

# ACTIVIZENSHIP

SOLIDARITY/COMMONS/FROM GRASSROOTS UP





# **ACTIVIZENSHIP**

**SOLIDARITY/COMMONS/FROM GRASSROOTS UP**

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**Edito, by Alexandrina Najmowicz, European Civic Forum Director**

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“**A**ctivizeship” is a word that does not exist. We propose it by contraction and use it as stalker to open the realm of possibilities, explore the potential of ancient and contemporary forms of civic, social and political activism to contribute to renewing, rethinking and reshaping a poetics of citizenship.

Activizeship magazine is an attempt to capture current trends and transformations affecting civil society environment across Europe and worldwide, connect ideas and experiences about changing the world from grassroots up, prospect the role of citizens’ movements, assemblies and organisations in revitalising civic and political space.

This first edition of Activizeship catalyses a number of issues that interrogate civil society’s agency power for driving social and institutional change against the multi-fold needs and aspirations in our societies today. It builds upon the inspiring outcomes of our European Civic Days in Athens this summer, which brought together grassroots activists and civil society organisations, thought-provocative discussants with trade union, social movement and academic backgrounds to deliberate on a democratic and civic-driven way out of the crisis, putting equality and solidarity at the heart of political action.

Hence the debate opens on the particular and dramatic case of Greece, which has become a reference point to many European citizens about the

systemic deficiencies facing the European project today. EU Member State having been hit particularly hard by the economic crisis, Greece now appears to be the emblematic case of a succession of failures of the dominant economic, monetary and ultimately political paradigms. The austerity memoranda and bailout policies implemented in Greece raise many questions to those who believe the European project should aim to secure decent lives, if not the well-being of all by organising solidarity between countries and inside countries. A very large part of the population living in Greece has been exposed for more than four years now to poverty and a high level of social exclusion through unemployment, shrinking revenues, deprivation of access to basic rights such as health care, education or housing.

The “Greek case” and the very intense debates this European crisis triggered into public space across Europe illustrated the insufficient democratic nature of the European governance system, especially if we agree to say that democracy is really at test in times of difficulties and crisis. This deficit of democratic legitimacy of the decisions, backed by the feeling of no future, including among young people, feeds disenchantment towards mainstream politics and continues to fuel traditional cleavages between “people and elite”, tensions among “creditor and debtor” Member States and, regretfully, cleavages between the peoples of Europe themselves, based on dangerous

stereotypes paving the way to raising regressive populism and extremism.

Representative democracy is severely scrutinized against by massive protest movements and growing audience of far right extremism across Europe. There is a deep feeling among citizens that their vote is not their voice. They turn away from ballots, when they don't use them as means to sanction the political forces in place.

Fronting this erosion of democracy and crisis of representation, we need to seek ways to get out of the deadlocks the dominant policies are driving us in. We need to reconnect politics with the grassroots and help translate resistance into effective political action in order to build cohesive societies.

Local fights driven by the values of equality, solidarity, true democracy and universal access to rights and commons illustrate a global, transformative potential of community-organised citizens' movements in reshaping the social contract our societies rest upon. Challenging, when not denying, the hierarchies and categories which underpin the traditional forms of political engagement and action, these community movements provide space for new thinking and social experimentation. Local struggles around the commons may prefigure a revival of citizenship and its forms of expression, giving meaningful substance to collective ownership rights, reclaiming democratic access and control over commodified material and immaterial resources for the benefit of all.

From this perspective, social solidarity movements that work to shape the future of Greece out of the crisis, like similar Spanish or Portuguese experiences, are for us the living proof and source of inspiration of community resilience and people's power in recreating solidarity for survival and resistance.

But the great challenge is how to go beyond protest to sustainable action? How to channel resistance to status quo towards global and systemic change, how to escape the institutional co-optation when it comes to advocating for citizens interests and thus, step into the institutional and political game? How to insure the convergence of social, civic and political forces, of civil society organisations and movements which articulate dissenting voices, so as to promote collectively an agenda for change, but first and foremost, to empower citizens, reveal and reactivate the agency capacity at grassroots level? How can the complexity of our developed societies, the diversity of social needs in a globalised world be aggregated in a democratic, inclusive, institutional framework relying on people's involvement?

We can hardly pretend to provide the answers to all present and future challenges. We can only hope to pose some questions which would help us regain trust in our capacity to challenge but also impulse a change in content and in the way in which we "do" democracy and build society?

May the conversation begin. ■

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# **LEARNING FROM FAILURE**

**THE GREEK CRISIS AS  
REALITY-CHECK POINT  
FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT**

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**T**he values our European societies are built upon have been seriously damaged these last years, and are still endangered, as illustrates the growing audience of regressive populist and anti-democratic parties across our continent. Greece is to a certain extent, the symbol of the failure of the neoliberal paradigm and current European policies, to which so few consent, to insure prosperity, social progress and well-being for all. Greece is the symbol of the failure of democracy, when its national leaders forget to openly discuss the measures the community must take to solve the problems it is faced with or when European leaders forbid its Prime minister to organise a referendum on these policies. Greece is also the symbol of how devastating social circumstances can stimulate the most violent, intolerant and anti-democratic discourses, as shows the rise of neo-nazi party “Golden Dawn”.

But Greece is also the symbol of civic vitality, as solidarity movements of citizens testify for, a reminder that citizens’ engagement for solidarity and justice still has long days ahead of it.

The universality of access to rights and to commons is absent from the logic governing today’s economies. But the European Union, building on the ashes of nationalism and xenophobia, was precisely imagined to ensure prosperity of its people, starting with economic prosperity, vital to peace. The crisis has made us all aware of the deep structural disorders which animate the European system. Solidarity has been undermined at State/Institutional level in many EU countries, and it has consequences at citizens’ level, as show the dramatic results of the European elections.

How then can positive examples of civil society action be inspiring to rebuild a system of humanistic values and reinstall solidarity and equality at the heart of its concerns, not as distant goal but as democratic principle? ■

# FROM POLITICAL FAILURE TO SOCIAL DESTRUCTION

## THE STRAW THAT BREAKS THE CAMEL'S BACK

Based on the speech held by Petros Linardos Rulmond during the opening session of the European Civic Days 2014

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### DEAR FRIENDS,

I thank you for coming all the way to talk about the problems we face here and that affect all of us in reality. Greece as it exists today cannot be understood outside the European scope. It owes its present to Europe, without being a typical European State, especially on one major aspect: its welfare system.

**WE NEED  
A EUROPEAN  
DEFINITION  
OF SOLIDARITY  
WE CAN AGREE ON**

1952	1967	1974-1975	1981	2002	2004
New Constitution declares Greece a Kingdom ruled by parliamentary democracy.	Military putsch. George Papadopoulos leads the "regime of colonels".	Fall of the colonels. Greece becomes a parliamentary Republic.	Greece joins the EU. Socialist party (Pasok) wins elections.	Euro replaces Drachma.	Conservative New Democracy wins elections.

As a consequence, the country is cut in two, opposing the unemployed and precarious excluded from social rights to an economic and political elite close to the government. In Greece, economic recovery rimes for many with stabilisation of the elite. This combination is due to the observation of a phenomena of neutralisation of the capacity of reaction of the part of the population most hardly hit by the crisis, feeding from its lack of organisation.

This weak equilibrium built on massive instability has started to be contested, at least during elections, but requires a fundamental change in policies, a change in the foundations of society themselves, a change of paradigm to restore or simply build up security, jobs, social rights. These changes will not occur without new structures of solidarity.

But because these challenges aspire at creating a welfare State on the model of XX<sup>th</sup> Century European States, the Greek question is a European one. Greece is part of Europe. Greeks are Europeans. And European solidarity conditions their future. Now all we need is a European definition of solidarity we can agree on. ■

**WHEN THE CRISIS HIT IN 2009, THE SOCIAL STATE WAS PRACTICALLY INEXISTENT**

When Greece entered the Common Market in 1981, it was crippled by decades of dictatorship. Already pensions were low, many worked undeclared, redistribution was incapable of filling the gaps within society... In 1981, Greece was not a welfare State, or at least, not a functioning one. And it did not become one, albeit the economic developments, rooted in a neo-liberal logic, implying low taxation of capital and businesses, and hence, redistribution.

When the crisis hit in 2009, the social State was practically inexistent, and after the Troika's tough management, what might have been had vanished. When the crisis hit in 2009 and the Troika intervened, Greece left the European social acquis.

Statistics report today that 30% of the population is unemployed; for youth, that number rises to 65%. But in fact, 70% of active population is either unemployed, employed but precarious, or employed but not declared. Either way, salaries have dropped 35%.

DEC. 2004	2005	DEC. 2005	MARCH 2006	DEC. 2008	OCT. 2009
EU Commission warns Greece after discovery of falsified budget deficit prior to joining Eurozone.	Greece parliament ratifies EU Constitution.	"Cleansing" of labour law provokes massive protest.	Massive strike of public sector workers after government plans intense privatization.	New strikes against governmental economic policies.	Socialist party wins elections.

2009	APR-MAY 2010	FEB. 2011	JUNE 2011	JULY 2011	NOV. 2011	2012
Prime Minister Papandreou announces tough austerity measures starting with public spending cuts. Massive strikes follow.	1st Rescue Package. Eurozone approves 110 billion euros rescue package. Harder austerity measures are part of the deal.	International lenders demand tougher measures to resorb the debt.	24h General strike	2nd Rescue Package. EU leaders approve transfer of extra 109 billion euros to Greece through European Financial Stability Facility	G. Papandreou resigns following highly criticised referendum on rescue package. Lucas Papademos, former director of the Bank of Greece, takes over to lead a left-right coalition.	3rd Rescue Package. Strikes immobilise the country against more and tougher austerity measures announced as part of the deal for 130 billion euros rescue package.

## WHAT THE IMF WROTE IN 2013...

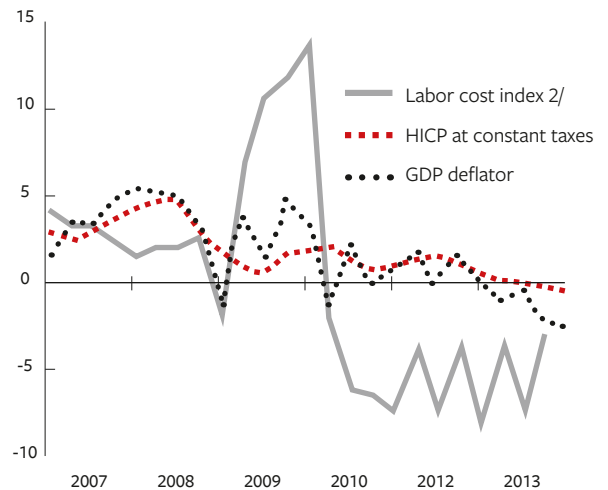
“Unemployment has risen to around 26,5% of which over 2/3 are long-term unemployed. The share of the population at risk of poverty increased from 20 to 23% over 2009–12.”

“While the current practice of collecting taxes through the electricity bill is clearly not a permanent solution, the authorities should consider extending this scheme, modified to take account of concerns about constitutionality. Here too, failure to take action would suggest the need for a much greater reliance on expenditure measures in 2014 than currently envisaged by the authorities, **including potentially targeted cuts in socially sensitive areas.**”

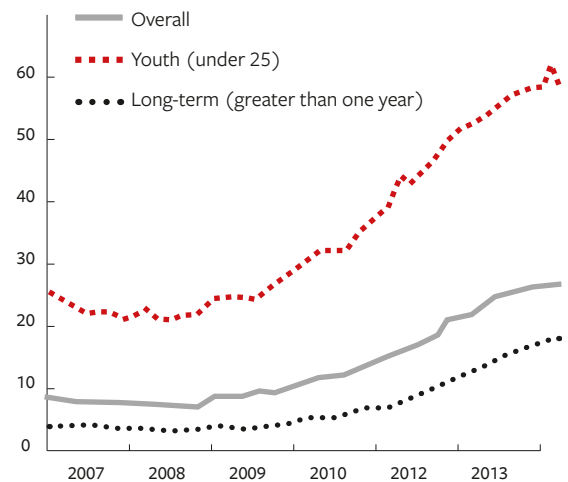
“The onus therefore remains on delivering rapidly on structural reforms to unlock growth and create jobs, **which would lessen the pain of further adjustment.**”

### SOURCE

Text and graphs:  
International Monetary Fund  
Country Report n° 13/241, July 2013



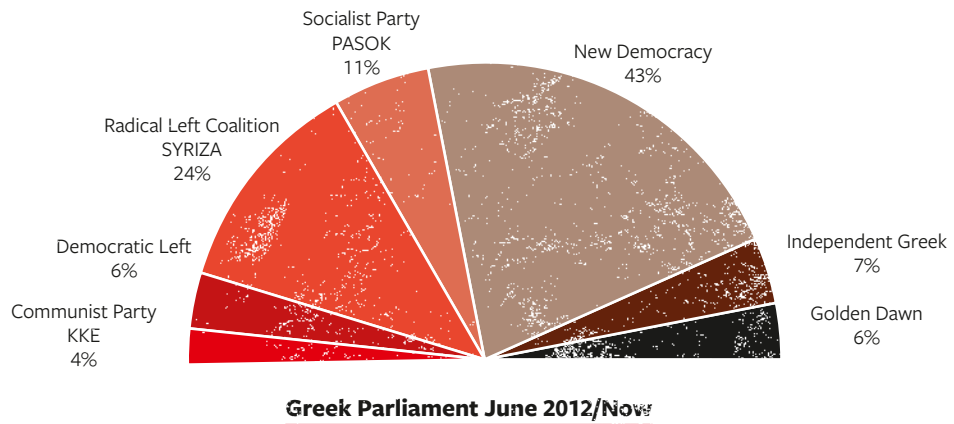
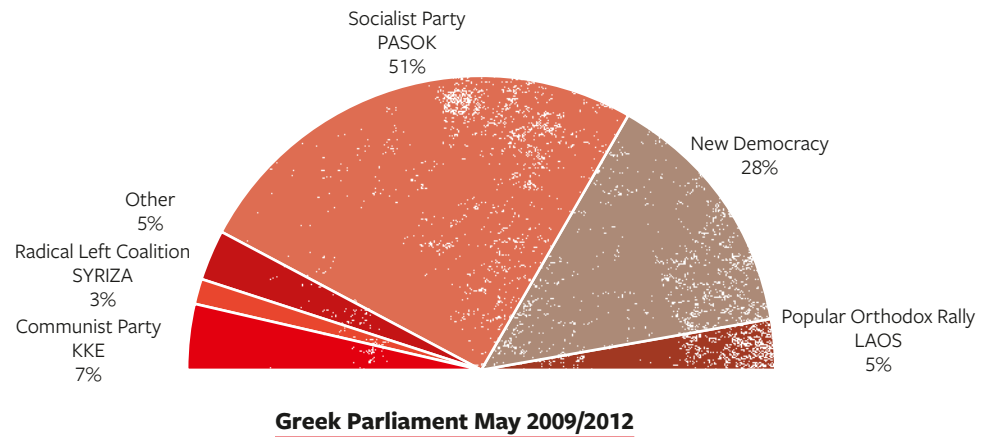
**Wages and Prices** (Y-o-y percent change)



**Unemployment Rate** (Percent)

2012	JUNE 2012	SEPT. 2012	NOV. 2012	JUNE 2013	SEPT.-NOV. 2013	2014
Debt swap deal reached between Greece and private investors, part of the conditions set by EU Finance Ministers.	Samaras leads coalition and pursues austerity programme.	24h General Strike	4 <sup>th</sup> Rescue Package. New EU-IMF rescue package delivered after promise to raise taxes and cut pensions.	National broadcaster ERT shut down. It is replaced by EDT in August, a smaller version of the ERT which employs some of the former ERT staff, but according to the 1:5 rule, i.e. 1 new staff for 5 retiring.	Troubles with far-right Golden Dawn.	Troika announces economic recovery. Unemployment hits historical records (26,4 % in July).

**According to the International Labour Organisation, the employment situation has continued to deteriorate since the introduction of fiscal consolidation policies. Following a pause in 2010-2011, unemployment has kept growing and shows no signs of improvement.**



# “SOCIAL SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT” FROM RESISTANCE TO REBUILDING A PUBLIC SPACE FROM THE GRASSROOTS

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by Christos Giovanopoulos

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Initially trying to respond to the most sharp needs for survival and collective organisation in specific fields, the social solidarity movement has gradually become a social transformer.

**T**he grassroots solidarity movement is the result of both the social and political struggle of the Greek people against the state of exemption and the austerity memoranda imposed by the Troika and Greek governments. It brings together the everyday resistance to the dire effects of the dismantlement of the welfare State and the political resistance against the regime of financial dictatorship imposed on Greek society. Through self-organisation, people have developed their own solidarity structures, practicing participatory direct democracy processes. Thus, at the same time as the solidarity movement tries to safeguard the means for survival, it also tries to build another future, an alternative proposal for society.

Offshoot of the squares' occupation movement (summer 2011), the movement was developed in dozens

of neighbourhoods and cities by locals from all edges. The movement is open to all those affected by the crisis, without distinction, whether they are socially and politically active or not. About 400 solidarity structures, in various fields (health, food, education, legal support, migration, housing, culture, social and solidarity economy etc.), counting about 10.000 activists and covering the entire country, have become sites of activity of both Greeks and migrants, playing an important role to counter the dismantling of the little there was of public services – including schools, hospitals... ; resisting the tearing apart of the social fabric and public spaces according to the dictates of the market. People got together to solve the problems they collectively faced, and by doing so, they built and still build on common social issues, new practices and spaces for decision-making processes and a potentially new paradigm of social self-management from below.

### **TRANSFORMATIVE POWER**

Combining social and political struggles transforms our idea of power because it bases it on commons, proposing a new conceptualisation of the notions of public goods, distinct, but not necessarily in opposition, with the State. For our movement, politics are not an abstraction of the social – in the level of institutional politics - but are the social itself. Consequently, the notion of commons is first defined by the people: they define their common needs. This empowering effect therefore differs from just demanding provisions from a

Welfare State, making society active where the previous model held them as assisted.

The intensity of the crisis exponentially increased the number of excluded, breaking political identities and threatening community fabric, or at least, radically changing our perception of it. In this context, to survive people had to build on a different paradigm: to create a new environment with new parameters to tackle the immediate needs of a population in distress. We also had to go beyond the notion of citizen, as undocumented migrants are not citizens, and yet, they are members of our communities. Or, if we refer to (organised/institutionalised) civil society, it was both an integral part of the dominant political system in Greece and a quintessential example of closed (non-participatory) representative politics, in its vast majority.

### **SOLIDARITY IS CHANGE**

We perceive solidarity and mutual-assistance amongst us as a necessary condition to develop our struggle for deeper social transformation. We strive for every person to be able to stand on its feet, to stand up fighting, to be able to carry on resisting the causes and countering the consequences of the crisis, the dissolution of the social State

**THE SOLIDARITY  
MOVEMENT TRIES  
TO BUILD  
AN ALTERNATIVE  
PROPOSAL  
FOR SOCIETY**

and the plunder of the labour and political rights won with struggle during the whole past century and more. But at the same time the solidarity movement self-organises itself, and the act of solidarity and help, in a different way based in participation of all, builds the potential for a new paradigm of social

organisation based on real people's democracy and self-management.

**POLITICS ARE NOT  
AN ABSTRACTION  
OF THE SOCIAL,  
BUT ARE THE  
SOCIAL ITSELF**

Horizontal collective practices contribute crucially in building new social and trustful relationships, verticality having proven its limits... Horizontal dynamics means that the ones who need help are the ones helping. To encourage the greatest number to participate, it was necessary to break the distinction between “those who know or/and can help” and “those who need help”, which is the rule elsewhere, in the public as much as private and charity sectors. In other words, getting rid of the idea that participation or resistance is a job for specialists. Today, 15% of those who were in need have become active participants of the movement. Not many, indeed, but the increase of those who cannot meet their basic needs and turned to the solidarity structures is 30% in less than a year. To encourage people to become active doesn't merely require to provide, but to genuinely care, to invest with affective labour, to provide space for anyone to become part of the collective effort in terms they are familiar with. This deeply political work cannot be but unmediated, which explains its functioning within neighbourhoods, building social and personal relationships. This in turn, builds a different kind of social and political subjectivity able to address issues such as primary health services for all, food sovereignty, unmediated food distribution networks, enhancement of local production, agricultural and environmental sustainability, development of self-managed social

economy, time banks, etc., not as ideological projects, but as challenges and potentialities that emerge through necessity and action.

### **PARTICIPATION IS INCLUSION**

The element of participation and self-organisation of these very people who are in need, is one of the main political aims and a fundamental element of the solidarity work. It is by no accident that an important number of those active through these structures, are unemployed men and women, people who were found out of work (pensioners, pauperised small businessmen and lower middle-class) or workers in precarious labour relations. An informal network has emerged among the various solidarity structures, defined either by geographical area of enterprise, or by sector of activity (e.g. network of medical facilities, food cooperatives), for the increase of their efficiency. A more recent development is workers initiatives to develop their own solidarity structures within their work-space. This encounter of the solidarity movement with the workers' one, even if belated, can give another perspective and dynamic to the movement and to the outcome of social and political struggles in Greece.

By abandoning the dominant distinction between social activism and political struggle, the experience of the solidarity movement changes our perception on what politics really are; by working beyond the notion of citizen,



### **THE AUTHOR**

Greek activist, **Christos Giovanopoulos** is member of “Solidarity for All”. He is also the co-editor of “Democracy Under Construction: From the streets to the Squares”, published in 2011.

**SOLIDARITY AND  
MUTUAL-ASSISTANCE  
AMONGST US ARE  
A NECESSARY CONDITION  
FOR EVERY PERSON  
TO BE ABLE, AT LEAST,  
TO STAND ON ITS FEET**





the social fabric is being recomposed: solidarity becoming the postulate, participation is the common objective. And participation substantiates the common. Indeed, the inclusive social net recreated and strengthened by the solidarity structures has become an obstacle to the extreme right, who cannot count on the most vulnerable and demoralised to succumb to a divisive ideology of hatred that opposes one part of the population to the other.

And last but not least, the activity of the solidarity movement composes the roots of the struggle for a political overthrow of those in power, in order to open up the horizon towards post-market based, post-capitalist social transition. Not merely because they are an outcome of the recent struggles of the Greek people against the undemocratic Troika regime and the corrupted, totally delegitimized political system. But also because it is aware that without such a political change it may end up being an “alternative” (or a substitute for the destroyed public welfare system) in a system and society of generalized inequality. ■

**“NO ONE  
WILL BE  
LEFT  
ALONE  
IN THE  
CRISIS!”**

## **FOCUS ON SOCIAL PHARMACIES AND CLINICS**

In the sector of health there are social clinics and pharmacies that serve mainly the uninsured and unemployed people. Their function is supported exclusively by the volunteer work and donations of the simple people, usually only in kind. Some (very few and left-wing) municipalities also supported them by way of offering premises. A picture of the degree of mobilisation of the people can be drawn by the data of the Metropolitan Clinic of Ellinikon-Argyroupoli, in which there were 60 volunteers active in the

first months of its function (spring of 2012) while now there are 150. All decisions of the social clinics are taken in their general assemblies, with the equal participation of all, the medical specialised personnel and the unskilled volunteers, while there is effort to involve their patients, too. A network of social clinics-pharmacies is already developed, trying to give immediate and practical solutions to phenomena of lack of medicines, vaccines etc. through the collection and reuse of drugs not needed by the initial users. ■



# SOLIDARITY STRUCTURES SOCIAL INCUBATORS OF POLITICAL DISCONTENT

Interview with Theano Fotiou, member of Solidarity4All and Greek MP

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Social solidarity structures have become models of social reform.  
Self-organisation, direct democracy and participation are the three main ingredients of these neighbourhood movements,  
inspiration at home and abroad.

## **EUROPEAN CIVIC FORUM**

Solidarity movements in Greece illustrate the idea that politics are not an abstraction of the social, but are the social itself. Can you elaborate on this?

## **THEANO FOTIOU**

The Solidarity movements in Greece create a new social sphere for survival and resistance. Their main objective and visible target is people's survival. However, very fast they extended their activities in many fields; always working collectively. They are models of social reform in which self-organisation, direct democracy and participation, take the first role. The neighbourhood is the place of their activities and the open assembly for all is the form of their function; for those who organise and for those to whom the structure is addressed. This way of functioning, practically fights the ideology of representation,

individualization and antagonism; the basic arsenal of neo-liberalism. These structures lead to social, political and class consciousness through social practice.

There is no need for theoretical elaborations, because everybody is passing from distress, loneliness and fear to the hope of collective and social action. Thus, they change consciousness, behaviour and political attitude. This way of working, in which Greeks and foreigners are working side-by-side for all, is eradicating racism and fascism from the neighbourhoods. They meet and work with thousands of people, they are trusted and they gain the necessary social grounding. The Solidarity Social Structures are politicising the crisis.

Moreover, the need for survival is creating, on an everyday basis, a new knowledge on poverty. It highlights the elevating power of people's participation; it proves that money is not the main and only mean for covering human needs. It provokes and converts the production as well as the consumption patterns. Food Solidarity Structures, which are spreading all over Greece, have started to be concerned by surpluses and what is thrown away.

## THE SOLIDARITY SOCIAL STRUCTURES ARE POLITICISING THE CRISIS



### THE AUTHOR

Former architect, Theano Fotiou is member of Solidarity4All and Syriza Member of the Greek Parliament since May 2012. She sits on the European Affairs Committee.

The products which are being buried by producers and destroyed by factories; that is, food which is thrown away by restaurants and stores, medicines which surplus in every house, and clothes which are accumulated without even being used. These goods are now saving lives, while capitalism destroys them for over-evaluating the Capital.

Within this scope, social praxis highlights and verges on political aspects and interpretations that Left parties are promulgating through their theoretical elaborations, but are unable to make understandable to the public. However, politics beyond the comprehension of society and its transformation, also require a strategic vision for society itself. For the SYRIZA party, the two slogans: “people above profit” and “another world is feasible” refer to Socialism and the great divisions that Socialism abolishes; manual work/intellectual work, management/implementation, city/countryside, man/woman.

We are referring to the values of Socialism: the productive power of society subordinates classes, the diachronical values of solidarity, equality, freedom, universal justice, which are regulating everyday political acting. For us, Socialism is not a regime, but a process, a route to a specific aim, which needs the participation of society.

**ECF. What does it take to reconnect politics with the grassroots in the context of Greece? Can political action give echo and scale up local fights?**

**TF.** We are facing a great challenge, after the Municipal Elections of June 2014 when 10 Municipalities in Attica and the Prefecture of Attica itself were gained by radical left municipal movements. These movements have close links with solidarity movements in the Attica Region involved in Food, Health, Education, Social Economy, “Without Middlemen” movement, Housing. There are 114 Solidarity Structures in Attica. According to the experience gained from these networks experience and their cooperation, the radical left Municipal Authorities and Prefectures are restructuring their policies in order to confront the humanitarian crisis. The Municipals conversion, from bureaucratic and “customer relations” mechanisms to open and sensitive cells of participating Democracy, is quite difficult. Transferring knowledge in poverty is not enough. Institutions have to be found which will encourage citizens to participate.

It is the first time that the experience and praxis of these Solidarity Structures is attempted to be transferred within State institutions in order to face the collapsing State. Thus, the knowledge created by the people from below is transferred to the electives; this is a new paradigm of social organisation and political intervention.

**ECF. How much do political parties in Greece value the contribution of citizens’ movements to rebuilding social fabric and political awareness?**

**TF.** The backbone of the solidarity movements that were developed during the crisis is constituted by the people of the radical Left. They are social incubators of political discontent, but they are also places where political trust is established. In our days, people do not easily join political parties, even if there are radical left parties. On the contrary, they are passionately activated in social solidarity structures, which are umbilically corded with the Left.

**NOBODY  
COULD IMAGINE  
THE HUGE  
PERSPECTIVES  
OFFERED  
BY THESE  
SELF-ORGANISED  
MOVEMENTS**

SYRIZA has been involved in these movements. Mainly with the participation of its members, with the repository of mutual help that SYRIZA founded and it is funded by the 20% of the salary of its Members of Parliament and with campaigns in European countries that today, produce political, social and financial results.

When we started, some of us were expressing doubts, on the possibility that solidarity might be interpreted as charity. We must confess, now, that nobody could imagine the huge perspective of the social and political processes represented in these self-organised movements and structures of social solidarity. The main pillar in SYRIZA's program has consisted in steps and policies for dealing with the humanitarian crisis.

**INSTITUTIONS  
HAVE TO BE  
FOUND WHICH  
WILL ENCOURAGE  
CITIZENS  
TO PARTICIPATE**

The experience gained by the social solidarity structures enrich the ideas and the program of SYRIZA in the fields of social insurance, food, “without-middlemen market”, agricultural production on the axis of locality and food sufficiency, which denies overconsumption and favors an economy based on cooperatives and self-management of the means of production. “Solidarity for All” contributed to SYRIZA's program with the guide “Constructing a new cooperative and social economy”.

It's a new imaginative path, rich within poverty, creative and innovative, that was opened to us by the Solidarity Social Structures and which we follow with hope and trust. ■

αλληλεγγύη  
για όλους!

**How do these**  
**positive**  
**examples**  
**of response**  
**to the crisis**  
**influence our**  
**larger thinking**  
**about rights,**

**commons**  
**and their**  
**relation**  
**to citizenship?**  
**How can**  
**we use**  
**the crisis**  
**for renewal?**

**2**

**THE  
COMMONS  
FOR  
CITIZENSHIP**

**USING THE COMMONS  
TO FIGHT THE ECONOMIC  
CRISIS AND POLITICAL  
DISENCHANTMENT**

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The following articles present some views and experiences that draw another picture of what is possible to reverse the present trend and to reconcile the future of the European project with the objective of a society that values policies aimed at the common good, inclusiveness for all, democracy, civic engagement,...

The diversity of the approaches tells us much about the complexity active citizenship has to address in order to be operational.

Can the “common good” be an answer to growing individualist behaviours? Does the management of the “Commons” push for collective solutions, for more citizens’ involvement at local and global levels?

How can disenchantment towards politics be overcome? How can we reverse the trend of voting for regressive parties? What kind of policies can support this, what are the responsibilities of mainstream politicians? Can active citizenship influence the emergence of policies favouring access to rights for all as an answer to rebuild the desire of a common future?

The presented articles cover ideas, wishful thinking, lived experiences, food for further debates... all essential ingredients to move forward, to connect people’s expectations and institutions’ responsibilities, placing (active) citizenship at the centre. ■

# ARGUING FOR THE COMMONS TO REBUILD CITIZENSHIP

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by Claudia McKenny Engström

Political disenchantment calls for a renewal of our democratic practice. Because commons emphasise on the community level and horizontal dynamics, they could be the way in to encourage active citizenship.

In a time of crisis, commons have been deeply affected, in some regions destroyed, by bad management, such as incarnated in the austerity measures taken by governments across the European Union, of particularly strong impact given the welfare nature of its member States claimed project. At the same time, we observe citizens' growing disregard for classic exercises of democracy and, whether at local, national or European level, a regular rise of abstention in general elections and of rallying to parties promising protection of what they present as national, familiar, by arguing for rejection of what is foreign, different.

Accepting austerity or choosing retreat seem to be the two options. Yet progressive movements conveying concepts of transformation are at the same time making their way through,

allowing us to hope the previous dialectics may not be exactly true, suggesting there might be a third way to regain citizens' trust and will to participate in determining the direction taken by the community. But this quest will not succeed without a renewed understanding of what unites a community, and henceforth, gives reason to exercise citizenship, in common.

### **APPROACHING CITIZENSHIP BEYOND RIGHTS**

Citizenship in holds a number of definitions depending on the approach chosen. From the status of citizen, granted to a defined member of a political community, derive rights, derives citizenship. Because in its traditional and formal acceptance it refers to the right to participate in the life of a politically organised community, it has been translated into the right to political autonomy, i.e. the right for the individual to be at the origin of a normative system. It is thus at the heart of sovereignty, whether exercised via direct or representative democracy.

Citizenship is also characterised by the vertical and horizontal dynamics, between citizens and the institutions at the head of a community on the one hand; between the citizens of a given community among themselves, on the other. If the vast majority of these relations happen in a State context, a Constitution organising the functioning of its institutions and guaranteeing the rights of citizens, delegation of sovereignty – the most prominent of all in the European context being the European Union – has, if not altered, at least added layers to these dynamics, as a number of competences have been put in the hands of Institutions other than the State. And even if important

**MULTILEVEL SYSTEMS CALL US TO SURPASS OUR TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF WHERE AND HOW NORMS ARE EMITTED**

duties are kept in the realm of the national State exercise, the superposed layers still touch and inevitably influence each other, calling us to surpass our traditional understanding of where and how norms are emitted.

It remains that these dynamics, if they generate rights and obligations, are fuelled and oriented by a number of informal elements, which when used, open to the possibility of seeing and exercising citizenship beyond the prime right to vote.

In "Citizenship beyond the State", a comparative and multi-source research presented at the University of Aberdeen in 2005, GORDON and STACK<sup>1</sup> describe "citizenship as an

<sup>1</sup> A. GORDON and T. STACK, "Citizenship Beyond the State: Thinking with Early Modern Citizenship in the Contemporary World", *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 117-133, May 2007.

**CITIZENSHIP IS AS AN OPEN SET OF ELEMENTS**

open set of elements", comprising the notions of equality, individuality, autonomy, fundamental rights, freedom, belonging, public debate, representation, inclusion and exclusion, popular sovereignty, commitment to a polity or community, and the common or public good. These different elements of composition thus reveal the bi-faced dimension of citizenship: there are formal elements, such as rights, and informal ones, such as a feeling of belonging to a community of values. Albeit this duality, both are permanently in interaction.

One of the problems presented by the formal elements of citizenship, is that it basis the latter almost exclusively on the need of a State which regulates and organises the effectivity of the access to rights. This was pointed out by T. H. Marshall, who observes that citizenship has become a ground for making claims on the State<sup>2</sup>, in charge of regulating both social and civil (or political) rights. But observing the growing disaffection for established means of expression of citizenship, acknowledging citizens capacity to act collectively, beyond an institutional (and rigid) rights-based approach, could prove – and has already proven in some cases – to be a key to encourage direct involvement among the members of communities. We believe this goal may be reached by using the

<sup>2</sup> A. GORDON and T. STACK, "Citizenship beyond the State...", p. 120.

concept of commons, namely because it actually encompasses many of the other elements mentioned in the here above list.

### **BUILDING THE ARGUMENT FOR THE COMMONS**

Commons can be defined as a land or resource belonging to or affecting the whole community; they are what is essential to all, what exists for the benefit of all and are a great part of what communities organise themselves around. According to OSTROM, the commons are the “general term for shared resources in which each stakeholder has an equal interest”. “Studies on the commons include the information commons with issues about public knowledge, the public domain, open science, and the free exchange of ideas - all issues at the core of a direct democracy”<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> The Cooperative Common, [www.cooperationcommons.com/node/361](http://www.cooperationcommons.com/node/361)

In the light of this definition, the temptation of putting the term “commons” in parallel with the idea conveyed by the notion of *res publica* is difficult to resist.

To explain the difference between the two terms however, we will emit the following hypothesis: the *res publica* serves to describe a form of governmental organisation tightly linked to the State and by which government is endowed with the responsibility of managing the public good, the *res publica*.

In the time we live in however, the State finds it more and more difficult to deliver. This failure can be explained by a number of reasons: expertise has taken over on deliberative democracy; global policies are disconnected from local reality; economy and the rule of market pre-empt the rule of Law and political vision; we, citizens, expect more...

Another explanation for the difference between commons and *res publica* could be found in the fact the first notion has a scientific and economic background, rather than legal or political as the second suggests, but this would not necessarily jeopardise the reasoning based on the first hypothesis, as the form of government is inevitably affected by the content and layers of competences. In the context

**COMMONS ARE NOT A SYNONYM OF “RES PUBLICA”**

of globalisation, the rules set by the market, with the predominance of financial markets, have taken over, in spite of Europe’s “long tradition in common property institutions”<sup>4</sup>.

In the complexity and immensity of our system, the representation of communities within States has deeply suffered, and the vertical relation between the latter and their citizens has changed, as States no longer ensure protection of the public good, essence of their legitimacy.

Thinking citizenship away from a State perspective should not be understood as a call for the abolition of states. Thinking citizenship beyond the State simply means envisaging citizens’ involvement outside the strict contours of statism, but at local level and privileging a horizontal dynamic, triggering collaborative decision-making. Because commons emphasise on the community level<sup>5</sup>, they could be the way in.

<sup>4</sup> G. BRAVO and T. De MOOR, “The Commons in Europe: from past to future”, *International Journal of the Commons*, Vol. 2, No. 2, July 2008, p. 155.

<sup>5</sup> F. BERKES, “Commons in a Multi-level World”, *International Journal of the Commons*, Vol. 2, No. 1, January 2008, p. 1.

## **THE COMMONS, SOURCE OF COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING**

Economist Jean GADREY characterises commons according to five elements<sup>6</sup>. First, they designate the quality of collective resources and heritages deemed fundamental, today and in the future. He extends this approach to societal qualities and fundamental rights, equally commons since they require a common management.

Second, commons are the result of collective decisions, are social constructs valorised by a community governed by rules which contribute to institutionalising the commons. Ugo MATTEI, who believes that since commons are contextual and contingent, they may be qualified as such when it is politically decided they are “relevant or even vital for a particular social end”, also supports this idea<sup>7</sup>.

Although commons might be natural resources, there is nothing natural in granting them that status, which explains they are also a struggle between the right to property, appropriation and responsibility.

Commons are diverse. What unites them is the political and ethical unity, incarnated in the deliberations where the question “what are the collective and fundamental resources we must together take care of if our final goal is to improve our way of life for now and the future?” is asked.

Third, the designation of commons requires general interest, accessibility to all, and a common or cooperative management under shared responsibility.

<sup>6</sup> J. GADREY, “Les biens communs: une notion au service de l’ESS?”, <http://alternatives-economiques.fr/blogs/gadrey/files/versionlongue.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> G. A. CAPERCHI, “Defining the Commons”, <http://thegocblog.com/2012/10/29/defining-the-commons/>

Fourth, commons should not be apprehended in opposition with private goods – another reason why public goods do not fully embrace the notion of commons. Indeed, it is the entire system, namely of production, which will be enriched by some resources falling under the qualification of commons. Which brings the author to the last element of characterisation: letting commons in transforms our economic system from one of production to one of “taking care”.

Because they are the social constructs of a given group, commons are contingent to a given environment. Their positive capacity of stimulating citizenship is therefore high, as commons, set in a familiar environment or made familiar by the effect they have on individuals of a community, and managed according to collective decision-making systems, thus increasing the feeling of belonging to a community, not by birth, history or culture, as might suggest nationality, but by participation in protection of a common resource.

**THEY CARRY  
THE NOTIONS  
OF EQUALITY  
AND INCLUSION,  
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AND POPULAR  
SOVEREIGNTY**

The commons encompass the various understandings of citizenship. They cannot be summed up to making claims on the State. They are not only rights, despite the fact that they may obtain their quality after legal transcription (see “Water, a common for European democracy”). Because defending the commons influences the life of all individuals of a community and influence their future, they carry the notions of equality and inclusion, conditions sine qua non of the possibility for autonomy and freedom. For the same reason and because commons are real, tangible, individuals’ commitment to the community will grow both in quantity and quality. And because not only their elaboration, but later their management, is the result of collective decision-making, they give life to public debate and popular sovereignty. ■

# THE COMMONS AS A FOUNTAIN OF HOPE IN BUILDING ALTERNATIVES

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by Richard Swift

Recasting our relationships to the commons should take pride of place as we build alternatives to capitalism. Analysing the way in which commons are managed, because they are dependant on horizontal decision-making, might be the key to fulfil the democratic promise.

**T**he commons is not just a battlefield between corporate predators and those who resist them – it is also a source of hope for those willing to imagine a world beyond capitalism. It represents a space between the private market and the political state in which humanity can control and democratically root our common wealth. Both the market and the State have proved inadequate for this purpose. In different ways, they have both led to a centralization of power and decision-making. Both private monopolies and State bureaucracies have proved incapable of maintaining the ecological health of the commons or managing the fair and equitable distribution of its benefits.

The conservative ecologist Garrett Hardin's belief that the commons is facing a tragedy was based on the notion that individual self-interest in

exploiting common resources was undercutting the overall health of those limited resources. Hardin maintained that individual self-interest trumps any more thoughtful notion of preserving resources for future use. External restraints needed to be imposed. To prove his point, Hardin used the example of the individual herder taking more than their share of pastureland. It assumes a human behaviour that is all too familiar to those who have seen the global fishery depleted and seen watersheds destroyed by those hungry for land to grow crops.

Hardin's solution was to divide up the commons into private property and public goods administered through the market and the State. But it scarcely seems to follow that if the commons is turned into private property or put under the supervision of some distant State bureaucracy that it will fare much better. These days, the two will likely form a 'public-private partnership' and any regime of fair-use regulation will go out the window.

There is also a question of scale. Is it better to have many small inshore artisanal fishers or to turn the fishery over to Big Capital and the high-tech trawler fleets? How could it make sense to push small farmers off food-producing land so that large bio-fuel producers

can help keep our unsustainable love affair with the private automobile alive? When Hardin's self-interested human nature is combined with large-scale private ownership, it is likely to yield ever more short-sighted results. It is no way to manage the commons.

### **MANAGING THE COMMONS**

It is far better to rethink how the commons is managed and to include as many of the players as possible so as to achieve a better result. If decisions rested with local communities or regions, in combination with users of various types both local and remote (environmentalists, fishers, miners, farmers, consumers), and were placed within a legal framework that takes future generations into account, it would seem likely to produce a more durable form of stewardship. This might also in the long run develop other potentialities of

human behavior than the narrow self-interest that Hardin so feared.

An alternative to capitalism must in the end be based on a more complex sense of the human than orthodox economists' notion that we are all hardwired to a rational calculus of individual costs and benefits. The influential commons theorist Elinor Ostrom proposes a different, more optimistic, notion of the human potential for managing the commons. Ostrom won the Nobel Prize in economics for her seminal 1990 work *Governing the Commons*. She believes that: "we live in a web of social relations infused with norms and values; we are intrinsically co-operative and as a result collective action is possible and may lead to sustainable and equitable governance practices."

**"WE ARE  
INTRINSICALLY  
CO-OPERATIVE  
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COLLECTIVE ACTION  
IS POSSIBLE"**



### **THE AUTHOR**

**Richard Swift** is former editor of *New Internationalist* magazine and author of the *No-Nonsense Guide to Democracy* as well as books on street gangs and mosquitoes. In 2011 he won the Daniel Singer Millennium Prize for an original essay which helps further socialist ideas.

Ostrom does not commit herself to an ambitious political program of replacing State and market with more direct democratic practices. But she opens up the debate about how the commons should be governed rather than just assuming the market abetted by the State can handle the job. For Ostrom, a process of ‘deliberative democracy’ is essential if there is to be proper human stewardship of the commons. Others in the commons movement carry the analysis further and see in the commons the potential to restructure the underlying configuration of power between markets, States and societies.

### **DEMOCRATIC PROMISE**

This begins to give some indication of the democratic promise of the commons as a potential cornerstone in working out an alternative to capitalism. It takes on the ascendant neo-liberalism of the commons privatizers while avoiding the dysfunctional effects of top-down State planning and centralized public ownership that have undercut previous efforts to build a socialism centered on the State. It moves beyond the sterile debate between an inadequate State and a rapacious market. Instead it explores the idea of a decentralized eco-democracy founded on what in the commons is vital to both

human and biosphere survival. It extends democratic decision-making to ensure egalitarian economic outcomes. Here is one example of a commons-based popular initiative from Greece (made vulnerable to privatization pressure because of the debt crisis):

“In the Greek city of Thessaloniki, a coalition of citizens’ groups called Initiative 136 is creating a new organization to compete with Suez [a French water corporation] in the tender for the Rebuilding the alternatives Southern-style acquisition of the shares and the management of Thessaloniki’s Water and Sewerage Company. The dual goal is to prevent privatization and replace the model of State administration that has failed to protect the public character of water resources and infrastructure, and secure genuine democratic control of the city’s water by its citizens. The management would be organised through local co-operatives, with citizen participation. Initiative 136 is an effort to pre-empt privatization before it is implemented, with an attractive concrete alternative in the form of improved public management.”

**THE CORE STRATEGY IS TO DESIGN INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS THAT MOVE BEYOND STATE AND MARKET**



### **SOURCE**

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can be far-reaching, as Joan Subirats concludes: “the abiding logic of the commons is not based, as we have seen, on a balancing act between the roles of the State and the market, but on the idea of a polycentrism, decentralization and agreement between those touched by common problems. More co-operation, less competition. More conservation and the dynamics of resilience with regard to resources and their relationship with the environment than erosion, limitless exploitation and unstoppable appropriation.”

### **NEW HORIZONTAL COMMONS DEMOCRACY**

Other commons-based movements, striving for an alternative ethos, are just getting started. Attempts to create a horizontal commons democracy include the Right to the City movement and other urban initiatives inspired by the French libertarian Marxist Henri Lefebvre. Right to the City has gained traction in South Africa with the Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) shackdwellers’ movement, which is active in a number of cities across the country, and in the German city of Hamburg, where it has inspired a network of squatters, tenants and artists. It has become a rallying point also in U.S. cities such as Miami and Boston, and a source of inspiration in India, where Rajapalaya Lake in central Bangalore has been the focus of a fight to maintain a livable urban commons in very crowded conditions.

## **EXPLORING THE IDEA OF A DECENTRALIZED ECO-DEMOCRACY**

The underlying principles of such institutions need to be based on a variety of forms of self-organization and collective ownership rights, which is exactly what Initiative 136 in Thessaloniki is attempting to achieve.

There are many other examples. The fishers of the Turkish port of Alanya manage their part of the global commons by allocating each fishing boat a clearly prescribed area of the Mediterranean according to the results

of a lottery. They then rotate from area to area: from September to January, every day, each boat moves east to the next location. From February to May they move west. All fishers get the same opportunity as the fish stocks

migrate. The system is collectively monitored and enforced. Problems are rare – and generally resolved in the local coffee house.

As Ostrom notes, “Alanya provides an example of a self-governed, common-property arrangement in which rules have been devised and modified by the participants themselves and also are monitored and enforced by them.” The co-operative self-management of a particular commons is likely to pay more attention to its long-term health and viability. The implications

Multiply such initiatives many times and root them in the plethora of different struggles currently being waged over the commons and you start to get a sense of radical democratic promise. While the term ‘commons’ has many meanings, both spiritual and philosophical, it is explored here mainly as a political project. The core strategy is to design institutional arrangements that move beyond State and market and put the commons back into the service of society as a whole.

Some struggles combine resistance and vision. In Quebec, 2012 witnessed a remarkable movement of students against the commodification of education, which put the besieged notion of free advanced education back on the public agenda. Their struggle, which helped to bring down a provincial government, could act as a template for those trying to recover the educational commons from the pressures of commercialization. In the 1990s there was a successful national fishers' strike in India that prevented the government of the time from handing over the Indian fishery to big trawler operators. Countless other examples, big and small, dot the daily press but are often just restricted to obscure websites.

Commons battles tend to gain attention when they precipitate or are part of some larger struggle that involves active confrontation with those in power. This is, however, really just the tip of the iceberg. If you examine the specialist literature you will discover that almost everywhere there are attempts to make the self-management of the commons a reality. There is an International Journal of the Commons which acts as a forum for debate about commons issues and case studies of successes and failures. A quick look through the table of contents provides

a sense of both the scope of the commons and of initiatives being taken to extend their democratic self-management. Here are but a few of the examples:

- ▶ *The commons in a multi-level world*
- ▶ *The European Union Baltic fishery*
- ▶ *Irrigation systems in southeastern Spain*
- ▶ *A new marine commons off the Chilean coast*
- ▶ *The cockles fishery in coastal Ecuador*
- ▶ *An environmental response to the globalizing forestry industry*
- ▶ *Southeast Asia: rewarding the upland poor for saving the commons*
- ▶ *Self-governance of the global microbial commons*
- ▶ *Icelandic health records*

This list provides evidence that the commons is not some obscure issue but one that runs in one way or another through the lives of most of the world's people, often on a daily basis. The scope is truly impressive. It also has a lot of complex nuts and bolts to it with which we need to get to grips. But it is a complexity we need to embrace, eschewing simple-minded monocultural

**MORE  
COOPERATION,  
LESS  
COMPETITION**

solutions in the process. This is an ongoing effort that will involve many.

Exploring all those efforts is beyond the scope of this essay. Here I just want to emphasize the peril and potential of the commons. It has the potential to become a new legal basis for the foundation of common rights to set against the threat of public-private partnerships. If this does not succeed, then we risk everything, not least our genetic make-up and that of the plants and animals with which we share the earth, being turned into corporate private property. The stakes are high.

The commons are connected to our sense of place, to our identities, livelihoods and self-expression – ultimately even to our survival as a species. This is a good place to start envisioning a radical democratic alternative that gives people a fundamental say in their individual and collective futures. As such, recasting our relationship with the commons should take pride of place as we build an alternative to capitalism. ■

# OSTROM'S PRINCIPLES FOR GOVERNING THE COMMONS

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**E**linor OSTROM was awarded the Nobel Prize for Economy in 2009 for her analysis of economic governance with a special focus on the commons, such as developed in “Governing the Commons” (1990). Demonstrating the success of local management of commons without any intervention from private or public authorities, she contributed to proving the positive effects of social organisation. Political scientist and economist, her interdisciplinary approach reflects in the seven principles she advances for organisation and management of the commons:

- ▶ **GROUP BOUNDARIES ARE CLEARLY DEFINED.**
- ▶ **RULES GOVERNING THE USE OF COLLECTIVE GOODS ARE WELL MATCHED TO LOCAL NEEDS AND CONDITIONS.**
- ▶ **MOST INDIVIDUALS AFFECTED BY THESE RULES CAN PARTICIPATE IN MODIFYING THE RULES.**
- ▶ **THE RIGHTS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO DEVISE THEIR OWN RULES IS RESPECTED BY EXTERNAL AUTHORITIES.**
- ▶ **A SYSTEM FOR MONITORING MEMBER'S BEHAVIOUR EXISTS; THE COMMUNITY MEMBERS THEMSELVES UNDERTAKE THIS MONITORING.**
- ▶ **A GRADUATED SYSTEM OF SANCTIONS IS USED.**
- ▶ **COMMUNITY MEMBERS HAVE ACCESS TO LOW-COST CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISMS.**
- ▶ **FOR CPRS THAT ARE PARTS OF LARGER SYSTEMS: APPROPRIATION, PROVISION, MONITORING, ENFORCEMENT, CONFLICT RESOLUTION, AND GOVERNANCE ACTIVITIES ARE ORGANISED IN MULTIPLE LAYERS OF NESTED ENTERPRISES**

# GOTEO. CROWDFUNDING THE COMMONS ADDING COLLECTIVE RETURNS TO INDIVIDUAL REWARDS

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## CROWDFUNDING + DISTRIBUTED COLLABORATION

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**G**oteo is a social network for crowdfunding and distributed collaboration (services, infrastructures, microtasks and other resources) encouraging the independent development of creative and innovative initiatives that contribute to the common good, free knowledge, and open code. The projects supported have social, cultural, scientific, educational, technological, or ecological objectives that generate new opportunities for the improvement of society and the enrichment of community goods and resources.

Goteo is part of an international trend of various emerging on and offline initiatives that are attempting to reconfigure the way in which we relate and progress both socially and economically, including crowdsourcing, peer-to-peer networks, microloans, complementary currencies, long tail economies, new forms of solidarity

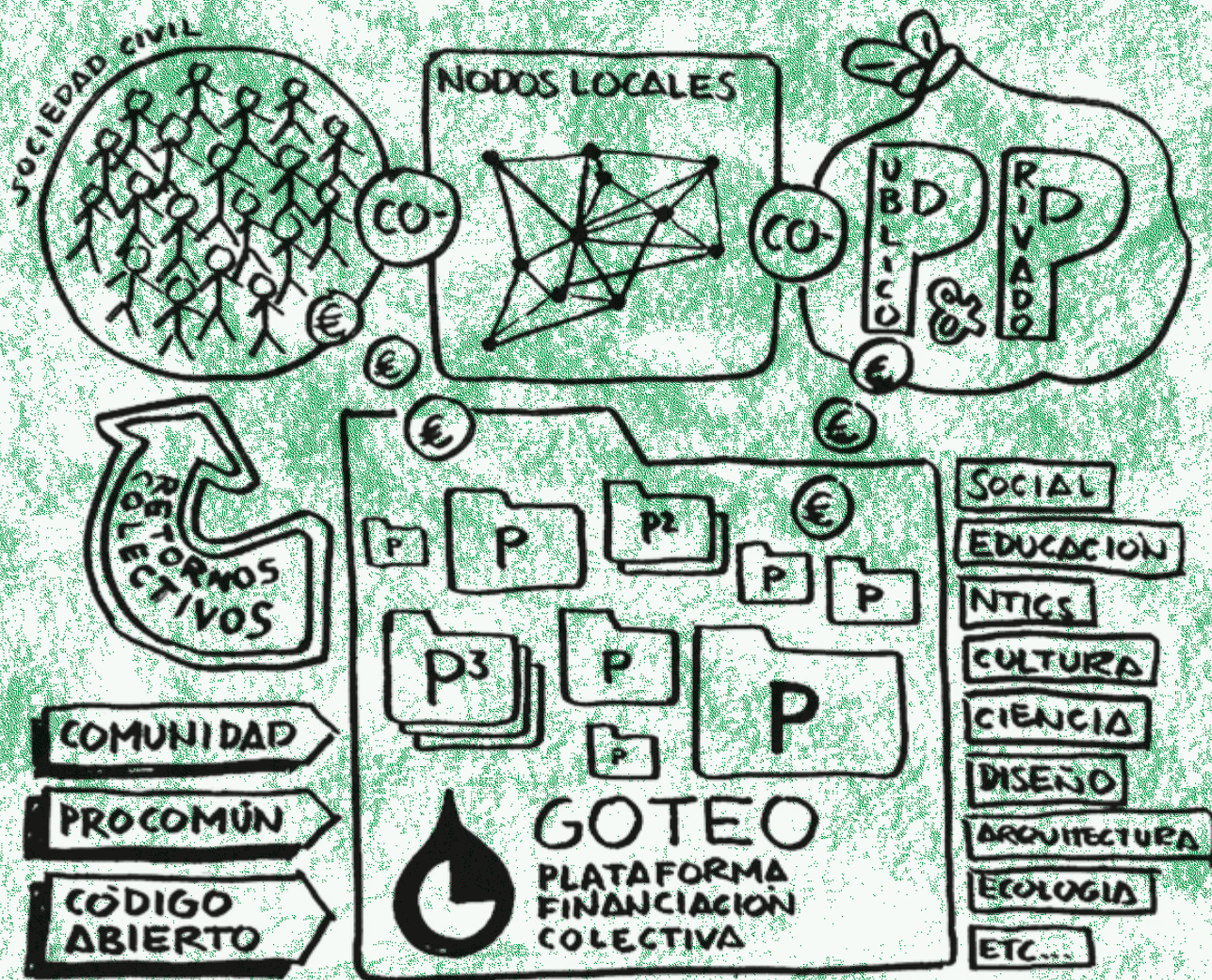
economies, free culture, and other ways of participating and socializing in a wide sense.

It is based on and inspired by a mixture of significant experiences with respect to crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter and micropayment platforms like Flattr, initiatives to support open web projects like those promoted by Mozilla, open licensing like Creative Commons, new registration platforms like Safe Creative and distributed economies around projects like open hardware.

Individuals, civic organisations, and public and private entities of all stripes, whose common focus is an interest in the development of a collective, open source, knowledge-based society, are called to participate on the platform. Goteo differs from other models of crowdfunding by positioning

itself as a social network composed of promoters, co-financers, and collaborators.

- **Promoters** choose a new model of collective financing and distributed collaboration, by giving their project, grounded on the values carried by Goteo, visibility, and by getting their potential community involved right from the beginning.
- **Co-financers** access a wide range of projects, designed, produced and/or distributed from a free and open source perspective, in which they contribute monetarily in exchange for collective returns and individual rewards.
- **Collaborators** participate in Goteo with resources, time, energy and skills, by helping concrete projects and the platform itself further the common good and achieve positive change in society.



**OPEN SOURCE = OPENNESS / NEUTRALITY / INDEPENDENCE**

**G**oteo is an initiative managed by the non-profit organisation Fundación Fuentes Abiertas [Open Source Foundation], ensuring the principles of openness, neutrality, transparency and independence are maintained through Goteo’s development and management “feeder capital” fund. The Foundation also promotes an experimentation laboratory, which is applied in turn for the benefit of the common good, open source code, and free knowledge in various social, cultural, and economic spheres. Goteo’s main promoter is Platoniq,

an international organisation of cultural producers and software developers, pioneer in the production and distribution of copyleft culture. Since 2001, Platoniq has worked on projects and activities where the social uses of information technology and networking are applied to the development of communication, self-training, and civic organisation. Noted among these projects are Burn Station, OpenServer, Banco Común de Conocimientos [Bank of Common Knowledge] and S.O.S (all are available on the online research platform YouCoop).

For Goteo’s development, Platoniq is fortunate to have an important support network, comprised of various entities, among others the Spanish Ministry of Culture, the Catalunya-National Council of Culture and Arts of Catalonia or ColaBoraBora, the Eutokia Social Innovation Center.

**Goteo was awarded the ECF’s European Democratic Citizenship Prize in the category NGO of the Year 2014.**

# **“RIGHT TO WATER”**

## **A COMMON FOR EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY**

Water is a common because it is vital to each and single one of us. Yet, it has been the object of large liberalisation waves these last year, threatening access of citizens and sustainability of the resource. A-M. Perret exposes the three demands of the Right to Water campaign.

**R**ight2Water” is the first European Citizens’ Initiative successful in reaching European Institutions after a long campaign which succeeded in gathering a total of 1,884,790 signatures. Its aim: implementing the human right to water and sanitation. However, this new right will not be effective without a change in mind-set of the European Commission, switching from a market-based approach focused on competition, to a rights-based approach focusing on the idea of commons and public services.

### **EUROPEAN CIVIC FORUM**

**The European Citizens Initiative that was launched in 2012 argues for the recognition of water as a fundamental right and common good: why did you feel the need to affirm this at European level?**

**ANNE-MARIE PERRET.** Our campaign should be seen as the regional follow-up of the process launched at international level: our aim is to achieve the recognition of the fundamental right to water such as recognised by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2010. Demanding this recognition at European level is very important for the effectivity of fundamental rights.

On the question of commons, nobody questions that water should be universally accessible, but the wording leaves too much room to suggest that water is not a common good. Indeed, at European level, in the directive establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, it is said that “water is not a commercial product like any other but, rather, a heritage which must be protected, defended and treated as such”. Unfortunately, the first paragraph of the directive does not start by saying that “water is a common good”, but that it “is not a commercial product like any other”, which means that although it might be submitted to exceptional limitations, it is still kept within the realm of commercial products. And this is precisely our point. Citizens and institutions need to realise that water is not a commodity, but a real common good, a universal good and a universal right. Too many politicians still consider it as a commodity.

We want to change that vision, by putting the first part of the definition, the fact that water is “a heritage which must be protected, defended and treated as such”, at the start of their thinking and their concern.

It is one thing to recognise a right to water. And it is a good thing, but it is not enough, because it will not become a reality if the organisation supporting it is not put in place. By this, I mean we need to decide who is in charge of managing water. As a common good, the resource itself and the human beings who need it win over private profit. That is not the case today.

**ECF. So the qualification of “common” is tightly linked to the way in which we manage the resource?**

**A-M.P.** Undoubtedly. Water is a common because it is vital to each and single one of us. Try not drinking for 3-4 days, your chances of survival are slim! Water is a fundamental human right our societies must ensure to all, but that will only happen if its provision falls under the rule of public services, because it is of general interest.

Even in Europe there are people who are still excluded, such as Roma communities in Central and Eastern Europe, but also in Spain, France... where distribution companies do not hesitate to cut off the water of households under financial pressure. For the so-called countries “in programme”, the main problem comes from the measures imposed by the “Troika”, because they push towards privatization,

**CITIZENS AND INSTITUTIONS NEED TO REALISE THAT WATER IS NOT A COMMODITY**

in spite of what the Commission might say. In Greece, for instance, some French private operators acting as multinationals want to privatize the water companies of Thessaloniki and Athens.

To protect the fundamental and universal right of access to water, we insist these public companies remain in public hands, the opposite scenario will only worsen the already dark reality in which one million Europeans do not have access to quality water and nearly 8 million lack access to proper sanitation, according to World Health Organisation data.

**ECF. Indeed, one of your demands concerns the stop of liberalisation of water services...**

**A-M.P.** Yes, because for us, the principle according to which water is a common is incompatible with the market and the competition rules that govern



### THE AUTHOR

**Anne-Marie Perret** is an active member of French Union Force Ouvrière (CGT-FO) since 1979, and President of the European Federation of Public Service Unions since 2005. During this last year, she has been chairing the Citizens Committee “Right 2 Water”, first successful European Citizens’ initiative.

it. Bottled water is case in point of this opposition. In a very strong statement, M. Peter Brabeck, Nestlé CEO, declared that “the one opinion which I think is extreme is represented by the NGO’S declaring water a public right, that means that as a Human Being, you should have a right to water. That’s an extreme solution. And the other view says that water is a foodstuff like any other and like any other foodstuff it should have a market value”<sup>1</sup>. You won’t be surprised if as campaigners of the ECI “right2water” we can’t agree with M. Brabeck.

What happened in countries like Pakistan or Nigeria? “To bottle its product, Nestlé busily dried up local underground springs that subsequently caused the village poor unable to buy the bottled water stolen from their springs to end up consuming contaminated water. Nestlé went on to extracting water from two deep wells in Bhati Dilwan village, forcing them to turn to bottled water. A similar story emerged from Nigeria where a single bottled water exceeds the average daily income of a Nigerian citizen”<sup>2</sup>.

Or in Fryeburg, Maine USA, where Nestlé wanted to pump water from a natural spring and sell it its bottles against the will of the inhabitants who simply wanted to protect their common? Let me tell you another crazy story, which represents the utmost limits of linear economy. The Fiji Water Company is pumping and shipping the most expensive water in the world while at least 30% of Fijian people have no access to drinkable water and still suffer

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEFL8EIXHaU>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.globalresearch.ca/privatization-of-water-as-an-owned-commodity-rather-than-a-universal-human-right/5378483>

**RATIONAL  
CONSUMPTION  
NEEDS TO BE  
INSTILLED  
IN OUR SOCIETIES**

diseases caused by contaminated water (typhoid, diarrheas). I got some more information about the price of this luxury product, consulting the Amazon website for France: 1 Liter/ €7.35 + €5.90 for shipping costs. Which is “low cost” compared with another website<sup>3</sup> where you can buy half a liter of this “water with the taste of paradise” (sic) for... €8.99!

If a conflict arises between corporations and citizens or national/local governments on the issue of water, the forces involved are far from balanced, as the Public Services International Research Unit of the University of Greenwich mentions it in a 2012 report: “local conflicts are more likely to be resolved in favour of corporate interest”.

That is why we believe all attempts to liberalise the water industry must be halted, and this issue has regained a vivid importance in the context of TTIP, CETA and TISA negotiations, the biggest transatlantic trade agreements of our time. One of the many concerns expressed regarding these agreements touches the Investor-State Dispute settlement procedure because it gives more than the impression that it will increase the power of multinationals at the expense of democracy and general interest, precisely because it hinders the State from regulating in the public interest.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.myamericanmarket.com/fr/fiji-water-eau-artesienne-naturelle-x4>

**1 LITER =  
7.35 EUR +  
5.90 EUR  
FOR SHIPPING  
COSTS**



**ECF.** Does this mean water would in the long run become free of cost?

**A-M.P.** We are not in favour of a gratuitous supply of water. A fundamental right means that there are also duties. Water is a scarce resource. As such, people must be aware that they can't waste it and that they should behave as responsible citizens, paying a fair fare for the access to fresh water even if the scarcity is not caused by households, who consume between 7 and 10% of available fresh water, but by industry, which uses around 22%, and agriculture, using up 40% of it. Water has a cost, and this cost needs to be shared by the citizens, only at a reasonable and affordable price, according to their needs and not those of the water provider companies. Sharing the cost also contributes to building the legitimacy of the common. We could imagine in the future that a limit for water consumption be set, and if it is exceeded, one has to pay extra, but we are certainly not at this stage yet.

**ECF.** What kind of legal measures do you expect from the Commission and EU Institutions in general to take on the basis of the initiative?

**A-M.P.** We have three demands. The first is that for the Commission to draft a new legislation stating that water is a human right and that all citizens in Europe should receive good water and sanitation. There are already two directives which could serve as basis for the new legislation: the framework directive from 2000 and the drinking water directive. During our meeting with Commissioner Sefcovic and the Commission's DGs, we also asked for the availability of good statistics on water and sanitation because the ones we use today only come from the WHO, despite the fact that Eurostat, the statistical Office of the European

Union, could and should perform a relevant survey on this issue at European level.

Our second demand is to stop the liberalisation of water services, and the third one is to make a bigger effort to achieve universal access to water and sanitation all over the world. For all this, we need Institutions to switch from a system governed by the rules of the market to one based on human rights. In this sense, we hope for a kind of revolution in mentalities!

**ECF.** What do you suggest to support this legislation in a long run perspective to change the idea that water is a commodity?

**A-M.P.** Education is at the core of the problem. We are still affected by droughts, even in Europe. As citizens, we need to be taught about this issue, which goes hand in hand with sustainable water resource management and the protection of water, and a good level of sanitation for our own health. Educating to the idea of water as a common good needs to be put in the larger frame of sustainable development citizens need to become aware of to protect in their day-to-day life. Rational consumption needs to be instilled in our societies. This was one

**ALL ATTEMPTS  
TO LIBERALISE  
THE WATER  
INDUSTRY MUST  
BE HALTED**

of the key messages sent out by the United Nations General Assembly during a debate last February: "Water, sanitation and sustainable energy are at the core of sustainable development and the overarching goal of poverty eradication. (...) "Achieving universal access to safe drinking water, basic sanitation and modern energy services is one of the greatest multifaceted development challenges confronting the world today".

So more generally, we must imperatively switch from downcycling linear economy, characterized by waste, competition, added value, standardized production... to an upcycling circular economy, based on collaboration, ecosystems, shared value, local and adapted production. Only then might we pretend to take effective measures to face the challenge of climate change, to prevent from waste and contamination of nature (i.e. fracking, use of pesticides...).

**ECF.** Water is a common, and therefore a democratic issue. With the campaign “right2water”, you seized the opportunity of using one of the instruments for European participative democracy provided for by EU treaties. How would you describe this process?

**A-M.P.** When you engage in an ECI, what’s more in the first one ever, you have no idea what obstacles are ahead of you: the ECI is not a simple petition and needless to say the strict rules it must obey will discourage more than one. Working between the national and transnational level is not an easy task, especially when collecting signatures, as the laws are not only complex, but different from one country to another. That is why, in hindsight of this nonetheless fabulous experience, we would recommend these rules to be harmonised and simplified for the ECI to stand a chance in the future, an aspect which the Commission did take into consideration during our audition on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2014.

Another problem we were confronted to was almost a political one, notwithstanding we are citizens and not politicians. All along the advocacy period of our campaign, we faced the deeply rooted misunderstanding, and even mistrust in Europe of the people we went forward to. So although we were campaigning for a change in European policies, we ended up convincing about the mere existence of the Union, since we believe the problem needs to be addressed at EU level.

We also realised that internet, which played a huge role in the campaign, and on which the ECI is almost completely based as the time frame is very short, is not the miracle tool that will allow you to achieve the hoped result. Indeed, another big



**SHARING THE COST  
ALSO CONTRIBUTES  
TO BUILDING  
THE LEGITIMACY  
OF THE COMMON**

problem came from the online signing, namely due to the fact that some people refused to sign because they had to give their personal data. We therefore asked Commissioner Sefcovic, then in charge of the ECI, to lighten the burden in this respect and to give an appropriate solution to the problem. It was also very hard to gather signatures because of the novelty of the process, as “right2water” was the first initiative and many people in our countries did not know about this new kind of petition. But all in all, we still did manage to collect 1.68 million valid signatures (1.88 million in total).

For an initiative to succeed, citizens will need a solid structure and dedicated people to support it, an activity which, once again, given the time frame, could almost be assimilated to full time job. It also implies significant financial resources to manage the website, communicate, ensure the basic administrative tasks... For these reasons, I believe the procedures as they exist today, link ECIs to organised civil society, whether NGOs or Unions, but to existing structures. Organised civil society is therefore crucial to the mere existence of initiatives, which cannot be supported by individual citizens alone given the complexity, and must be in

constant discussion with Institutions in order to implement the appropriate procedural evolutions.

**ECF. Do you think your voice and requests have been heard?**

**A-M.P.** We received considerable support from members of the Parliament of different political origin, which was very encouraging, and on the day of the audition, the room was full for a discussion that lasted over three hours! The first concrete result directly linked to the ECI was in February 2014, during the revision of the “concession” directive, which excluded water from it, a first step in recognising water as a common. We are confident that our idea is spreading among citizens, municipalities in charge of water management, civil society and institutions. During the ECI Day organised by European Economic and Social Committee, Commissioner Sefcovic underlined that in spite of the Commission’s response of 19<sup>th</sup> March – which recognises the legitimacy of our initiative, without guaranteeing the legislative follow-up we request – does not mean the end of the impulse, but rather a first step in the process for the ambitious change we demand, backed up by 2 million European citizens.

**CITIZENS AND THEIR RIGHTS COME BEFORE A PRIVATE COMPANY'S RIGHTS TO PROFIT**

**THE MOST IMMEDIATE REACTION TO THIS CAMPAIGN IS TO BE FOUND AT LOCAL LEVEL**

The most immediate reaction to this campaign is to be found at local level, and is part of the second step, which continues to feed “right2water”. A first significant example of solidarity for our cause comes from Greece. On 18<sup>th</sup> May 2014, a popular referendum was organised in Thessaloniki on keeping water management in public hands. Out of 280000 voters, 98% expressed their voice against the privatisation of their public owned company. It was later corroborated by an Athenian Court of Justice. A second example comes from French Courts. On 25<sup>th</sup> September 2014, the Tribunal d’Instance of Soissons sentenced the Lyonnaise des Eaux/Suez Environnement, which manages water supplies, for having cut off a single mother of two children during the summer, thus violating the fundamental right to water guaranteed by article L-115-3 of the Code de l’action sociale et des familles. This case law is the living proof that a rotation in logic is possible: because water is a common and not a commodity, the citizens and their rights come before a private company’s rights to profit.

Put together, these examples also prove the positive dynamics of European democracy, translating European movements for change into local action and vice-versa.

I believe examples like these will accumulate and nourish the hope until it becomes reality. ■

**Right2Water was awarded the ECF’s European Democratic Citizenship Prize in the category Campaign of the Year 2014.**

# RECAPTURING RELUCTANT RADICALS

## WHEN POLITICAL DISENCHANTMENT BECOMES A COMMON ISSUE

To recapture reluctant radicals, using populist votes to express their discontent and disengagement from their community, understanding the origin of this disenchantment is the first step of a wider reflection on how to renew democratic dialogue.

Over the past two years, national and local elections in France, Italy and Sweden, as well as the recent European Parliament elections, have shown that there is growing discontent with mainstream politics and politicians. A range of populist parties, including the French Front National, the Italian Five Star Movement, the Sweden Democrats and UKIP, have seen their support surge at local, national and European elections and in some cases have gained control over municipalities. These results are often solely read and interpreted as a worrying phenomenon of a political nature. But through our research we have found that, in reality, this is a problem that goes well beyond the electoral choices of voters across Europe; it is rather a manifestation of citizens' discontent and disengagement from their community at a much deeper level. We live in

a complex world characterised by rapid changes and increasing levels of uncertainty. At times this can be challenging and a common defence mechanism is to step out of the realm of civic involvement; consequently community engagement is almost inexistent.

Since September 2011, Counterpoint has been working on the project Recapturing Europe's Reluctant Radicals, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research aimed at identifying the different layers of support for populist parties across Europe. The project has challenged the common assumption that support for populist parties comes exclusively from those considered the 'usual suspects' – male voters who tend to be young and unemployed and who have openly racist views. Instead, we argue that the vote for populist parties has increased over the last decade as a result of the support of other groups within the electorate who find populist parties attractive. These groups of voters feel let down and ignored by mainstream politics but are still uncommitted to populists. Thus, they can and should be brought back into the fold.

**A COMMON DEFENCE MECHANISM IS TO STEP OUT OF THE REALM OF CIVIC INVOLVEMENT**

In order to bring these voters back, a contextual understanding of their environment is necessary. One that explores the cultural and historical dynamics which sparked grievances and made populism seem an attractive solution to them.

### **WHO ARE THE RELUCTANT RADICALS AND WHAT MOTIVATES THEM? A BRIEF SUMMARY OF OUR FINDINGS**

For the first stage of the "reluctant radicals" project, we conducted an in-depth analysis of electoral data on voters for populist parties, including the European Social Survey and national election studies from the UK, France, the Netherlands and Italy. The ensuing report, 'Recapturing the Reluctant Radical: how to win back Europe's populist vote', showed that support for populist parties can be divided into two main groups: committed radicals (those who vote for populist parties and identify with them) and reluctant radicals (supporters of populist parties who do not identify with them), along with so-called potential radicals (those who have not voted for these parties but who find some of their ideas appealing). We found that reluctant radicals make up a large proportion of the support for

**EDUCATION APPEARS TO BE THE FEATURE THAT DISTINGUISHES THE RELUCTANT RADICALS MOST RELIABLY**

populist parties: often at least half of the supporters of right wing populist parties are reluctant.

Our study included the following countries: Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the UK and Italy. Some of our results confirmed earlier assumptions by other experts, but other findings departed from the consensus. For instance, we found that the gender gap is narrower than one might think. In our study, men are more likely to be reluctant radicals than women only in Germany and Finland. But in countries like the Netherlands and Norway the gender gap is small. In France, women are more likely to be potential radicals than men.

In line with other research, we found that in nearly all countries in our study, anti-immigration views increase the likelihood of being a reluctant radical. Distrust in parliament is also an important factor in Germany, Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands and Norway.

Contrary to what has been suggested by parts of the media, the economic crisis has not uniformly triggered more votes for populist parties. We found in our study that there is a relationship between reluctant support for populist parties and unemployment only in Germany. Across all countries, education, rather than gender, age or unemployment, is the most consistent predictor of reluctant radicalism. Education appears to be the feature that distinguishes the reluctant radicals most reliably.

### **MAJOR GRIEVANCES OF FRENCH, FINNISH AND DUTCH POPULIST VOTERS**

Our analysis of electoral data also looked at the main reasons why reluctant radicals had cast a vote for a populist party. Based on our findings we labelled French, Dutch and Finnish reluctant radicals as ‘disconnected’, ‘nostalgic’ and ‘alienated’ respectively.

What characterises the French reluctant radicals is their disconnection from almost every aspect of French life. They are geographically, educationally and politically removed from the mainstream and thus feel a permanent sense of insecurity, in combination with low levels of interest in politics. The reluctant radicals are also politically disconnected, tending to have low levels of interest in politics.

What characterises the Dutch reluctant radical is nostalgia for a particular, Dutch version of consensus politics (orderly, implicitly codified, pillarised) – and rooted in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Dutch politics – combined with disdain for the current political elite and an unresolved attitude towards minorities in the context of a fluid party system. Right-wing populism in the Netherlands is shaped by the particularities (and recent history) of the Dutch political system and context, and



### **THE AUTHOR**

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[www.counterpoint.uk.com](http://www.counterpoint.uk.com)

**MANY PEOPLE  
BELIEVE THEIR  
OPINION NO  
LONGER  
MATTERS**

in part by the peculiarities of the Party for Freedom (PVV) itself. Dutch citizens are disillusioned with the establishment and have low levels of trust in parliament.

An appetite for a different kind of politics and difficulties in processing the rapid transformation of Finland in the past two decades seem to define Finnish reluctant radicals. While reluctant and potential radicals in France and the Netherlands are strongly motivated by anti-immigration attitudes, in Finland it appears that different factors are at play. The most common reason the Finnish reluctant radicals gave for voting for the True Finns was to bring political change. We interpret the emergence and popularity of the True Finns as the product of both a ‘crisis of modernity’ and, potentially, a ‘crisis of masculinity’ shaped by the particular Finnish context.

### **DISILLUSIONMENT AND DISENGAGEMENT BEYOND THE POLITICAL SPHERE**

To complete the portrait of the reluctant radicals we partnered with organisations and experts in France, the Netherlands and Finland and held a series of consultations. Our aim was to hear first-hand, detailed information about specific events, dynamics and issues that have, over the past few years, generated tensions and discontent among the citizens of those cities where populist parties are successful. On the one hand, this exercise confirmed our previous findings on

disconnection, nostalgia and alienation being the main drivers of reluctant radicalism in France, Netherlands and Finland respectively. But on the other, we found that citizens' stepping away from mainstream politics was more the tip of the iceberg than the bulk of the problem.

When inviting citizens to participate in our consultations, our partners often found them unwilling to even acknowledge the fact that collective discussions might be a first step towards airing grievances and addressing concerns. Even when most of our gatherings were pitched in non-political terms and instead invited citizens to come and share their views on how to improve theirs and their fellow citizens' lives, they were not interested in attending.

This was particularly the case in the Netherlands and in France. In the former we found that many people believe their opinion no longer matters – they are convinced that ordinary citizens have lost all the power they once had to influence any local dynamics or shape their communities and neighbourhoods. It would appear that, where consensus and joint efforts were once the driving force, selfishness and self-interest are now the rule.

In France, on the other hand, where the State was traditionally the guarantor of people's wellbeing, citizens have gradually felt that such an important leadership role has been weakened – many think that the French State has failed. This has had an impact on the

**CITIZENS NEED  
TO BE RE-ENGAGED  
WITH COMMUNITY LIFE  
AT A VERY BASIC LEVEL**

**CITIZENS'  
STEPPING AWAY  
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MORE THE TIP  
OF THE ICEBERG  
THAN THE BULK  
OF THE PROBLEM**

quality of everyday lives, both in terms of access to basic services and with regard to the perception of opportunities and hope. It has encouraged citizens to relinquish their civic duties and suppress any desire to improve their shared circumstances.

What this tells us is that citizens need to be re-engaged with community life at a very basic level. Unless civic life is reignited, political options that threaten the stability of democratic institutions and the openness of societies are likely to continue gaining ground.

So how can the risks posed by populist parties be averted? Based on our research findings and the citizen engagement work that we have carried out in the second phase of our project, we are convinced that this endeavour requires the involvement of both policy makers and politicians on the one hand and, on the other, of citizens themselves. The former should listen carefully to the concerns of reluctant radicals, focus in particular on addressing educational inequalities, and seek to regain trust among their electorate. And policy-makers need to reach out to citizens and provide the space and time to have difficult conversations, whether it is in the form of public consultations or other modes of deliberative democracy. ■

# IDEAS FOR A NEW NARRATIVE

## A NARRATIVE FOR EMPOWERMENT

by Daphne Büllsbach, Citizenship and Democracy Director at European Alternatives

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**A** ‘citoyen’ per definition is someone, in the spirit of the age of Enlightenment, who cares for his or her community, respecting the common good. It is someone who takes charge of finding solutions (local to global) independently and puts them into practice. Naturally, he or she inspires others to do the same and plants the seeds for larger societal change.

This process is at the basis of social movements or citizens’ initiatives. However it is overlooked by current political parties and institutions. Ahead of the European elections in May 2014, we set out to make this process more visible and travel to where people around Europe enact their citizenship on a daily basis.

### **IMPRESSIONS FROM ALONG THE ROUTES OF TRANSEUROPA CARAVANS**

European Alternatives is based in many cities across Europe. We have offices in Rome, Paris and Berlin and local groups active around the continent in a network of individuals, organisations and initiatives. Taking this as a starting point, we collaboratively mapped initiatives, ideas and local struggles to understand the bigger picture of what we call civil society. Arriving at a comprehensive map of the tremendous richness of activities across Europe is no easy feat, especially considering how many of these activities and initiatives are far from the spotlight. So we chose to visit places of action where we felt that a different conversation was taking place:

from the migrant squats of Calais to the student markets of Canterbury, or the Roma camps of Pata Rât.

We endeavoured to engage in that conversation by travelling across 18 countries during 10 days on 6 simultaneous tours, talking to over 2000 people across the continent, just a month before the largest elections the EU has seen so far.

We deepened the interaction with the Citizens Manifesto<sup>1</sup> and its policy proposals, discussing and finding concrete ways of putting proposals into action. Along the route we engaged Members of Parliament and candidates into this process to bridge the connection to decision-makers and those closer to policy-making in Brussels. We will continue the conversations that have started and we will continue to understand how local solutions can be enacted on a larger, European scale.

What we saw along the journey was both astonishing and well-known. Voices which are not being heard by politicians, needs which are not being met by States, solutions which are not being supported by institutions. The articles in this publication continue the conversation, they synthesise the ideas and portray the initiatives we met along the routes, interweaving stories from England with Southern Italy, Eastern Poland with Southern Greece. The result is a narrative of citizens’ participation and action in places where solutions do not seem available and are far from ready-made. It is a narrative of empowerment. ■

<sup>1</sup> Read the Citizens Manifesto (available in 17 languages) on [citizenspact.eu/citizens-manifesto](http://citizenspact.eu/citizens-manifesto)



# TOWARDS A POSITIVE NARRATIVE ON CITIZENSHIP

Interview with Oonagh Aitken, Volonteur Europe President

**“W**hat do we mean by common good principles? What do we need to do to make them real?”. British civil society organisations ask the questions and launch “A Call to Action for the Common Good” campaign. Oonagh Aitken tells us more about it.

**EUROPEAN CIVIC FORUM** The campaign you are launching is “A Call to Action for the Common Good for Europe”. Do you believe our societies have lost the sense of common good?

**OONAGH AITKEN** The way in which our societies have been governed over the last decades has allowed individualism and competitiveness... influence decision-making processes. These “values” unfortunately, have proven their inability to face the challenges with which we are now confronted: the economic crisis has led to a social and demographic one, and we see a democratic deficit at all levels, not just the European level. However, in this time, many people have also become aware of the fact that the “wicked” problems of the 21st Century predate the financial crisis. In this context, alternatives have emerged, alternative ways of doing economy, politics... alternatives which revitalise the common good. So it still exists and citizens are aware of it, as expressed recently when the current UK government attempted to dismantle the National Health Service, but this idea of the common good needs to be bound-up with thinking about everybody’s wellbeing. It needs to dissociate itself completely from individualistic and competitive discourse

**ECF.** One of the ideas suggested is to develop a positive narrative on citizenship. How would this support the common good?

**O.A.** The idea is to promote the strengths and assets citizens already have, rather than defining people by their needs in a negative way. What’s more, this negative rhetoric is and has been, very harmful as it fuels sentiments of mistrust and xenophobia. In its relation to the common good in particular, it focuses on what is negative because it stems from an individualistic ideology. But a “this is mine” reasoning is incompatible with the common good, precisely because it is common! Being

a citizen, even though it is a personal status, essentially means the belonging to a given community. So when we speak of “a positive narrative about citizenship”, we mean putting the person as member of a community at the heart of the project we set up for the future. The positive narrative is a hopeful narrative about citizenship and engagement in community based on values such as solidarity, respect for human rights, equality, empowerment... and adding value to these ideas by optimising their potential via common understanding.

**ECF.** Will seeing citizens as belonging to their local communities in the first place, affect their relationship with the State?

**O.A.** Citizens need to be put at the centre of decision-making. For this reason, finding the common good includes loosening or at least changing the relationship between the State and the citizen, shifting from a top down system to one of horizontality, where we all do our bit. The benefits of such a dynamic are numerous, but most of all, it ensures decisions are taken about what citizens really want and need, and because these decisions are taken directly by the citizens concerned, citizens will trust the process and the implementation of the decisions.

**ECF.** What is the European dimension of a campaign led by British civil society?

**O.A.** The European dimension of the common good is about applying common good principles to European issues.. Indeed, it also develops in a shift in understanding, taking an issue, a concept – which is traditionally looked at from one point of view, a negative one – and looking at it from a positive perspective. *I.e.*, focusing on the advantages rather than negative effects. Take immigration for instance, which plays a significant role at EU level. From a negative point of view, you only hear about illegal immigration, how immigrants steal our jobs... but if you take that same issue and put under a positive light, you’ll see how migration enriches societies, teaches them respect, diversifies jobs... That is a question which is no longer national, but reveals the need for a narrative on the European common good in the context of European citizenship. ■

**In this  
context,  
what role for  
civil society?**

**What does  
it mean  
and take  
to challenge  
policy making  
with citizens'  
concerns?**

**3**

**FROM  
GRASS  
ROOTS  
UP**

**LOOKING FOR  
THE COMMON GOOD**

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**E**

urope is a two-way road: what happens in the arenas of decision-making and is later implemented at local level must be the result of a mature reflection, guided by the principle of subsidiarity, on what can be better done at EU level for the benefit of all. But paramount to that first dimension of subsidiarity, it also means that decisions must reflect and address citizens' needs and concerns. It

is in this second dimension that civil society has not only the potential, so long as it seizes its opportunities, to influence the political agenda, but also the responsibility to work towards social and institutional change.

Examples of active citizenship abound, at the grassroots, which transform the way in which public services are provided. When

institutions fail to put the common good at the center of the concerns and install the means to ensure its optimal protection, when the State is not able anymore to provide the minimum of public services on which rests part of its legitimacy, citizens' movements recreate solidarity chains as substitute to the State's failure. When institutions fail to deliver a positive and inclusive narrative on our societies' future, citizens organise themselves in deliberative forums.

Learning from grassroots responses to the deficiencies faced by society during the crisis, how can civil society now effectively influence policy thinking and making? How can the energy created by the renewal of horizontal citizenship provide a new impulse for vertical relations between citizens and institutions? Can it transform the role of civil society, going from being a mediator between citizens and institutions to becoming a strong political actor challenging the existing institutions? How must it renew itself to strengthen its role? ■

# RECONNECTING INSTITUTIONS AND GRASSROOTS

## THE ROLE OF ORGANISED CIVIL SOCIETY AS FACILITATOR

Are networks the solution to the problems faced today by representative democracy today, giving grassroots the possibility of interacting directly with Institutions? Reality proves less evident, revealing numerous dynamics, calling organised civil society to play a key role in the reassessment of our forms of representation.

In the last decades grassroots movements have come again on the stage of public action with new power and strength provided by internet. Paul Mason, speaking about the Tunisian and Egyptian movements said: “Six months ago, in the context of Tunisia and Egypt, I wrote that the social media networks had made “all propaganda instantly flammable”. But the most important fact is: not for the first time in 2011, the network has defeated the hierarchy”.

In public opinion is emerging the idea that “people” thanks to networks are able to self-organise in a world without hierarchies. On the website OpenDemocracy we found the following analysis: “In March this year, Compass Chair Neal Lawson and former Danish Culture Minister Uffe Elbæk declared the world to be flat. They were not confirming the suspicions of dubious mediaeval geologists, but rather trumpeting the arrival of a

paradigm shift in which “the old icebergs of State and corporation are dissolving into a fluid sea where action only becomes meaningful in concert with others.” Driven by digital technology, the changes in the ways that people interact with the world are profound, and demand revolutions in how we constitute our politics.”

From these ideas, it seems that digital networks are the solution to the old problem of representative democracy: people give rise to grassroots movements and can take the power with the support of social networks.

But is this completely true? Is a world without hierarchies really possible? Are social networks really flat?

### **NETWORKS ARE NOT FLAT**

Starting from this latter point, we can state that networks are not flat: there are actors that are more central with respect to others; networks have a core and peripheries; actors gain or lose their status (or prestige) in the networks, there are stars, hubs, brokers, gatekeepers... They are a very complex system that connect and disconnect people at the same time.

They only activate links that are valuable for the network’s functioning and drop the links that are not useful or redundant. Moreover, digital networks reproduce the same inequalities of the real world through digital divide. The reasons behind these inequalities are not the classical ones, although they are strongly related to income, level of education, census and age. Large parts of the population are excluded from (and by) digital democracy. Hence, networks are not the panacea to cure all the diseases of democracy due to a lack of representativeness and legitimacy of institutions.

**INSTITUTIONS NEED TO BE REALLY AND HONESTLY OPEN TO DIALOGUE**

### **RECOGNITION AND DIALOGUE**

From this point of view, in order to bring the instances and issues supported by grassroots movements into the public debate and into the institutional agenda, there is a need for third bodies that intermediate between institutions and grassroots. In the last decades, we have observed institutions having different behaviors with respect to citizen movements. Very often, institutions ignore many of these movements as they are very small and local. When they are sufficiently large, institutions cannot ignore, but must recognize them, and usually adopt some measures to contrast them. A common way to do that consists in delegitimization by labeling their issues like old fashioned, reactionary, or classifying some movements as affected by the “Nimby syndrome”. The effect is isolation with respect to public opinion

by using the traditional communication media. This kind of institutional reaction makes grassroots movements ineffective.

On the other hand, sometimes it happens that institutions are open to dialogue with grassroots movements. They organise auditions aiming at political concertation, even if, we have to note that often, these are false auditions wanting to give the impression of open participation, but only the impression. Very rarely grassroots movement issues have brought forward in the public agenda.

But at the same time, the behavior of grassroots movements themselves does not always facilitate dialogue with institutions. Very often, people belonging to movements try to contrast



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institutions or just aim at opposing them. They propose ideas without being open to mediation. In other cases, they are not interested in having any relationship with political levels because they are interested only in the initiatives that they carry. This is the case of associations involved in actions for their own local communities. Only in few cases do such movements focus on the possibility to cooperate with institutions accepting compromises.

Many examples of such grassroots movement whose actions are not so effective can be found in recent Italian history: they were born around some idea,

involve a large amount of people, but obtain very few results. This is the case for example of the *Popolo Viola* (the purple people) or the *Girotondini* (people of human circles). Another typical example of grassroots movements is the *NO-TAV* (people fighting against the construction of the high capacity railway between Lyon and Turin). This movement carries on a mix of public discussions, pacific occupations and sometimes violent protests. However, they have been classified as NIMBY protests, against the future and economic growth, and Institutions have not helped with their alternating approach, ranging from dialogue to military occupation.

A different story is told by the *Movimento 5 stelle* (five stars movement): it was born as grassroots movement sponsored by a digital platform. At the very beginning, there were a lot of “Meet up” clubs discussing and organizing civil actions at local level. These “meet ups” were then spread all over Italy and started organizing civil lists for mayor elections, turning the movement into a real national (and European) political party. Of course, this evolution was not without criticisms, in terms of leadership or internal democracy and participation. However, the M5S story reminds us that there is no crisp distinction between institutions, civil society and grassroots movements.

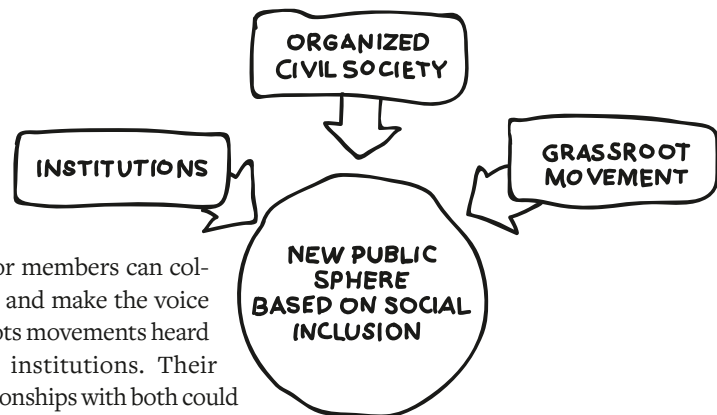
### **ORGANISED CIVIL SOCIETY AS INTERMEDIATE BODY**

Given the above discussion, in our opinion, organised civil society plays a central role in connecting institutions and grassroots movements, acting as intermediate body. They can use their position to facilitate relationships between these two worlds. Organisations, associations,

third sector members can collect issues and make the voice of grassroots movements heard by public institutions. Their good relationships with both could help our entire society to be inclusive of all instances, all opinions, working for a resolution of social conflicts deriv-

ing from systematic exclusion from the public debate of needs and ideas supported by minorities. This mediating action is relevant especially in

this moment of economic crisis to preserve the cohesion of European societies, where we are observing the birth and rebirth of new and old populisms, separatisms and nationalisms. Of course, this role is essential not because it is functional to the maintenance of the European order as it is now, but it is right and could help the pacific evolution and renewal of European institutions and nation States, of European integration policy that should not be only economic based, but should be also integration of social protection, of rights, of cultures, of citizens...



Of course, like in the picture, the three wheels should move in the right directions and cooperate. If one wheel doesn't work properly, the whole mechanism stops. From this metaphor, in order to ensure a cohesive and inclusive society aimed at reaching the well-being of all its citizens, this mediation to be effective needs the will of all involved parties. Institutions need to be really and honestly open to dialogue; organisations of civil society need to be flexible, permeable from the bottom and influential towards the top. But grassroots movements also have to do their part. People from movements need to *move* towards the organisations of the civil society without changing their nature of horizontal, spontaneous and democratic movements, but should also remove obstacles for effective dialogue. Just to give some examples, grassroots movements avoid leadership, organisation and tend to be radical in their ideas. However, they must also be careful of internal anarchy and isolation. They should adopt some different form of leadership, for example having diffused leaderships, democratic mechanism of decision-making. These would allow to have clear instances to support and people that can be representative of the movements and that can then be included in the policy-making processes.

**THERE IS A NEED FOR THIRD BODIES THAT INTERMEDIATE BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS AND GRASSROOTS**



## **THE CONDITIONS OF RECIPROCAL TRUST**

In our opinion, in order to remove these obstacles and to have open organisations, a reciprocal trust is needed. Without trusty relationships, it is not possible to cooperate, to find common positions and ideas and in particular, it is not possible to delegate representation to others. To build this fundamental trust, people belonging to different organisations and institutions should meet and get to know each other. In one word, they should be connected. In this view, the idea of network comes up again, but with a different meaning. We are here thinking about inter-organisational networks made up by people from different hierarchical levels but that are personally connected among each other. In other words, to construct network that are effective, we believe this should be done in a “scientific” way. Indeed, very often, such kinds of networks connect people in a pure formal way, without constructing true personal relationships able to establish trust. In other cases, the connected people are not able to influence

the behaviors and the choices of the organisations which they belong to, *i.e.* networks connect peripheral persons.

For these reasons, in our understanding, in order to create effective links among organisations, a preliminary analysis of the networks inside each organisation should be done. It is necessary to find the central actors, the brokers, the isolated actors (if they are present), the gatekeepers... It is important to discover the core and the periphery of an organisation, and then to connect persons lying close to the core of the networks (usually it is more effective to connect people closely connected to the network “stars”, instead of directly connecting stars). In order to do that, social network analysis methods and strategies should be adopted. These methods allow us to discover what these networks look like (small world, preferential attachment, random graphs); what are the roles and positions of people in terms of relational patterns; what are the network status that people have and if these correspond to the status in the organisation.

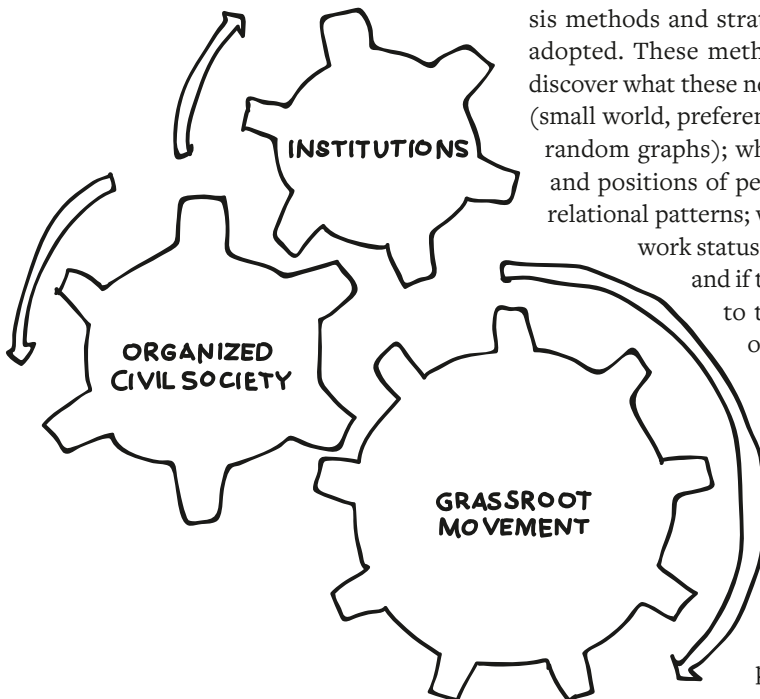
The construction of inter-organisational networks and of trusty relationships inside these networks could promote a joint

**PROMOTE A JOINT  
TRIPLE MOTION OF  
INSTITUTIONS, CITIZENS'  
ORGANISATIONS AND  
MOVEMENTS TOWARDS  
A NEW PUBLIC SPHERE**

triple motion of institutions, citizens’ organisations and movements towards a new public sphere at local, national and European level.

Of course in the construction of this new public sphere, there are other parties that should also interact. For example, the new and the old media should take their part, but to this issue a complete discussion should be devoted.

Among all the other relevant actors, here, I would mention the academic world. Indeed Universities could represent a place where institutions, civic organisations and grassroots movements meet and where new ideas find scientific foundations and acknowledgments. In our opinion, in light of the current research funding system (both at national and European level) that supports almost exclusively the ideas in line with mainstream researches, civil society and grassroots movement should cooperate with researchers in promoting new ideas and new research fields into the public debate. In one word, it is necessary to break the isolation that the involved actors sometimes experience by moving (and sometime mediating) towards common positions in a large network of personally connected people coming from different worlds. Only these kinds of networks could be able to contrast other more powerful networks, such as international lobbies. ■



# CAN NGOS BUILD PEOPLE'S POWER OR HAVE WE LOST OUR WAY?

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by Danny Sriskandarajah

**The corporatization of civil society has tamed our ambition; too often it has made us agents rather than agitators of the system. To formulate a new paradigm and an alternative model to the current narrative, we need to put the voice and actions of people back at the heart of our work.**

Last week, I co-signed perhaps the most important letter of my career<sup>1</sup>. It was an open provocation to my colleagues, to the members of our organization, to all those who, like me, earn their living in the civil society sector.

CIVICUS, the organization I lead, exists to strengthen civil society and citizen action throughout the world. Yet, I put my name to an open letter that is deeply critical of this sector; that says that much of our work has begun to reinforce the social, economic and political systems that we once set out to transform; that we have become too institutionalized, too professionalized, co-opted into systems and networks in which we are being outwitted and out-manoeuvred.

<sup>1</sup> <http://blogs.civicus.org/civicus/2014/08/06/an-open-letter-to-our-fellow-activists-across-the-globe-building-from-below-and-beyond-borders/#more-1750>

During my first year at CIVICUS, I flew thousands of miles around the world nominally 'taking part', as a representative of civil society, in the machinery of global governance. With each passing conference, the uneasy feeling intensified that my colleagues and I were achieving little more than a tick in somebody else's box. Feeding into this system -- and moulding our work around it -- takes up too much of our time and too many of our resources for scant evidence of real social change. More worryingly, our institutionalized approach is actively buttressing a status quo that keeps too many on the losing end of globalization.

Often overly reliant on State funding, we have allowed our work -- our ambitions even -- to become constrained by donor requirements, by the need to avoid biting the hand that feeds us. Where once a spirit of volunteerism was the lifeblood of the sector, many NGOs today look and behave like multinational corporations. The largest of them employ thousands of people around the world and their annual budgets run into hundreds of millions. They have corporate style hierarchies and super-brands. With such extensive infrastructure to maintain, the inherent agility and innovation of peoples' movements has moved beyond our grasp. Saving the world has become big business.

And all this matters because we are losing the war; the war against poverty, climate change and social injustice. Many courageous, inspirational people and organizations are fighting the good fight. But too many of us -- myself included -- have become detached from the people and movements that drive real social and



## THE AUTHOR

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political change. The corporatization of civil society has tamed our ambition; too often it has made us agents rather than agitators of the system.

Our intention in publishing this letter was not to berate, but to spark a debate; to challenge all of us to engage in re-configuring, re-imagining and re-energising civil society. A first and small step was to host a Twitter conversation<sup>2</sup> responses to the ideas expressed in our letter. And it would seem that many civil society activists around the world share our concerns. Again and again people spoke of an overreliance on particular funding streams, on the stultifying effect of our organisations' hierarchical and bureaucratic structures; on the urgent need to increase the diversity of those working in the sector; and on the death of volunteerism.

I still believe passionately in the power of civil society to change the world. Only we can formulate a new set of global organising principles, a new paradigm and an alternative model to the current narrative. But, in order to do so, we will need to put the voice and actions of people back at the heart of our work.

<sup>2</sup> <https://storify.com/CIVICUSalliance/peoplespower>

## SAVING THE WORLD HAS BECOME BIG BUSINESS

Our primary accountability must be, not to donors, but to all those struggling for social justice. We must fight corporatism in our own ranks, re-connect with the power of informal and grassroots networks, tap into the wisdom of diverse activists, and re-balance our resources. This should not entail abandoning the organisations we have created; but evolving them to be truly accountable to those we seek to serve.

My hope is that the dialogue we have begun will help to re-connect us to an understanding of civil society as a deeply human construct, as a facilitator of empowering social relationships. In this, it will be crucial to reflect on the role of our own organisations. For only solutions that are at once pragmatic and radical will be sufficient to meet the challenges we face. ■

## SOURCE

This article was first published in the Huffington Post on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2014.

# CIVIC ACTIVISM

## THE TIMES ARE A CHANGING?

60

by Conny Reuter

Civic movements are now of global outreach, but we still miss the capacity to unite, to build a real movement in spite of all good attempts and intentions of convergence of our movements. To get what we want, we must first find common answers to the crucial questions our societies face.

**W**hen civil society organisations (CSOs) discovered by the mid 80's that there would be an interest in being present at EU-level, many networks set up their European structures and since the mid 90's, many of them have formed sectorial coordinations.

As CSOs we managed, through the European Convention process, to include Article 11 in the Lisbon Treaty, giving civil dialogue a constitutional place and – what is often ignored – putting it at the same level as social dialogue.

### **OUR HISTORY, BRIEFLY...**

Civil Society is a term that can be dated back to the 60's and was developed at the University of Berkley/California. Looking back, who won't remember that California was the State in the US of the Anti-Vietnam War movement and that in California, the movement for the rights

of gay people was a particular popular and became a political movement.

In post-war Europe we often forget that civil society movements were at the origin of resistances against political oppression and dictatorships: in Hungary (1953), Eastern Germany (1956), Western Germany (at the end of the 50's against rearmament), Greece, Portugal and Spain in the 70's and Poland in the 80's. To this we can add the anti-nuclear and pacifist movements of the 80's and 90's.

It is not to say that everything was better in the past, but at least we should learn from our own history and acknowledge there is some continuity and consider our organisations as part of movements for change.

Since the end of the 90's, we have given to these struggles an even more global perspective, facing the socially imbalanced globalization. Starting in Seattle and through the development of the World Social Forum launched in Porto Alegre, civic movements are now of global outreach and also comprise the fights of indigenous people for their rights.

### **CONDITIONS OF SUCCESS**

The movement has always been successful under 4 conditions: 1) accepting heterogeneity of actors and action; 2) combining local and global approaches; 3) developing alliances with trade union movements and progressive political parties; 4) setting a convergence agenda.

Therefore, it was a very good choice for the ECF to bring us to Greece for the European Civic Days 2014, where activists, professionals or volunteers representing networks from different backgrounds and different European countries came together for large exchanges and debates. And in order to prevent from a euro-Brussels-centric vision, it is always enriching to have decentralised meetings and a regional vision of Europe.



### **THE AUTHOR**

Throughout his education, **Conny Reuter** was involved in youth and political student organisations, where his interest in youth work, vocational training and social inclusion began to grow. He has extensive experience in NGO networking, managing EU and international projects and events, and is specialised in the social dimension of EU affairs. He has been Secretary General of SOLIDAR since October 2006, and was President of the Social Platform from 2008 to 2013. He is now co-President of the EESC Liaison Group.

The crisis is not overcome and the choices made were more at the favour of financial sector than on the people. So yes, we need change! And we need it more now than ever before in this century, more than we could ever imagine we would need it if we want to stick to democracy and to stick to the European project.

The social imbalances are increasing globally, in spite of some Millennium Development Goal's being reached but in Europe inequalities are still increasing between member States and in member States themselves.

In Greece, Portugal and Spain, under Troika rule, who would have thought, forty years ago when their people got rid of their dictators, that we would need to take the measures we are taking today? I am not speaking of austerity, because this is a threat and not a necessity. I want to speak of investing in social infrastructures, in fighting inequality and in particular poverty by defending our democratic *acquis*.

**CIVIC  
MOVEMENTS ARE  
NOW OF GLOBAL  
OUTREACH**

# TRUST IN WHOM AND CONFIDENCE IN WHAT?

## IN THIS CONTEXT, WE OFTEN HEAR THE SAME REFERENCE TERMS AND ALTERNATIVES:

**Reform or revolution?** But is this really the alternative? History has told

us that revolutions often only change one governing class by another, and even end up in more undemocratic systems, whereas reformism is often absorbed by an unfair and unequal society. So isn't

our challenge to see how we can develop the energy and movement that will allow us to reach a higher level of social cohesion, of social justice?

Trust and confidence, but trust in whom and confidence in what? First of all, we need to trust in our own capacity to contribute to change. Concerning

trust in the system, what system do we want to trust? The neo-liberal capitalistic system which is ignoring democracy and fundamental rights? No. But then the key for us is to position ourselves within this system and find allies and partners for a large move for change. And at the same time, as lobbyist in Brussels, even when lobbying for social justice, you are part of the system and have to recognize it...

## FINDING NEW ANSWERS TO CRUCIAL QUESTIONS TOGETHER

Facing the increasing exclusion and precariousness as result of wrong policies, we need to find answers to more worrying questions:

► **How to reach out to those who are about to leave the system** and who give electoral support to those who are the enemies of Europe, of democracy, of

## REALISING THE CONVERGENCE OF IDEAS

When civil society actors come together to share opinions and realize that they might be different, we acknowledge however, that our actions are also slightly different, but nonetheless, because we agree on values, we converge on the idea that we need change, or at least a movement for a change. We all see that things cannot go on like this; we want a more fair, a more just, a more open society.

But still, we find ourselves stuck in the middle, on the one hand still wishing to be a movement and on the other, involved in institutional civil dialogue with those institutions we defend at EU-level, but whose policies we have to combat as they are actually socially disastrous.

In terms of sustainability many of us have had to learn to accept that providing services exposes us to markets, competition and management needs which were not the initial DNA of our movements, but which strengthened the structure economically, unfortunately often at the detriment of the identity as a movement sticking to values.



is another buzz-word, although this economy does not automatically create decent work, but is often based on self-exploitation and precarious self-employment or precarious work as such.

►**How can we have an impact on change?** This leads us back to the issue of the “system”. If we want to generate systemic

**WE WANT A SOCIAL EUROPE, WE WANT MORE SOLIDARITY, AND WE WILL GET IT!**

social progress? There was a big mistake made by mainstream parties during the run up to elections: they did not pay attention to what was being proposed by the extremist parties and for what they got too many voters. But do they have a program? At first sight, no, they only remain in opposition, and precisely there lies their weakness. Secondly, their programme is based on exclusion, and their economic approaches are purely neo-liberal. The application of such programmes will actually increase social and economic injustice. Because they seem to “have nothing”, we could have countered them on tangible figures, issues, consequences of their programmes. But in the end, we do the same, we remain in opposition.

►**About economy, what are the new ways?** That is where civil society, with social economy for instance, or crowd-funding systems such as the one presented by Goteo, give evidence that there is a third way to resolving the economic crisis, and this third way is advanced by citizens. And that will also be a positive example to bring to those who have abandoned the system. Share-economy

changes, on what do we focus on: human rights, democratic rights, social rights? For a change in the growth paradigm, calling for sustainable economic and social development? For more transparency and more participation?

►**How can we manage to be more present and count more in the public debate?** No one ever talks about the real social issues in Europe. Inequality in Europe is not under the spotlight. Even journalists working under precarious conditions call for reforms in the sense of Troika (structural reforms), call for more flexible labour markets and undermine credibility of social movements and trade unions. Economists have been strong in making recommendations after the outbreak of the crisis, but only very few have anticipated the crisis.

►**What keeps society together?** Maybe we need to ask ourselves again what the social contract is. Cohesion of society has to do with balances, opportunities and identification. The social is the societal glue, but people are scared.

**COHESION OF SOCIETY HAS TO DO WITH BALANCES, OPPORTUNITIES AND IDENTIFICATION**

►**What constitutes a personality also has to do with identities.** And people need to know their identity because it's what gives them self-esteem, confidence in themselves and the will to go forward. The extreme-right has captured this necessity in the concept of national identity, but that is a uniform and excluding notion. Our job is to help each other find our multiple identities and build a society model grounded on solidarity.

We have many items on our agenda! But we still miss the capacity to unite, to build a real movement in spite of all good attempts and intentions of convergence of these movements. The progressive left has historically always suffered from division and sectarianism. The other side always unites around the same interest: keep the power!

►**What we should use is all the energy we have, and transform our critical energy into transformative energy,** and make of Europe the idea of values, of solidarity, it once was. From Hegel's Dialectic, we learn that their current victory is only the beginning of their future defeat.

We want a social Europe, we want more solidarity, and we will get it if we manage a real convergence of social, civic and political movements! ■

# OF FREEDOM AND DUTY OF ASSOCIATION

## PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

by Jean-Marc Roirant,  
ECF President and Secretary general of the French Ligue de l'Enseignement

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Civil Society organisations have  
come a long way since  
individuals were recognised the  
freedom to associate, but in the  
time we live in, in the light of  
the struggles we go through and  
what we hope for the future, we  
ask if the freedom to associate  
should not now move to become  
a duty to associate.

In a world characterised by a weakening of collective values and the hesitation of public powers to carry out their social responsibilities, the work of organised civil society, by the diversity of its fields of intervention and the very nature of the involvements it underpins, has become indispensable to the realisation of projects aiming at rebuilding social and political links within society. Hence, the fundamental role played by civil society organisations, if it is originally grounded on the freedom for individuals to associate, might be one in pass of becoming more than a right, revealing today the duty to associate.

The importance of the freedom of association comes to light in the fact that it is not only a political freedom complementary to the freedom of reunion, but also one of thought and conviction; a legally organised freedom,



allowing individuals to unite under a legal person, as well as an economic freedom, supporting the defence of interests as much as ensuring their management.

Public powers, resting their legitimacy on conviction and a defined democratic practice, tend to be suspicious of anything that

looks like an organisation of civil society. Indeed, such a reunion of men and women, aims at constituting intermediary bodies likely to exercise a counter-power, mobilise the critical capacity of citizens and contest the prerogatives or political orientations of those whose legitimacy might seem impermeable to any form of contestation. But rather than focusing on the negative side of the relation between public powers and this intermediary body, why not focus on its positive side, namely debate, crucial element of democratic vitality?

### **CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, A PLACE OF EXPRESSION FOR DEMOCRACY**

In its classical form, democracy is essentially representative, more rarely direct. Whatever its form, it rests upon the affirmation of the equality of rights between citizens who have been granted a right to vote, a constant which finds its source in the Athenian model of democracy. Contrary to this conception, hostile towards intermediary bodies, another acceptance of democracy is grounded on the recognition of the right for individuals to organise themselves, in order to, collectively,

**PUBLIC POWERS TEND TO BE SUSPICIOUS OF ANYTHING THAT LOOKS LIKE AN ORGANISATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

express their opposition, critiques or proposals, towards public power. This second conception holds the idea that society is not only a conglomeration of individuals equal before the law, but that it is animated by forces, social counter-powers, which have the capacity of voicing protests, increase participation or stimulate influence.

Civil society organisations, for a large number of them, contribute to satisfy needs of general interest. The diversity of their fields of intervention, their independence, have made them through time, a precious force of warning and questioning on such issues. For these reasons, they have become a key player in the development of social innovation and social cohesion, as well as a vector for dynamic renewal of public life, thanks to free and voluntary involvement.

At a time when a number of decisions are being made without taking into account the critique, opposition or alternatives brought forward by citizens,

leading to civic disenchantment, the second dimension of democracy could be part of the remedy and must be strengthened in order to allow those who act, believe or look for answers for the future, to be heard.

**THE BORDERS BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND MOVEMENTS MUST FALL**

## **CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, LANDMARK IN THE PUBLIC SPACE**

Defined spaces of education to citizenship and exercise of democracy, civil society organisations resolutely follow the path and methods of social utility supported by the militant involvement of their members.

This space occupied by civil society organisations is the public space. Popularised by Jürgen Habermas, the notion of public space is made up of places in which is forged a political sociability, and at the same time, of the

modalities according to which this sociability will function. “Gathering of private individuals exercising their reason publicly”, the public space is better and more than the mere agora in which equal citizens debate, before adopting, the common laws. Indeed, the functioning of this public space rests on a reserve of subjectivity of those who confront each other within it, even though the opinions expressed remain submitted to the rule of reason.

By the ideas conveyed or born from this space, civil society organisations contribute to rehabilitating political action and involvement of citizens in public life, thus sustaining a more participative dimension of democracy.

## **CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS, A FIELD OF POSSIBILITIES**

In this public space animated by a multitude of places of civic ownership of modest or essential questions, the borders cannot be drawn in advance. But one thing is certain, the borders between civil society organisations and movements must fall, given the high potential of networks in increasing the level of influence of these organisations on democratic life. And if this is true at national level, it is even more important in the European context.

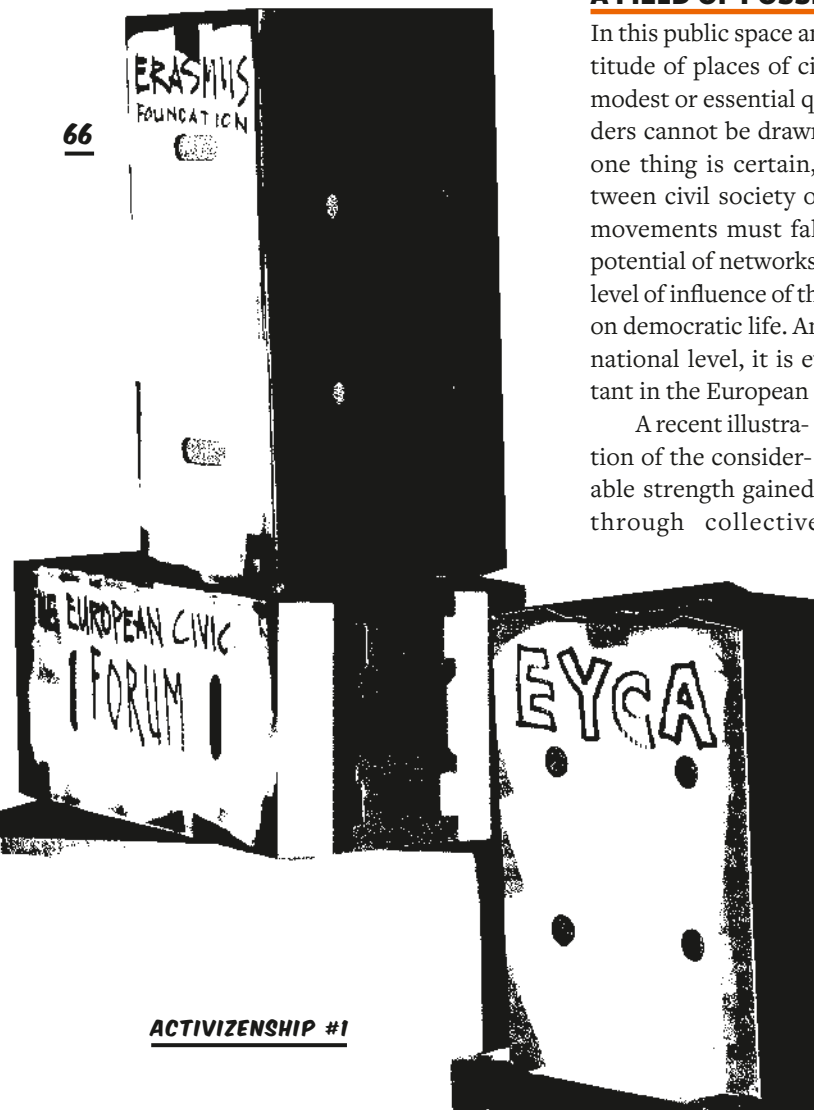
A recent illustration of the considerable strength gained through collective

action can be found in the Alliance for the European Year of Citizens, the EYCA, which highlighted the complementary nature of the concerns motivating European civil society. For the ECF, EYCA has been the opportunity to continue the efforts to structure the life of civil society organisations and to strengthen civil dialogue in Europe. Working collectively, transversally and transnationally, demonstrating its capacity to be both a critical and constructive interlocutor between institutions and citizens who often feel distant from European decision-makers, EYCA proved that European civil society has a fundamental role to play. Founded on the lessons learnt

from this experience, Civil Society Europe will soon take over and strive to demonstrate the importance of this dialogue in revealing a European public good.

If civil society actors have associated by means of the freedoms which is theirs, they have, today, the duty to carry on their daily work, too rarely rewarded, as they are essential to citizens regain of trust in the possibility of a government of the people, by the people, for the people; of the possibility of democracy. ■

**REHABILITATING POLITICAL ACTION AND INVOLVEMENT OF CITIZENS IN PUBLIC LIFE**



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**O**rganised civil society defending Human rights and the common good with constructive and collective solutions should be reinforced since its role as an advocate and agent for change is crucial for our democracies.

The organised civil society we represent aims to regenerate the European project by bringing back citizens, solidarity, equality, fairness, inclusiveness to where they should be: at the heart of Europe. This implies a shift from a dominant approach of regarding citizens as individual-consumers to an approach of a citizenship that both respects individual aspirations and takes into account collective needs for a shared future.

Achieving this requires a paradigm shift from a Europe that is largely considered as an “economic project” to one that restores and promotes the values of solidarity and equality among States and European citizens. Only by emphasizing these fundamental components can the legitimacy of the European project, the trust and enthusiasm for Europe and greater progression in the integration process be ensured.

The rise of far-right extremism as witnessed in the latest European Parliament elections should set alarm bells ringing for all democratic forces

across Europe. It indicates that the European project is now facing a major challenge and that business as usual is no longer an option. Confronting this phenomenon of regressive radicalisation is a matter of urgency at European, national and local level. It means that we should implement policies which re-establish trust and credibility in the capacity of institutions to ensure social protection, social inclusion and welfare for all. As long as people fear exclusion when facing major difficulties the regressive populist discourse denouncing the weaker and the poorer will be listened to and will continue to occupy political space and put democratic institutions at risk.

The indivisibility of rights and their effective progress through implemented policies is an indispensable pre-requisite of social inclusion and active citizenship. Moreover, we believe that citizens can only be conscious of their responsibilities towards each other in a society that enables effective and universal access to rights.

Working hand in hand on transversal issues of common interest, we can create an enabling environment for horizontal exchanges between civil society organisations and movements across Europe and hope to be influential in shaping the European agenda. ■

Extract from Civil Society Europe Manifesto

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**The European Civic Forum is:  
more than 100 associations and NGOs  
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**Standing for a Europe grounded on:  
Solidarity, human rights  
and Civic participation**

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