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## The Political Response of Spanish Youth to the Socio-Economic Crisis: Some Implications for Citizenship Education

This article discusses the effects of the current socio-economic crisis on Spanish youth and their political response to it. It does so in three consecutive stages. In the first, it analyses the repercussion of the crisis on young people using information from certain social indicators (employment, mobility and education). It then outlines the subjective perception of the crisis, i.e., how they are experiencing it and what their hopes are regarding the economy and politics. The third part focuses on how young citizens have responded to the situation politically. The article finishes by considering what implications may be drawn from that response in terms of citizenship education.

### Keywords:

youth, economic crisis, political participation, social movements, citizenship education, Spain

### 1 Introduction

In 1985 the United Nations held its first International Youth Day, with the slogan of "Participation, Development and Peace". Spain was having a turbulent year marked by strikes, protests and rising unemployment. Nevertheless, they were times of hope. The Spanish Constitution, ratified in 1978 after nearly forty years of dictatorship under General Franco, had established the democratic system, and the nation excitedly awaited joining the European Community on January 1, 1986. Nearly three decades later, on August 12, 2013, once again on International Youth Day, a radio station aired the following profile of a 28-year-old Spanish woman, born back in that year of 1985, and whom we shall call Laura:

"Let's look at this girl. Let's say she's 28 years old. I just made her up, so we can make her any age we want. As you can see, she's in her room. She still lives with her parents, nothing she can do about it since she doesn't have a job. She did some internships in a couple of companies, mostly for free. It was always the same story: they said she did good work, and they were very pleased with her but they never hired her afterwards because, surely she could understand, the economy was so bad and all...

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The young woman tinkers with her resume almost every day. There's no space left for any more master's degrees and courses she's taken: Corporate marketing, Computer graphic design, Chinese. Her boyfriend couldn't take it anymore and left the country. He now works abroad at a money transfer and export office. She blames herself for not going with him and suspects she started to lose him that day...

Her little sister is at college, her father has been unemployed for the last four years and her mother has barely survived the latest layoffs at her job. That's all the family gets by on. She helps out at home as much as she can, but she can't shake the nasty feeling of guilt...

Our young woman doesn't believe in politicians. They all seem the same to her. Nor has she ever considered joining a union, she doesn't get the monarchy or all that stuff with the Pope, cardinals, banks and international markets. She goes to a few protest marches and posts comments on Facebook and Twitter, but deep inside she thinks there is no way the world is going to change..."<sup>1</sup>

Laura represents thousands of young Spanish men and women today. This is perhaps the best-educated generation in our country: they speak foreign languages, have skills with new communication systems unimaginable only ten years ago, and many have college degrees, which was something only a much lower proportion achieved among their parents' generation and ever fewer among their grandparents', especially their grandmothers. And yet, despite that, this is a disillusioned generation, one that no longer identifies with the culture of the political transition to democracy in which their parents came of age (Fernández-Savater 2012).

Laura's political detachment is a focus of interest in recent empirical literature, which has highlighted the links between the economic crises and the erosion of trust in political institutions and representative



democracy in different contexts (e.g., Córdoba and Seligson 2009; Chaistya, Whitefielda 2012; González 2012). At the European Union level, data show that support for democracy has declined over the course of the crisis. Spain is the second most harshly effected country, just after Greece. Between 2007 and 2011 satisfaction with democracy receded in Spain by 32.1 percentage points and trust in national parliaments fell 29.3 points, well above the average of the 26 EU countries studied, in which the decreases were 6.6 and 7.8 points respectively (Armingeon, Guthmann 2014). Recent research by Galais and Blais has also found a significant association between the deterioration of the individual economical situation and the relaxation of the belief in the duty to vote in Spanish citizens under the age of 30 (Galais, Blais 2013).

This article aims to explore this relation in greater depth. It does so in three consecutive phases. In the first section, it analyses the repercussion of the current socio-economic crisis on young Spaniards in aspects such as employment, mobility and education. After that it sketches out how they are experiencing the crisis and their hopes regarding economy and politics. The third section focuses on how young people have politically responded to the situation, especially through the 15-M initiative. Lastly, the article ends by wondering about the implications that can be drawn from the young citizens' response in terms of how to foster citizenship education at schools.

In order to achieve a more comprehensive interpretation, the analysis uses a variety of sources. The first section is based on information and reports from national and international organizations such as the *Spanish Statistical Office* (INE) and the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD). In the second section we have worked with the *Barometer series* (2009-2013) by the Spanish *Sociological Research Centre* (CIS). The third section moves to a different orientation. In this case, statistical data and surveys on subjects related to political participation by the CIS are combined with the 15-M movement's presence on the web and the personal involvement of one of the authors.

## 2 The scope of the crisis among youth

According to European Commission data from March 2013, the rate of youth unemployment in the euro zone reached 24%. However, the situation is very unequal in the different regions. The lowest unemployment rate is found in Germany and Austria, at 7.6%, and the highest in the southern countries: Greece (59.1%), Spain (55.9%), Italy (38.4%) and Portugal (38.3%) (European Commission 2013). In the case of Spain, the unemployment rate has skyrocketed over the last years, according to some sources rising from 37.8% in 2009 (Eurostat 2012) to 53.2% by 2012, in sharp contrast to the overall European Union (EU27) rate of 22.8% that last year (Teichgraber 2013).

This situation affects the younger population segment (16 to 19 yrs old) particularly dramatically. Data from the

Spanish labour force survey from 2013 show the unemployment rate for this age group is up to 74.2%, higher among women (76.5%) than men (72.5%). In the next higher age group (20 to 24 yrs old), the ratio is the opposite: joblessness is higher among men (52.7%) than women (50.9%). This is the age group that has undergone the biggest rise in joblessness over the last six years, with the unemployment rate soaring 254% (from 20.4% in 2008 to 51.9% in 2013).

Table 1: Evolution of the youth unemployment rate from 2008 to 2013 by age group and gender

	Total		Men		Women	
	16 to 19 years old	20 to 24 years old	16 to 19 years old	20 to 24 years old	16 to 19 years old	20 to 24 years old
2008	39.4%	20.4%	35.8%	20.1%	44.5%	20.8%
2009	55.3%	33.4%	54.9%	34.6%	55.9%	32.1%
2010	61.4%	37.0%	60.3%	38.8%	62.9%	35.0%
2011	64.1%	42.6%	64.4%	44.4%	63.7%	40.6%
2012	72.7%	49.1%	72.0%	50.5%	73.5%	47.6%
2013	74.2%	51.9%	72.5%	52.7%	76.5%	50.9%

Source: INE. Labour Force Survey (2008-2013)<sup>2</sup>

No one is being misled about the profound effects this job crisis may cause on a large number of young people as well as on social cohesion. For example, a recent report from the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), which depends on the European Union, warns that one third of the EU youth between the ages of 18 and 24 are at risk of social exclusion (Paolini et al. 2013). Along with these effects, the scarcity of financial resources keeps young people from emancipation and starting their own family, or forces them to emigrate abroad in search of a job and a better life. The following table shows the flow of emigration of Spanish youth aged 20 to 24 years old, the age group that usually corresponds with the end of higher education. As can be seen, the flow is always higher in women, who also attain higher levels of education, representing 54.3% of total university enrolment (MECD 2013). In the six years covered, from 2008 to 2013, the flow of immigration has gone up by 242%, and higher proportionally among women than men.



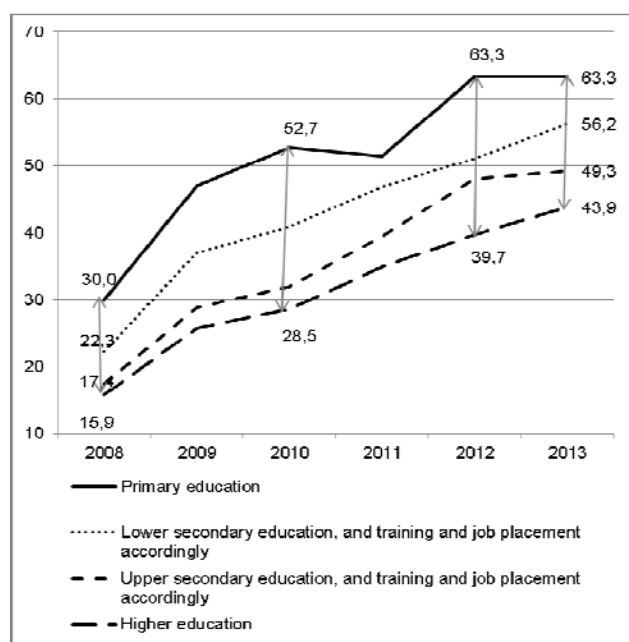
Table 2: Evolution of the flow of emigration abroad of Spanish youth aged 20 to 24 (2008-2013)

	Total	Men	Women
2008	1909	906	1003
2009	1821	858	963
2010	2183	1006	1177
2011	2930	1367	1563
2012	3252	1510	1742
2013	4615	2145	2470
Ratio 2008-13	241.7%	236.8%	246.3%

Source: INE. Migration Studies (2008-2013). Unit: migratory movements<sup>3</sup>

These data must necessarily be juxtaposed with young people's education and training, which is one of the most important variables in relation to economic crises (e.g., Varghese 2009, 2010; Barakat, Holler, Prettnner, Schuster 2010; Hartleya 2010; Shafiq 2010; Ball, Maguire and Goodson 2012). Therefore, the report from the EACEA on the social exclusion of youth in Europe, mentioned above, states that on the average in the EU countries, the likelihood for youth to suffer from "material want" is 7 times greater in those who dropped out at the age of 16 than in those who reached higher education (Paolini et al. 2013, p. 13). The report goes on to note that Spain is among the countries where this rate is lower than the average (ibid.). However, this observation requires a few caveats. According to the data from the Spanish Labour Force Survey, this ratio shows a more complex profile in which the effect of levels of education on job possibilities has become greater over the course of the crisis. As

Figure 1: Evolution of unemployment by level of schooling (young adults from 20 to 24 years old)<sup>4</sup>



Source: Based on data from the Labour Force Survey- INE (2008-2013)

shown in the graph (figure 1) below, the difference in the unemployment rate of young people with a primary school education and those with higher education was 14.1 percentage points in 2008 and rose to 19.4 points in 2013. The situation reached its peaks in 2010, with a difference of 24.2 points, and 2012, with 23.6 points. In primary education the line is fluctuant, while in higher education the growing tendency is permanent and softer.

Given these results, one would expect to see an upturn in the young people's levels of schooling in an attempt to open more doors in these times of crisis. The graph below (figure 2) illustrates what has happened in that regard over the last six years. It shows that the proportional increase in schooling has mostly been concentrated on upper secondary education, i.e., the last two years of high school (grades 11 and 12). Fewer students are willing to stop at a lower secondary certificate (grade 10, the end of compulsory formal education in Spain), but rather aspire to a more thorough upper secondary education, which in Spain comprises the Baccalaureate as well as secondary-level technical/vocation training. As regards higher education, the increase is less pronounced, perhaps due to the hopelessness in young people and the lack of financial resources in this recessionary context to afford an education that, in the case of university studies, involves a sustained financial burden for at least 4 years, and whose return on investment is not always clearly perceived.

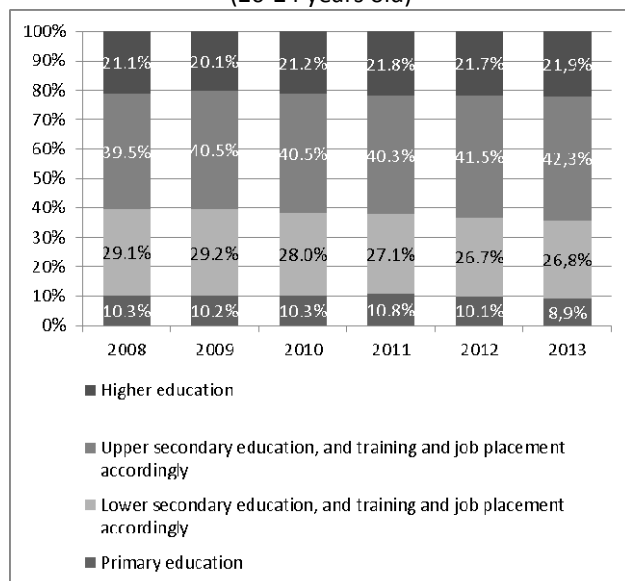
The *Education at a Glance* report from 2013 confirms these data in the context of the OECD. It reports that the percentage of youth who continue studying after completing compulsory education has increased in Spain faster than the OECD average. In 2008, roughly 81% of Spanish youth aged 15 to 19 and 21% aged 20 to 29 were enrolled, but by 2011 these percentages had increased to 86% and 26%, respectively. In comparison, in the OECD nations enrolment among 15-to-19-year-olds went up from 81% to 84% and enrolment among 20-to-29-year-olds went from 25% to 28% over the same period (OCDE 2013).

The trends point to Spanish youth between 15 and 29 years old staying an average of 6.4 years in the school system, which is less than the OECD average of 7.1 years. Spanish youth are also inactive for 1.1 years, or unemployed for 2.5 years, which is more than the OECD average of 2.4 years. This greater difficulty to find a job explains that since 2008 the estimated time that youth from 15 to 29 years old remain in school has increased by almost one year, which, according to the report, "suggests that some Spanish youth see education as a temporary way to avoid unemployment and a potential advantage when they try to return to the job later on" (ibid., p. 1). However, the report warns of the fact that more than half of the young people in that age group who do not study and who hold a part time job would like to find a full-time job instead, which is interpreted "as an indication that not all young people feel



compelled to return to school to increase their chances of entering the job market at some future stage" (ibid., p. 6).

Figure 2: Evolution of levels of education among youth (20-24 years old)



Source: INE. Labour force survey (2008-2013). Schooling completed

The difficulty increases when nothing more can be expected from the education system, which is giving rise to the phenomenon of the NEET generation ("Not in Education, Employment or Training"). In Spain, more than 20% of the youth aged 15-29 -in contrast to the OECD average of 16%-found themselves in this situation in 2011. It is significant that the NEETs in this age group with higher education increased in Spain by approximately 69% between 2008 and 2011. This increase is much greater than the OECD average for the same period, which was 24%, and that of the European Union (EU21), which rose by 29% (ibid., p. 10).

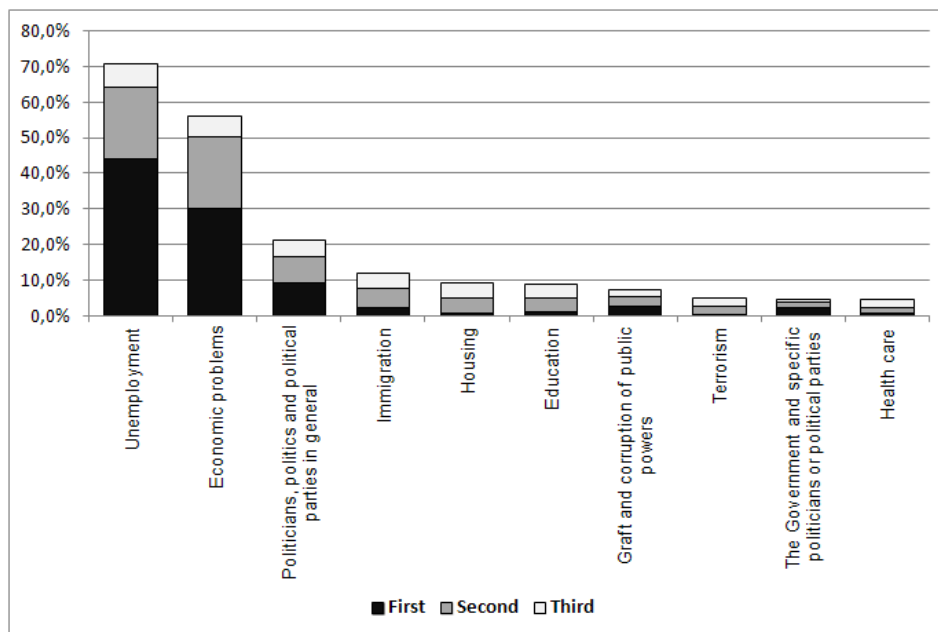
### 3 How young people perceive the situation

What do young people think of this crisis situation? To answer this question we turn to an analysis of the Barometer published by the *Spanish Sociological Research Centre* (CIS) from January 2009 to June 2013 (figure 3).<sup>5</sup> As expected, unemployment and financial hardships from the last five years have consolidated their ranking as the main problems our country has for young people, identified as such by 70.6% and 55.9%

respectively. With them in the top ten are a set of difficulties regarding basic social rights (housing, education and health care) and questions specifically about immigration and terrorism. It is significant, however, that the third largest problem in the nation, as noted by 21.1% of the young people, involves politicians, politics and political parties in general, and that the top ten list also includes corruption and fraud in the public powers (7.3%) and the current administration and specific politicians or political parties (4.5%).

The economy and politics are both aspects that make the future uncertain for young people. As shown in the table, also made from the 2009-2013 CIS Barometer data (table 3), the proportion of young adults who think the two aspects will get worse in the near future is greater than those who think it will get better. This does not keep young people from being slightly more optimistic than the population at large as regards the economy. In contrast, regarding politics their opinion is more polarized, with larger proportions of youth than the general population who think it will worsen or improve. In both populations, and for both aspects, though mostly in politics, the greatest percentage is for those who make no claim as to whether the near future will get better or worse.

Figure 3: Main problems facing the country (youth 18-25 yrs old)



Source: CIS. Barometer (January 2009 – June 2013)

If we consider what has happened over these last five years (figure 4), pessimism has increased in terms of politics and the economy, although with a more fluctuating profile in the case of the economy. It should be noted that in January 2012, following the last general elections, optimism among youth increased regarding politics but not regarding the economy, which entered a phase of plummeting pessimism. Then, in the first half of



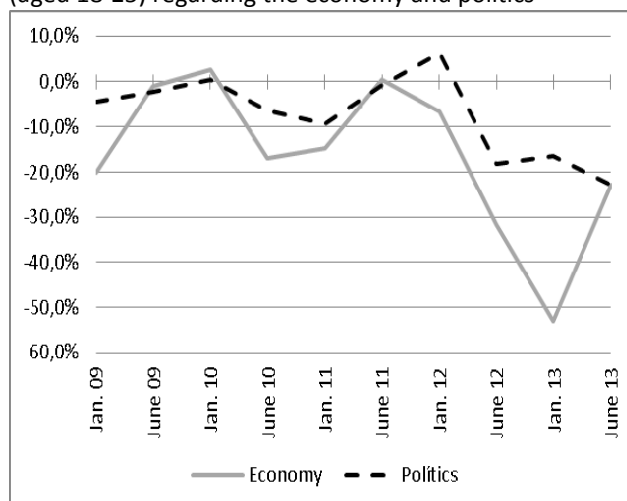
2013, the trend reverses. Hope arises regarding the economy but politics drops to a record low.

Table 3 Young people's outlook on the economy and politics in the near future

		Better	Same	Worse
THE ECONOMY	Total	18.0%	36.0%	35.7%
	Youth (18-25)	19.3%	38.5%	34.7%
POLITICS	Total	13.5%	47.2%	19.0%
	Youth (18-25)	15.5%	49.1%	22.8%

Source: CIS. Barometer (January 2009 – June 2013)

Figure 4: Evolution of expectations of young people (aged 18-25) regarding the economy and politics<sup>6</sup>



Source: CIS. Barometer (January 2009 – June 2013)

#### 4 Young people's political response to the crisis

The perception of the socio-economic context is reflected in the political attitudes of youth. Back in the 1920s, the then President of the Government in Spain, Álvaro de Figueroa, Count of Romanones, bemoaned the scarce political interest held by young people when he said:

“The ball has produced important changes to modern life, and in every corner of the world, politics being no exception, contributing to youth's distancing itself from it. In the past, students abandoned the university to join the ranks of Carlists or to fight for freedom in barricades; today more than a few drop out of college to become professional ball players; this fact is regrettable, since the absence of youth in politics produces heinous effects; their vim and verve have no substitute” (Figueroa 1999, p. 12).<sup>7</sup>

One hundred years later, plagued on the national and international scene with historical events that have called democratic systems into question, it cannot be said that Spanish youth are politically apathetic. At least

some of the young people have become active subjects politically, even if politics is understood in a very different way. Rather than indifference, what we see today is overall distrust of institutional politics. Compared to 15.5% and 16% of the youth who state their indifference to or boredom with politics, are 40.6% who say they feel distrust and 11.2% irritation. On the other hand, only 11.8% state being interested and 3.1% enthusiastic.

Table 4: Feelings in young people regarding politics (15-29 yrs old)

Enthusiasm	3.1%
Indifference	15.5%
Boredom	16.0%
Distrust	40.6%
Irritation	11.2%
Interest	11.8%
Other feeling	0.3%
Don't know	0.7%
No answer	0.8%

Source: CIS. Study on political culture of young people (CIS 2011b)

This distrust and disdain is directed primarily at the institutional forms of representative politics. To prove it, it suffices to look at what has happened in the last general elections. The table below (table 5) uses data from post-electoral polls taken from the CIS Barometer to show the turnout of young voters with respect to the total voting population in the last two general elections held in Spain.

Table 5: Turnout in the general elections of 2008 and 2011

	2008 Elections: youth (18-24)	2008 Elections: Total	2011 Elections: youth (18-24)	2011 Elections: Total
Voted	76.5%	86.9%	74.6%	83.7%
Preferred not to vote	17.0%	9.1%	19.9%	11.7%
Couldn't vote	5.8%	3.5%	5.1%	4.3%
No answer	0.7%	0.4%	0.5%	0.4%

Source: CIS. Post-electoral studies on the general elections of 2008 and 2011(CIS 2008 and 2011c)

As can be seen, young people 18 to 24 years old are the ones who have the highest abstention rate. In the last two elections, the ones who chose not to vote exceeded 17%, and those who could not, 5%. On the other hand, the table shows an overall decline in voting in 2011 with respect to 2008, down 3.2 percentage points, which however was less pronounced (1.9 points) among the younger voters.

The reasons why young people abstained from voting in the 2011 general elections were not very different from the ones for the general public. In both cases, the

most frequent motive was distrust of political parties and politicians, followed by the lack of suitable alternatives, the pointlessness of voting and the chance to show discontent by abstention. For the electorate, consisting of all eligible persons 18 and older, an important motive was their weariness with politics and elections. Although this reason was not as strong among the youngest voters, it was still mentioned by more than 13% of them. In contrast, a stronger reason among young people in the electorate was that they felt disoriented and did not know who to vote for.

Table 6: Reasons for abstention in the 2011 general elections

	Youth aged 18 to 24	Total
No trust in any party or politician	45.7%	42.6%
No suitable alternative	38.0%	37.3%
Whether you vote or not, it won't make any difference anyway	32.7%	28.9%
To show their discontent	21.0%	25.5%
Disoriented, did not know who to vote for	14.8%	6.5%
Tired of politics and elections	13.8%	26.7%
Other reasons	11.4%	12.0%
Don't know / No answer	22.7%	20.5%

Source: CIS. Post-electoral study on the general elections of 2011(CIS 2011c)

More than a fifth (21.8%) of the young people between 18 and 24 years old in the post-election poll defined themselves politically as "liberal", the most chosen position, and in contrast to other options featured in the survey, such as socialist, nationalist or even conservative, it is hard to peg to any political formation in particular. This is in line with 57.5% of the young people stating that they do not feel any affinity to any party or coalition. Three fourths (76.2%) feel that politicians do not care much about what people their age think, and even more (81.2%) think that people in power are only looking out for their own interests (CIS 2011c).

The results of these surveys reveal the despair that built up in the time between elections, and was vented a few months prior to the 2011 elections in the social uprising represented in the 15-M movement, which got its name because it broke out in a large protest that year on May 15. Many saw this as a response to the inability of institutional politics to deal with the problems the country had been facing since 2009. The movement, which was inspired in part by Stéphane Hessel's book *Time for Outrage!* (2011) and *React* by José Luis Sampedro and others (2011), with a foreword by Hessel, brought together many different citizen groups and platforms. It sprang up out of a multitudinous protest called on the 15 of May, which ended in occupation of the *Puerta del Sol*, the main square in Spain's capital Madrid, where the headquarters of the regional presidency are located.<sup>8</sup> The protests continued into a large-scale camp-out. The protesters were turned out the next day, but the effect on them was not what was intended: it made many of them set up tents, not only in

the square in Madrid but also in squares in many other cities in Spain, the largest camp being the one in the *Plaza de Cataluña* in Barcelona. The campers in the *Puerta del Sol* and the *Plaza de Cataluña*, and others, decided to stay in the plazas at least until the municipal elections on May 22, which was against the electoral regulations. Support for the movement was not confined to Spain: throughout the world, Spanish residents abroad and local sympathizers alike marched together in cities such as London, Amsterdam, Istanbul, New York, Paris, Brussels, Bogota and Bologna (Hughes 2011, p. 408).

The 15-M movement was conceived and organized on line. Blogs and websites of collectives, Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, YouTube, etc. were essential for spreading the message and mobilizing the citizens.<sup>9</sup> Their *Democracia real ya (Real democracy now)* website gave the movement an ability to reach out to a wider audience while providing an identity to different groups towards the inside.<sup>10</sup> The virtual presence of the movement was combined with the occupation of public squares, where the activists held daily assemblies to deal with the problems of the country. They organized into commissions and interest groups to diversify the subject matters. From the start, the movement took on a horizontal assembly-type profile that shied away from leader personalities and opposed the possibility of certain leaders becoming self-appointed official spokespersons.

The chance to boost the effectiveness of the movement occurred a week later, on May 22, with the municipal and regional elections in several Spanish autonomous communities. In the elections for the Assembly of the *Comunidad de Madrid*, where the movement began, voter turnout among young people and the population at large was only slightly lower than in the previous elections in 2007, and in fact young people abstained less than they had originally claimed.

Table 7: Participation in the regional elections of 2007 and 2011 in the Comunidad de Madrid

	2007 elections: (18-24 yrs)	2007 elections: Total	2011 elections: youth (18-24)	2011 elections: Total
Voted	70.4%	81.6%	69.6%	80.7%
Preferred not to vote	23.5%	12.2%	22.8%	15.6%
Could not vote	6.1%	6.2%	7.6%	3.3%

Source: CIS. Post electoral studies on regional and local 2007 and 2011 elections in the Comunidad de Madrid (CIS 2007 and 2011a)

A large percentage of young people (41.8%) answered that the 15-M movement had influenced them a lot when it came to casting their vote in the 2011 elections (CIS 2011a, question 18). However, this influence was not reflected as much in their abstention as it was in the composition of the Assembly. Whereas in the 2007 election the two main national parties -the People's



Party (PP) and the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)- together garnered 90.8% of the seats, in the 2011 elections this proportion was reduced to 83.7%, which meant a decline of 7.1%. Something similar happened in the general elections held a few months later: in 2008, 323 of the 350 seats in Congress went to the two main parties; this dropped by 8.4%, to 296, in the 2011 elections.<sup>11</sup> In both cases, the loser was the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party. Although many factors contributed to these results, especially the fatigue of the socialist party in power, the 15-M movement took it as a triumph of their stance against bipartisan politics (Cioni 2011; Anduiza, Martín, Mateos 2014).<sup>12</sup>

The movement has been kept very much alive throughout its existence, especially in the large urban areas. Its members have continued their work in neighbourhoods and villages, from their street assemblies or at social centres. As of the autumn of 2012, a sector of the movement became more radicalized, with protest demonstrations supported by the "*Plataforma ¡En Pie!*", (*Stand Up Platform*) whose goal was to "surround/siege the congress building" to achieve a dissolution of parliament and the installation of a transition process toward a different political and economic model. The movement is now taking a greater stance on questioning the neoliberal capitalist system, generating proposals they call *constituent power*, and reclaiming what is "common".<sup>13</sup>

## 5 Conclusion: some implications for citizenship education

The protest demonstration that arose in Spain on the 15th of May of 2011 may be considered as the social response, especially among young people, to what many perceive as a sombre period in our young democracy. Spain has one of the highest unemployment rates in the European Union, which has a dramatic effect on young adults. Between 2008 and 2013, unemployment among 20- to 24-year-olds went up by 254%. In the same period, the flow of emigration abroad for those same young adults rose by 242%. One effect of the economic recession has been the increased importance of schooling for improving one's chances of finding a job. While in 2008 the difference in unemployment between young adults who had not finished high school and those with a college education was 14.1 percentage points, by 2013 that difference had risen to 19.4 points. This trend, and the difficulties in finding a job, explains that since 2008 the estimated time young people remain in school has increased by almost a year, though still short of the average among OECD countries. The demand for education is concentrated most at the upper secondary level whereas higher and university education shows a minimum increase, perhaps due to the difficulties during a recession in making ends meet, especially with the raise in tuition and fees and the new policies on financial aid.

Unemployment and economic hardship are not, however, the only problems faced by our young people.

Spanish youth have trouble with political action, the government and the parties. Institutional politics cause more distrust and outrage than indifference. Consequently, the response has not been so much political abstention as seeking out an alternative, which was found in what became known as the 15-M movement. This movement has been deemed "one of the expressions of outrage of what is likely the most well-educated generation in history" (Hernández, Robles and Martínez 2013, p. 64). As happened in analogous movements in Iceland, Tunisia, Egypt and other Arab countries during the *Days of Rage*, and in the US with *Occupy* (Castells 2012) 15-M may be characterized as a *techno-illustrated civic initiative*. Its protesters included many university students who, among young adults of their age, are the most willing to participate politically, whether formally or informally (Martin 2007). These are young people who grew up in the digital era, students who have their world on the Internet and in social media.

The 15-M phenomenon acts as a stimulus to rethinking how to handle citizenship education at school. According to the *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study* (ICSS) of the *International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement* (IEA), Spanish students in secondary school have a moderate level of civic knowledge, average among the countries studied, but below many European countries. They also support democratic values, gender equality and immigrants' rights more than their classmates in other countries. However, they fail in their critical skills and ability to feel like active citizens. Thus, they are below average in their ability to analyze or reason their knowledge, in their interest in political affairs and in their perception of their political and citizen effectiveness (understand a political problem, defend their opinion on a controversial subject, run for the School Board, etc.). Our students have the feeling that their teachers do not encourage them to participate, to give their opinion or to consider different positions on a problem and, generally, as the study points out, the answers from students, teachers and school principals indicate a lack of participatory culture in the classroom (Instituto de Evaluación 2010, p. 27-29).

A comparison of these results from the ICSS with the capacity for political action of young people as witnessed in the 15-M movement reveals a clear gap between these two worlds. Schools do not prepare students enough to become active citizens, at least in the sense it is understood at the ICSS. And yet, 15-M participants show this competence in their ability at political mobilization. Indeed, adherents to the 15-M had a particular profile. They were young people affected by the consequences of the crisis, with high levels of education and resources for understanding and acting in the political reality, digital natives widely connected, involved in community life and with prior experience in political participation (Anduiza, Martín, Mateos 2014 p. 149-157). In consequence, the existing gap indicates that school must reinforce its civic role today more than ever. Exercising the rights of citizenship today requires more



than being good at reading and writing. The school's shirking of its responsibility may thus lead to the emergence of a new class differentiation of enlightened citizens who find opportunities for literacy in the new resources and skills at the superior levels of the education system or outside of it, and those who do not.

As public spaces of collective living, schools can provide a setting for young citizens to learn early on how to participate actively in their groups and institutions, to know the demands involved in participating in formal contexts, to move with a critical eye in social networks, to share goals and responsibilities, to modulate their interests with other people's, to appreciate the value of tolerance and recognition (Guío 2012). Learners must gradually come to understand the political and social processes they are immersed in, they must know their rights and duties, and be able to recognize shortcomings of the system, and to propose alternatives and actions to benefit the well-being of their groups and of society at large. Fostering a participatory culture at school also means making use of the resources offered by the community, for instance by having students participate in the dynamics of self-organization, fair trade activities, markets and solidarity drives, shared ecological vegetable gardens, volunteer work, children's and youth councils at their town hall, town council sessions open to the public, etc.

By encouraging participation in these types of experiences, the hope is to use the dynamics at and beyond the school to promote democratic living not as something guaranteed or closed, but as a living ideal continually being constructed by everyone in the different spheres of daily life.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Report by Severino Donate: International Youth Day with almost two million jobless youth in Spain. *Hoy por hoy* (radio program). Cadena Ser, August 12, 2013. Audio available at: [http://www.cadenaser.com/espana/audios/dia-internacional-juventud-millones-jovenes-parados-espana/csrcsrpor/20130812csrcsrnac\\_11/Aes](http://www.cadenaser.com/espana/audios/dia-internacional-juventud-millones-jovenes-parados-espana/csrcsrpor/20130812csrcsrnac_11/Aes). [Accessed:12/8/13].
- <sup>2</sup> INE: Instituto Nacional de Estadística (National Statistics Institute)
- <sup>3</sup> Data for 2013 are estimated.
- <sup>4</sup> As per the categories from the National Education Classification (CNEI) adapted by the National Statistics Institute
- <sup>5</sup> These analyses were completed in November 2013. The barometers used were those of January and June in the period between January 2009 and June 2013.
- <sup>6</sup> Differences in percentages between young people who think that the economic or political situation will get better and those who think it will get worse in the months from January to June of the period considered.
- <sup>7</sup> Carlism was a Spanish political movement of traditionalist character, originating in the 1820s. It looked for the establishment of an alternative branch of the dynasty of the Bourbons to the Spanish throne, which originally advocated a return to the Old Regime.
- <sup>8</sup> <http://tomalaplaza.net/>
- <sup>9</sup> There are more than 500 videos on YouTube tagged as “Spanish revolution”. See <http://www.youtube.com/user/spanishrevolutionsol?feature=watch>
- <sup>10</sup> <http://www.democraciarealya.es>
- <sup>11</sup> Information using the electoral results from the elections to the Assembly of Madrid and the general elections, available respectively at <http://www.asambleamadrid.es> and <http://www.infoelectoral.mir.es/min>
- <sup>12</sup> Several political projects have emerged from the 15-M movement, including *Podemos* (“We Can” Party) which won five seats in the European Parliament elections in May 2014.
- <sup>13</sup> A *Foundation of Commons*, which includes groups from many different areas of Spain, has been created under the auspices of theoreticians such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2012).

