia de Recerca Feminista; Seminar on Interdisciplinary Feminist Research Methodology).

**Sean Deel** is a researcher in the Department of International Development at the London School of Economics.

**Donatella della Porta** is Professor of Sociology in the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the European University Institute, where she directs the Center on Social Movement Studies (Cosmos). She also directs a major ERC project, Mobilizing for Democracy, on civil society participation in democratisation processes in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America. Among her very recent publications are *Can Democracy Be Saved?* (2013), *Clandestine Political Violence* (with D. Snow, B. Klandermans and D. McAdam, eds., 2013), *Blackwell Encyclopedia on Social and Political Movements* (2013), *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right* (with M. Caiani and C. Wagemann, 2012), *Meeting Democracy* (ed. with D. Rucht, 2012), *The Hidden Order of Corruption* (with A. Vannucci, 2012), *Social Movements and Europeanization* (with M. Caiani, 2009), *Another Europe* (ed., 2009), *Democracy in Social Movements* (ed., 2009) and *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences* (with M. Keating; translation into Spanish by Akal, 2008). In 2011, she was the recipient of the Mattei Dogan Prize for distinguished achievements in the field of political sociology.

**Paolo Gerbaudo** is Lecturer in Digital Culture and Society at King's College London. He has worked as a reporter for the Italian Left newspaper *il manifesto* and has been involved in anti-corporate, global justice and ecologist campaigns. His current research focuses on the use of new media and social media by social movements and emerging digital parties. He is the author of *Tweets and the Streets* (2012), a book analysing social media activism in the popular protest wave of 2011, from the Arab Spring to the indignados and Occupy Wall Street. He has a PhD from Goldsmiths College, where he worked under the supervision of Professor Nick Couldry. He has previously taught at Middlesex University and the American University in Cairo. He is currently the convener of the Digital Culture and Political Protest module at King's College.

**Jody Jensen** is a research fellow at the Institute of Sociology and Institute of Political Science, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and the Director of International Economic Relations, Institute for Social and European Studies, Hungary. Amongst other positions, she has been the regional director of ASHOKA Central Europe (1994–2002); director of the HCA Liaison Office for East Central European Cooperation (1994–1998); general secretary of the Consortium for the Study of European Transition (1991–1995); and co-convenor of the Helsinki Citizen's Assembly Commission on Nationalism and (Con)Federal Structures. Focusing on the Balkans, global civil society, transformation of the nation state and the governance of global markets, she contributes regularly to major journals and is also the English editor of the website Találjuk-ki Közpeuropát (Reinventing Central Europe; [www.talaljuk-ki.hu](http://www.talaljuk-ki.hu)) and editor-in-chief of English publications for Savaria University Press and ISES Publications.

**Mary Kaldor** is Professor of Global Governance, Director of the Civil Society and Human Security Research Unit at the London School of Economics and CEO of the DFID-funded Justice and Security Research Programme. She is the author of several books, including *The Ultimate Weapon Is No Weapon: Human Security and the Changing Rules of War and Peace* (2010); *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era* (1999; third edition 2012) and *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (2003). She was co-chair of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly, a member of the International Independent Commission on Kosovo and convenor of the Human Security Study Group, which reported to Javier Solana.

**Lorenzo Mosca** is an assistant professor at Roma Tre University, where he teaches new media, sociology of communication and public opinion. His research interests are mostly focused on political participation, communication and social movements. Recent research includes anti-austerity movements in Italy, the political use of the Internet in comparative perspective and the Movimento 5 Stelle.

**Tamsin Murray-Leach** is a research officer in the Civil Society and Human Security Unit at the London School of Economics and managing editor of *Global Civil Society 2012* and of this volume.

**Anne Nassauer** is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Sociology, John F. Kennedy Institute, Free University of Berlin. Her main

research interests include collective behaviour, emotions and symbolic interaction. She completed her doctorate at Humboldt University, Berlin, on 'Violence in Demonstrations: A Comparative Analysis of Situational Interaction Dynamics at Social Movement Protests'. Currently, she is researching violence, social movements and crime from a micro-sociological perspective.

**Louisa Parks** holds a PhD from the European University Institute in Florence. She is the author of *Social Movement Campaigns on EU Policy: In the Corridors and in the Streets* (2015). She is Lecturer in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Lincoln, where she is carrying out research within the Benelux project on the role of NGOs in the elaboration of norms on benefit sharing in global environmental law. This research, funded by the European Research Council, proceeds alongside continued work on social movement campaigning in the EU.

**Mario Pianta** is Professor of Economic Policy at the University of Urbino and is a member of the Centro Linceo Interdisciplinare of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. His recent books include *Global Justice Activism and Policy Reform in Europe* (ed., with P. Utting and A. Elleskirk, 2012).

**Geoffrey Pleyers** is an FNRS researcher at the University of Louvain, Belgium. He holds a PhD in sociology from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS, Paris) and teaches sociology of globalisation and social movements at the EHESS and at the University of Louvain. He is the author of *Forums sociaux mondiaux et défis de l'altermondialisme* (2007) and *Alter-globalization: Becoming Actors in a Global Age* (2010) and has edited the books *Movimientos sociales. De lo local a lo global* (2009) and *Consumption critique* (2011).

**Sabine Selchow** is a research fellow in the Civil Society and Human Security Research Unit at the London School of Economics and in the Institute of Sociology at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Germany. She holds a PhD in government from the London School of Economics. She is the co-editor of *Global Civil Society 2012*.

# 1

## Introduction – In Search of Europe’s Future: Subterranean Politics and the Other Crisis in Europe

*Mary Kaldor and Sabine Selchow*

### **Introduction**

There is a growing body of research and commentary on the current global crisis and its social and political consequences. The majority of these studies take ‘the crisis’ to be a *financial* crisis that has been unfolding since 2007,<sup>1</sup> sometimes reading and analysing it as a crisis of capitalism as we know it. The outcome of these analyses is diverse and rich. Yet, they share the assumption that the financial crisis is the context that guides their research in terms of the questions that scholars ask and in terms of how they assess current political activism. In a subtle way, then, the financial crisis has come to serve as a key frame through which current socio-political developments and happenings are explored; socio-political phenomena, such as recent protests like Occupy, are analysed and, not least, evaluated with regard to their relationship to the financial crisis (and its consequences), or as a reaction against or a failure to react to it.

The starting point of this book is that when it comes to contemporary protests and the search for alternatives to existing political practices in Europe, the frame of the financial crisis predetermines analyses in an overly circumscribed way. It ‘tames’ both critical efforts to fully understand what is happening in the streets and squares worldwide, and the search for original ideas within these protests and collective activities that might form the basis for social transformation. A good example of this is the study of the impact of the financial crisis on British politics by Johal et al. (2012). In their study the authors observe that what they perceive as ‘the most profound financial and regulatory crisis in

the United Kingdom since before the First World War' did not have a major impact on the underlying structures that led to the crisis and suggest that there won't be any substantial change 'until some means is found of linking programmatic action with civil society discontent' (ibid. p. 69).

In this book, we put forward an alternative conceptual and analytical frame for the critical exploration and understanding of the developments that are unfolding in Europe. Grounded in observations made within the context of a broader project on the future of Europe, and specifically building on the findings of seven empirical studies of recent protests and manifestations of collective activism across Europe that were conducted within our 'Subterranean Politics' project, we propose a shift in scholarly perspective, that is, in how we see and understand what is currently unfolding in Europe. To be clear, this is not a study of what is going wrong in Europe or how we should think about 'Europe' per se, rather about how the contemporary crisis is analytically treated and 'perceived' in Europe. There are two aspects to this alternative perspective.

First, we argue that the current protests and manifestations of collective activism that we see across Europe can be analysed as 'subterranean politics'. In this introductory chapter, we summarise the overall findings of our seven case studies and present five important features of subterranean politics: the fact that current protests strike a chord and have specific 'resonance' among the public, the relevance of *2.0 culture*, the fact that current public displays of subterranean politics are about democracy but not as usual, the observation that Europe is 'invisible' and, finally, the fact that protests and other manifestations of collective activism are to be seen, first and foremost, as being concerned about the state of politics and democracy in Europe, rather than simply and solely about austerity.

Second, we suggest that analysts and political decision makers need to understand that there is a crisis currently unfolding in Europe that is overshadowed by (the dominant and naturalised focus on and concern with) the financial crisis. This is the crisis of the legitimacy of political orders and practices across Europe. It is evident in the recent protests and manifestations of collective activism, such as Occupy and the 15-M, but also in the various *Wutbürger* protests in Germany. It is this 'other' crisis that not only requires critical attention but that needs to be taken as the point of departure for social and political scientific analyses, as well as for the development of policies in the face of the current situation in Europe.

In what follows, we start by outlining the research project on which this book was based. We then describe the five features of subterranean politics in Europe that emerged from our research. Before concluding we summarise the main thrust of each of the case studies.

## **In search of Europe's future: Project background and approach**

The arguments presented in this chapter arise out of the initial phase of a broader research project, based at the London School of Economics. Its critical interest is the future of Europe. At the heart of this initial phase were seven distinct, commissioned empirical studies that were conducted by European research teams between autumn 2011 and spring 2012. The chapter draws on empirical data from each of these studies.

In the face of the danger of a breaking apart of the European Union (EU), the project set out to investigate whether and which constructive ideas about the future of Europe as a political project are articulated 'on the ground'. Is there a trans-European movement (in formation) to rescue the (idea of) Europe? Which role does this idea of Europe actually play among those engaged in what might be termed politics from below? The original aim was to identify and analyse existing pro-European initiatives. What became clear from an initial exercise was that there are/were indeed a proliferation of conferences and workshops, appeals and petitions, articles and blogs proposing reform of the EU and a renewal of political Europeanism, but that these initiatives largely stem from what might be called mainstream politics – a trans-European elite that includes politicians and former politicians, think tanks and intellectuals as well as established NGOs and trade unions (see the listings of initiatives at [www.subterraneanpolitics.eu](http://www.subterraneanpolitics.eu)). However, these multiple initiatives seemed to bear little relation to what might be described as 'politics from below' or, in other words, Europe 'on the ground'. Importantly, the exercise did not seem to capture a significant development unfolding across Europe.

Once we left this narrow question and adopted a wider vantage point, it became clear that what seemed to be actually happening was a 'bubbling up' of various kinds of socio-political phenomena, social mobilisations and collective activities, ranging from the 15-M in Spain, Occupy LSX (London Stock Exchange) in London, the Pirate parties across Europe to the German *Wutbuenger*. This initial observation led us to conclude that it was valuable to take these 'bubbling up' politics as the focus of research in the search for the future of Europe, rather than



adopting an approach of focusing solely and narrowly on pro-European initiatives. This, however, seemed to require a novel concept because none of the concepts that are usually employed in studies with similar aims – such as ‘social movement’, ‘(advocacy) networks’ and ‘civil society’, or even the more critical terms like counter-publics or resistance movements – would allow analysts to capture the diversity of politics that are currently ‘bubbling up’. Or rather, most of these terms carry a conceptual history and genealogy that prescribes the kind of research that is undertaken and the choice of research tools employed. Our focus has less to do with the theory of social action and more to do with understanding the current crisis in Europe. Hence we invented the new term ‘subterranean politics’ which could be substantiated as a consequence of the research rather than as a starting point.

It is the above reasoning and stream of initial observations that account for the somewhat unusual experimental and explorative research design of the initial phase of the broader project on the future of Europe in general, and the commissioned case studies that constitute the core of this initial phase in particular. The concept of ‘subterranean politics’ was used as a relatively open frame to guide the empirical studies, and, at the same time, constituted the blank field to be filled with meanings in the self-reflective research process. That is, our ideas about subterranean politics fed into, and also grew out of, our research, positioning the concept of ‘subterranean politics’ in a dynamic relationship with the research about it. Interestingly, the only other application of the term that we have been able to identify is very similar to our approach. Simon Tormey, building on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, suggests that the term ‘rhizomatic’ can be used to describe

‘subterranean’ underground initiatives of this kind. The rhizome makes us to distinguish between the liminal and the subliminal, between what ‘expert’ commentary sees above, and what lurks beneath the surface. Even when ‘nothing seems to be happening’ rhizome-networks can be growing, developing, readying themselves for the next opportunity to push through the surface and emerge in unpredictable ways.

(Tormey 2012: 66)

To start the exploration of ‘subterranean politics’ in Europe in this initial phase of the broader project, seven context-specific studies were commissioned. Four of them focused on national political cultures: Germany, Hungary, Italy and Spain. One analysed London as a global

city and two looked at the trans-European context – one focusing on grassroots networks, the other on both alternative European initiatives and trans-European anti-austerity movements. Given the experimental nature of the research project with its explorative conceptual guiding frame of ‘subterranean politics’, the aim of these studies was not to capture a representative picture of protests across Europe but to explore ‘subterranean politics’ and to allow the concept to be filled with meaning through their respective research. The highly explorative and experimental nature of the project demanded that the empirical work had to be done by local research teams who were sufficiently familiar with the local socio-political context in order to be able to determine what were to be considered as public displays of subterranean politics in their specific contexts to begin with. Eventually, each research team engaged with and can be said to have filled in the concept of ‘subterranean politics’ differently. Likewise, each of them applied those social science research methods which they individually considered appropriate in their respective context. These included media content analysis, Protest Event Analysis (PEA), participant observation, surveys, focus group discussions and extensive ethnographic-style interviews with individual subterranean actors across Europe.

The result of this initial phase of the research project on the future of Europe was a set of empirical studies that each present context-specific arguments triggered by the experimental conceptual guiding frame of ‘subterranean politics’ and that, taken together and cross-examined, enabled us to develop broader arguments that contribute in an original way to the understanding of recent developments in and the critical search for where the future of Europe lies. These broader arguments are presented in this chapter. In addition to the observations developed in the project overall and the cross-examination of the data and findings gathered in the individual commissioned studies, it draws on existing data sets such as the survey data from protest demonstrations in seven European countries that the European Collaborative Research Projects (ECRP)-funded Protest Survey Project has been collecting (Protest Survey 2010) and European public opinion and demographics surveys including Eurobarometer (Eurobarometer 2011) and Eurostat (Eurostat 2011).

### **Five features of subterranean politics in Europe**

What emerged from the research were five features of current protests and other manifestations of collective activism across Europe that

seemed to be significant in terms of understanding the character of the European crisis. First, we noted that even though these political initiatives may not be new, what is new is the way that they strike a chord and have a particular kind of 'resonance' in the wider publics. This observation motivated us to conceptualise them as current displays of subterranean politics that have been 'bubbling up' to the surface. Second, we stressed the relevance of *2.0 culture*. We suggested that *2.0 culture* is at the heart of the changing nature of political activism. Third, we demonstrated that current public displays of subterranean politics are about democracy but not as usual; the prefigurative character of public displays of subterranean politics all have to do with emerging conceptions of democracy. Fourth, we observed that Europe is largely 'invisible' in current displays of subterranean politics. We suggested that it is oscillating between three poles: a widespread European cultural identity, especially among young people; an opposition to what is perceived as a neo-liberal bureaucracy; and a sense that the EU is abstract and remote. Finally, we argued that current protests and other manifestations of collective activism across Europe are to be seen, first and foremost, as being concerned about the state of politics and democracy in Europe, rather than simply and solely about austerity. In the following we will reflect on each of them in turn.

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

On 15 May 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, Greece and later cities across Europe, as well as in the United States, Israel and Chile. On 11 February 2012, Europe saw mass protests against the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), an international legal agreement seen to threaten Internet freedom and communication privacy. Numerous small and larger protests against austerity in the UK and Greece took place during 2011. In Greece, these protests appeared to be dominated by traditional social actors – the trade unions and far-left parties – but, as anecdotal evidence suggests, they also involved many people who called themselves *Aganaktismenoi* (indignant citizens). In the UK, new groups sprang up that distanced themselves from organised civil society groups such as trade 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 ([www.ukuncut.org.uk](http://www.ukuncut.org.uk)), 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 demonstrated against a large-scale train station development project that had been in planning since the 1990s and which was officially launched in 2009. Italy, too, has seen protests against infrastructure projects during recent years, such as opposition to 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 to 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 campaigns for freedom of the press and had almost 100,000 Facebook supporters at that time, and the Two-Tailed Dog Party, a mock political party that made fun of mainstream politics and had some 80,000 Facebook followers (see Chapter 6, p. 151). And during the same period national incarnations of the Pirate Party – 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 – conquered parliamentary seats across Europe (Appelrath et al. 2012).

Social mobilisations and manifestations of collective activism of the kind we are witnessing in Europe at the moment are, of course, not new. The entire past decade has been one of large-scale social mobilisation worldwide (see the Global Civil Society Knowledgebase and Kaldor et al. 2012). The anti-Iraq war protests in 2003 brought some 11 million people to the streets (see Kaldor et al. 2003: 26–27). The social forums, the main focal point of the alter-globalisation movement, have spread worldwide, and particularly in Europe, in the years since 2001, regularly mobilising 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), as did a blossoming of all sorts of online activism and forms of consumer activism (Bob et al. 2008). Viewed in relation to these mobilisations, the current manifestations of collective activism across Europe are smaller, less widespread and, arguably, less interconnected. Yet, there is something peculiar about them: they seem to have a specific ‘resonance’. Unlike previous mobilisations and protests, contemporary protests and manifestations of collective activism are somehow striking a chord in the mainstream in a way that could not be said of earlier protests, causing

ripples of discomfort in established institutions, challenging dominant ways of thinking and unsettling normal assumptions about how politics is done.

A good example of this 'striking a chord' is the way that the protests of citizens in Stuttgart triggered a new German term, *Wutbürger* ('angry citizen'), a word which was eventually elected by the *Gesellschaft fuer die deutsche Sprache* (2010) 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. *Indignados* is a similar word, which was employed by the Spanish press and not the activists themselves; it is a noun ('the Indignants', or 'the Outraged') rather than a verb or an adjective to describe the Spanish 15-M, identifying it with the bestseller *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 26 June 2011, 64% of those polled backed the movement and 74% considered that it was a peaceful movement aimed at revitalising democracy (*El Pais* 2011), while a poll published by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (2011) at around the same time revealed that over half of those who voted for the *Partido Popular* (the ruling conservatives) expressed support for the movement.

Also exemplary is Occupy LSX, 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 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. Most significantly, it generated soul-searching within an institution that could hardly be more established: the Church of England – and led to the resignation of two high-ranking Church of England officials and a chaplain (BBC 2011a). 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 et al. 2012). What is more, academic analyses and commentaries of Occupy LSX were already being undertaken while the protest was still under way (see for example Couldry and Fenton 2011; [www.possible-futures.org](http://www.possible-futures.org)).

In Italy, the 2011 referendum concerning future development of nuclear power, the privatisation of water and the possibility of

government ministers not appearing in court when accused of crimes marks another example of what we mean by increased ‘resonance’. Italian civic groups not only collected sufficient signatures to hold a referendum according to the Italian constitution, they also managed to mobilise sufficient voters to turn out for the referendum (more than 50%) and then win (BBC 2011b; see further Box 3.2 in Chapter 3). The success of the 5 Star Movement, which won up to 10% of the vote in the municipal elections, is another example of the ‘bubbling up’ of subterranean politics in Italy (Bartlett et al. 2013). The 5 Star Movement is a populist, anti-corruption, eurosceptic, ecologist party started by the comedian and blogger Beppe Grillo, attracting voters who abstained from voting previously and candidates who had never before considered political careers (ibid.). And across Europe, national incarnations of the Pirate parties began to win parliamentary seats. In the case of the success of the Pirates in Saarland, not only did they ‘suddenly’ conquer the *Landtag* with an astonishing 7.4% of votes – overriding established parties like the liberals (Free Democratic Party), who lost 8.0% of their votes – but also 20% of their vote was based on previous ‘non-voters’ (Appelrath et al. 2012).

## 2.0 Culture

The second significant aspect about subterranean politics as it is currently ‘bubbling up’ across Europe relates to the role of the Internet or, more precisely, to the ethos of web 2.0, or, as we call it, *2.0 culture*. The growing everyday relevance of the Internet, in general, and of social networking applications such as Facebook and micro-blogging sites such as Twitter, in particular, is undisputed. There is also a growing body of studies that demonstrates the significance of these applications specifically in and for contemporary *political activism*, that is, their relevance for social mobilisation and collective action (e.g. Khondker 2011; Milan 2013). Whether it is useful to speak of Facebook and Twitter revolutions, as Clay Shirky (2010) does, or 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 Moore and Selchow 2012). Nevertheless it is clear that these tools are fruitfully used to mobilise and organise. In the current public displays of subterranean politics in Europe their significance is readily apparent. The 15-M in Spain, for instance, was started by a bloggers’ network (see further Chapter 5). Similarly, Facebook was instrumental in the mobilisation that led to the occupation of the London Stock Exchange (LSX), while UK Uncut initially developed through Twitter (Chapter 7).

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, more precisely, the *ethos of web 2.0*, as a 'culture' that evolves from, plays back into and is manifest in contemporary subterranean politics and its actors. David Gauntlett (2011) neatly 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' (also in Moore and Selchow 2012: 33). In this sense, web 2.0 is not simply about specific technological innovations or applications, but about an ethos of *how to do* things. It is about 'the disappearance of the signature', as Pierre Levy puts it (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 is a salient feature of subterranean politics in Europe. So, in addition to preoccupations with Internet-related issues such as Internet freedom and open content that ranks high on the agendas of actors such as the Pirate parties, the occupiers and, of course, the hacktivist group *Anonymous* that Nassauer and Anheier (Chapter 4, p. 101) identify as a distinct example of subterranean politics in Germany, the impact of the Internet, in the sense of web 2.0 ethos, is evident in broader organisational forms. In their analysis of subterranean politics in Germany, Nassauer and Anheier (*ibid.* p. 99) utilise the concept of 'swarm intelligence', with which they refer

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-organised, 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.

A prime example of this kind of 'swarm intelligence' highlighted by Nassauer and Anheier was the GuttenPlag platform, an initiative through which activists revealed a total of 10,421 plagiarised 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).

While Nassauer and Anheier use the metaphor of 'swarm intelligence' in order 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 occupations of various squares are prime examples of ‘swarm intelligence’ in the sense of collective action that builds on horizontality, replaceability and leaderlessness. Of course, this does not mean that these principles were fully realised in practice and there was much (internal) debate about shortcomings in this respect (see for example, Chapter 7, p. 187). Yet the idea of horizontality constitutes an important ideal for many ‘subterranean politics’ actors, as they strive to achieve a culture of inclusion that places limits on the ability of individuals to use authority to dominate others or determine the group’s priorities. The fact that these activities are shaped by what we call a *2.0 culture* of collectivity, openness and inclusion – a culture which then plays back into the broader mainstream culture with the potential of transforming 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 ‘subterranean politics’ actors see their own political role and involvements. It seems to be about contributing to change without necessarily leaving a distinct and identifiable personal mark. Current displays of ‘subterranean politics’ are shaped by actors who come in and out of activism, whether online or in a square, taking seriously their contribution (sometimes based on their professional experience as designers, web developers, marketing specialists, as in the case of Occupy LSX) 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’.

### **Democracy: But not as usual**

Related to the point about *2.0 culture* is the significance of the subjective experience of participating in politics in a ‘new’ way. Underlying this is the idea of reconstructing democracy out of one’s own actions. The campaign for the referendum in Italy, mentioned above, is a good example of this *practising* of democracy. Mobilising for the referendum (and, subsequently, winning it) showed how change can be achieved by citizens. As della Porta, Mosca and Parks (Chapter 3, p. 74) explain, it was seen as a form of direct democracy, the ‘rebirth of civil passion’. In a different context, Geoffrey Pleyers (2010) uses the concept of ‘prefigurative action’ to describe this kind of action that attempts to practice the kind



of democracy that the participants imagine should be practised in their societies. Arguably, it is this idea of 'prefigurative action' that was one of the primary attractions of Occupy LSX, which experimented with forms of participation like daily assemblies and consensus decision making and insisted on horizontality and leaderlessness (Chapter 7, p. 176). As Bonet i Martí (Chapter 5, p. 135) suggests, this experimentation was pioneered by the Spanish 15-M and taken up and displayed all over Europe, as well as in other parts of the world.

... the crucial innovation the 15-M repertoire was not the encampments, nor the fact of congregating at a city square, nor the organisation of meetings, but the combination of these three components: the gathering at a city square indefinitely to transform it into a permanent space for dialogue and enunciation. [...] The occupied squares became a 24-hour citizen agora where the exchange of ideas and their expression was possible. [...] non-violence contributed throughout to popularise its demands and increase the wave of sympathisers towards it.

(ibid. p. 132)

The Spanish practice was replicated in other places, and new techniques for dialogue were developed, including the 'human microphone' technique, which allows people to communicate with a large group without the use of amplification equipment. More broadly, a repertoire of hand signs – adapted from sign language – came into use that allows an audience to indicate to a speaker 'approval' or 'disapproval' as well as to provide other feedback – such as 'out of frame', 'we understood your point – you are repeating yourself', 'what you are talking about belongs to a separate working group' – without interrupting the speaker. The aim of these novel techniques is to encourage debate and discussion without major interruption, while maintaining the possibility of intervening and preventing individual speakers from dominating the exchange (see Deel et al. 2012: 16).

It is the physicality of these practices, the sense of actually *practising* politics that is noteworthy as a significant aspect of the current display of 'subterranean politics' in Europe. It is also implied in the importance of occupying *physical* spaces. On the one hand, the occupation of physical spaces such as the square in front of St Paul's Cathedral in London can be seen as an act of reclaiming spaces 'in the name of the public' in environments that have come to be shaped by a wave of privatisation, as is the case in London,<sup>2</sup> as well as a key strategy in confronting government restrictions on public demonstrations, as

Jensen (Chapter 6) points out for Hungary. For the current manifestations of ‘subterranean politics’ in Europe, physical space also has an explicit importance both in terms of message and autonomy. As an occupier in London 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’ (Chapter 7, p. 186). In this sense, the occupation of squares or temporary sit-ins are seen and practised as a way of constructing temporary autonomous zones where prefigurative politics can be practised.

In general, the idea of changing society by changing one’s own practices of interaction must be acknowledged as a key aspect of ‘subterranean politics’ in Europe. ‘Process is what this form of politics is all about’, explained an ‘occupier’ in London (Deel et al. 2012: 16), and the Assemblea San Giovanni in Italy encouraged 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 practising it in the first person in the square and sharing this practice with thousands of others who feel the same need’ (Chapter 3, p. 80). This is why current displays of subterranean politics in Europe are about democracy – but not democracy as usual. As an *Indignada* – interviewed in Paris – made clear: ‘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’ (Chapter 8, p. 206). Linked to this is a distancing from traditional social actors, such as trade unions, as well as a distancing from traditional forms of protest. Interviews in London suggest that the forms of ‘attention-generating tactics’, like sit-ins in high street shops or cyber attacks as well as the long-term appropriation of public spaces, are explicitly seen and practised as alternatives to ‘classic’ approaches, such as large-scale demonstrations like that against the Iraq war in 2003 and that have come to be perceived as inadequate (see Chapter 7, p. 185).

It is important to acknowledge the significance both of *2.0 culture* and the emphasis on democracy but not as usual, because this avoids misleading assumptions about the nature of the current public displays of subterranean politics. It is commonplace, especially but not only within policy circles, to dismiss current displays of subterranean politics as not being constructive and/or able to trigger social transformation. This critique usually runs along the lines that activists in the squares across Europe do not develop and articulate clear demands; David Cameron’s critique of Occupy LSX is a prime example of this attitude (BBC 2011c), which can also be found in the various critiques addressing the Pirate parties or the 5 Star Movement in Italy (Bartlett et al. 2013: 27). In fact,