The astonishing evolution of Spanish young people’s political involvement

In May 2011, almost every mass media all over the world echoed the massive protest that had started in Madrid’s Puerta del Sol, and was followed in a great number of Spanish cities. From this moment on, the 15-M movement -or the “indignados” movement- became one of the milestones of the mobilization cycle that had begun in Tunisia and Egypt and that, symbolically, ended with “Occupy Wall Street” at the end of 2011. The most surprising fact is that, until that moment, there had been no signs in Spain that such a mobilization could arise. Certainly, for almost three years the economic and financial crisis had brutally disrupted Spaniards’ lives, and it is also true that the country was living the end of a socialist governmental cycle in an atmosphere of deception and bewilderment. But there had been no previous significant protest movements, and in any case social mobilization had always been led by main institutional actors, such as political parties or unions.

On the other hand, young people –particularly salient among those who propelled the demonstrations that turned into the camp-sites- hadn’t shown a significant degree of political involvement. On the contrary, compared to European youth, young Spaniards were defined precisely by their apparent lack of interest on political matters. For example, in 2005 only 22% of those who were between 15 and 24 years old declared to be interested in politics, a small percentage compared to 54% of the Germans or 43% of the Italians of the same age. The same features appear when we take into account other indicators such as their scarce membership in associations, or their high rates of electoral abstention. Nevertheless, we should not forget that among Spanish young people protest was by and large the most frequently participatory action (except voting), and the one they considered more effective in order to express their claims.
In any case, until few days before the 15 of May, Spanish mass media had spread a rather negative image of Spanish youth. It was depicted as a group defined by its individualistic and hedonistic culture, more preoccupied with immediate enjoyment, consumption and personal success than with social or collective issues. On the other hand, academic research, besides referring to the traditional weakness of Spanish political culture, had pointed out the negative consequences of their high family dependency, which encouraged their conformist and individualistic attitudes, far away from civic involvement (Gaviria 2005; Gil Calvo 2002). Accordingly, their protests, confirmed by survey research data, were interpreted not only as reactive but also as confined to those who had more free time: students (Cainzos 2006).

In consequence, youth was mainly depicted as distant from the political sphere, apathetic –like adults-, and also dissatisfied (Galais 2012), even though at the end of the first decade of the XXIth century there were already signs of their increasing politicization. This fact was largely due to the impact of the huge mobilizations against the Iraq war, and of other protests that took place in the first years of the century. All these claims had been systematically ignored by political institutions, and therefore, among young people the feeling that authorities didn’t meet citizens’ demands had grown. Besides, we have to take into consideration that political involvement was discouraged by the atmosphere of polarization and exasperation that characterized Spanish public life between 2004 and 2005, and, a few years later, by the failure of institutional political actors to cope with such a virulent crisis.

The movement of the “indignados”, accordingly, took almost everybody by surprise, not only due to its high level of popular support but also because of the amount of novelties it displayed: the camp-sites, the network organization, the absence of organized groups, no visible leaders, an assembly decision making procedure, the prominence of new information and communication technologies in the mobilization development and diffusion, the intergenerational character of the movement, and, finally, the preponderance of claims related to the functioning of the social and political system. The camps gradually disappeared during the month of June, but high levels of mobilization endured until the end of 2011. The actions moved to neighborhoods and small towns, where a great number of assemblies were constituted, contributing to the maintenance of the potential of protest. At the same time, during this period massive demonstrations continued to take place, such as the one organized by United for #Global Change on October the 15th 2011 in more than 90 countries.

The impressive burst of the “indignados” movement in Spanish political arena, and the resulting mobilization dynamic provoked among certain scholars an excessively optimistic account of the transformation of civil links’ cultural foundations.
According to this interpretation, Spanish traditional cynicism had turned into a new participant political culture. Therefore, young people—particularly those who had had a leading role in the 15-M: middle-class, overqualified, and with integration problems—weren’t seen any more as a parasite and disenchanted generation, but as one outraged but proud of itself (Gil Calvo, 2013).

During the three years that have gone by since the camp-sites in the squares, several events have moderated this optimism, and have stressed the complexity of the situation: the relative failure of the first anniversary of the 15-M, the movement’s gradual loss of media impact, the recrudescence of the crisis and its neoliberal management... Although the feeling of outrage that triggered the 2011 mobilizations still prevails, the majority of young people has swung from their traditional disaffection towards institutional politics—which at the present is strengthen by deep feelings of distrust and dissatisfaction with the working of the sociopolitical system-, to a reawakening of political activism by means of demonstrations, acts of protest, new forms of on line mobilization etc. If we want to understand the swaying between these apparently contradictory positions, we have to go beyond the conventional approaches on youth political involvement, based on surveys that try to apprehend attitudes and behavior related to the political field. Instead of focusing on their participation in political activities, on the circumstances in which it takes place or on the factors related with it, we need to carry out a thorough analysis of their involvement processes. This move implies to look into the collective meanings of the participation civic bases, and to connect the latter with the structural transformations of civic bonds and, more generally, with the relationship between youth and politics in the second modernity societies.

On this basis, this paper aims to interpret from a social identity perspective how Spanish youth political involvement has evolved during these last years. For this purpose, we agree with Jones and Gaventa when they state that: "the way in which people understand themselves as citizens is likely a significant impact on their rights and obligations and on whether they participate, in what form, and why" (2002: 13). Analyzing youth civic identities\(^3\), we will try to demonstrate how both disaffection and activism are extreme expressions of a complex process in which the feelings of injustice prevail. In this process, two important factors converge: on the one hand, the consequences of the traditional weakness of the meaning of citizenship in Spanish

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\(^3\) In addition to the data provided by different studies on Spanish youth, our analysis will rely on qualitative research that we have conducted from 2000 to the present on the building of citizenship among different groups of Spanish young people. Its main results are presented in Morán and Benedicto (2003, 2008), Benedicto and Morán (2007; 2014), Benedicto (2011; 2013), Benedicto et al. (2014).
political culture. Citizens lack prominence compared to institutions and leading elites, and there are many difficulties to build citizenship by means of specific experiences and practices related with young people’s everyday spaces\(^4\). On the other hand, we have to take into account the changes within the bonds that link young people to public sphere, as a result of individualization processes that propel a different kind of individual agency, and also due to a transformation of collective action itself. The most remarkable consequence of this process is the appearance of new ways of expressing or practicing citizenship, in which the meaning of “collective” is redefined as an encounter of singularities, and where emotions become the driving force of action. The “indignados” movement is a good example of these transformations, and also demonstrates that they cannot be ignored if we wish to understand current Spanish youth political involvement.

The analysis of Spanish young people’s civic identities will be addressed in sections three and four of this paper. But before, we need to describe in detail the relationship between citizenship and political involvement on which our reasoning is based. This will be the aim of the next section.

2. The civic foundations of youth political involvement

When addressing the subject of political involvement, conventional sociopolitical analysis tends to assume an individualistic and quantitative viewpoint. Therefore, it seeks to compile the number of political participatory actions that individuals/citizens carry out in a specific historical and temporary context, and to establish typologies according to their different nature. Thereon, it draws conclusions on the citizens’ degree and type of politicization, and on their consequences for the health of democratic systems.

This perspective of research arises several problems, but we will just restrict our criticism to the way in which it conceives the relation between citizens and the political sphere. In fact, classical viewpoint emphasizes how action is implemented. Consequently, politicization and participation become almost synonyms, and the latter is perceived as a set of acts –defined as political- that people carry out in a more or less individual way, and whose meaning and importance have been previously established. Therefore, the process and dynamic of citizens’ involvement is barely taken into consideration, neither the context of collective meanings in which they are embedded. But participating in the political sphere only achieves its full sociopolitical relevance when it is embedded in a broader frame in which the image citizens have of

\(^4\) This conceptualization of citizenship is closely related to the notion of “lived citizenship” stated by Hall and Williamson (1999).
themselves as actors that express their belonging to a community by means of their involvement in collective processes is taken into account. The procedures of getting involved—that eventually turn into participatory behavior- allow citizens to assert their bonds with their community of belonging. Therefore, it is essential to enquire about the civic foundations of involvement if we want to understand the meaning of participating in politics among young people.

There is an interesting academic debate on the different conceptions of citizenship in contemporary democratic societies (Isin and Turner 2003). In any case, beyond their disagreements, most authors underline two main components around which the rest of contents, images and concepts are organized: belonging and involvement (Benedicto and Morán 2007). The analysis of each one of them—of their characteristics, and of their institutional and sociopolitical relations—will give us a better understanding of how the actors’ civic identities are articulated, and the kind of ties they establish with public sphere and collective issues. In both cases, the way in which they are socially defined at a precise moment is mediated by the cultural traditions in which they are embedded. These draw a frame of possibilities in which these definitions tend to move.5

Let’s begin with the axis of belonging. Being a citizen means essentially belonging to a specific community. But the notion of belonging is composed of objective and subjective dimensions, whose interrelation produces the building of civic identities. From an objective point of view, belonging is stated collectively through the allocation of certain rights and duties institutionally recognized. In contemporary citizenship, they constitute the main mechanism through which an individual becomes a community member. But, if we overcome this formal perspective and adopt a sociopolitical view, we should be interested not just in considering the legal recognition of the status of citizenship, but mainly in analyzing the way in which these rights and duties are put into practice by citizens. At the same time we should have to take into account the impact of inequality on their ability to exercise them. We should bear in mind that social status—and its related resources—modify the thresholds of inclusion and exclusion established by civic rights and duties.

Nevertheless, from a subjective viewpoint, belonging to a particular community implies something more than just having the State formal and institutional recognition: one has to feel as its member. We need to recognize the existence of some kind of “we the citizens” that transcends the differences between groups, and creates identification.

5 However, the mediation of cultural traditions in the process of building civic identities cannot be interpreted in a deterministic way, stressing persistence over change. On the contrary, these identities are created by means of a relentless dialectic between tradition and change, in which the weight of each opposite pole varies depending on multiple circumstances.
bonds with others and with the community on its whole. This “we the citizens” –and the image it projects- sets the frame in which belonging and even civic identity itself make sense. Within this framework, local and state identities have been traditionally more relevant than any other kind of inclusion. But nowadays they are losing a significant share of their hegemony due to the huge transformation processes that are taking place in a world increasingly globalized and interconnected.

As regards new generations, the growing importance of other kind of identities has been emphasized: they are more global and cosmopolitan, and they replace the restrictive logic of nation-state belonging by an inclusive one which rests on the coexistence of different forms of belonging, and on the interaction between collective and individual identities. In the development of this cosmopolitan frame of meaning, new experiences faced by current young people play a key role. In Europe, the Erasmus program, the phenomenon of “low cost” travels, the increasingly homogenous and global youth lifestyles, and, above all, the communicative and relational revolution carried by digital social networks stand among the phenomena that allow for new ways of being in contact with others, of experiencing different principles of belonging, and of imagining other kind of civic communities (Cicchelli 2012; Szerszynski and Urry 2006).

The second element of citizenship is involvement. In this case, we need to go beyond normative discourses that proclaim the need/duty to participate in the “res-publica”, and to pay attention to the image employed when referring to the competent citizen and to the bond of engagement that links him/her which the community. The civic practices carried out by actors in different domains highlight diverse ways of conceiving citizenship, and different viewpoints on the role played by citizen in its development.

Thanks to the involvement in the public sphere, each individual completes and activates his/her citizen’s status. Being a citizen and acting as such are basic requirements of civic condition, but in contemporary societies their connection poses many difficulties that need to be considered in detail. For some time now, scholars have pointed out the constraints of the formalist perspective, which considers that the axis of citizenship spins around the State legal recognition of the status of citizenship. On the contrary, sociopolitical analysis stresses it dynamic and controversial character, in so far as actors conquer, practice and reinterpret civic rights and duties by means of their involvement in social and political processes. In that way, according to R. Lister, citizenship as status and citizenship as practice interact dialectically through the notion of agency. Consequently, people’s ability to act turns into the key notion that allows us to overcome the traditional division between being formally a citizen and acting as such (Lister 2003).
The gap between status and practice becomes especially important in the case of young people because they are a group defined by a clear “civic deficit” in the sense stated by Lockwood (1996): a situation in which the lack of resources hinders the exercise of formally granted rights. Although in some contexts young people face insufficiency of legal recognition of their citizenship, in most cases –at least in western societies- their problem is the conditions in which they develop their lives and transitions to adulthood. Structural (class, gender, ethnicity...), institutional and cultural factors result in a set of opportunities and risks that affect the negotiation of their status of citizens and the possibility of becoming active agents (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). Therefore, we cannot go on considering citizenship –as many social and educational policies do- as a body of norms, values and rules that define a model of good citizen (Hart 2009)\(^6\), and that provide a stable and defined identity in which young people gradually fit in. Understanding how young people become citizens implies working with a dynamic and procedural conception which allows analyzing how their civic identities are shaped and how they build new ways of being recognized by adults (Gifford, Mycock and Murakami 2014).

In most cases, they become citizens in a negotiated way, through specific collective actions and practices related with public issues. Every time they put their rights into practice, or when they demand that their claims and aspirations should be attended, young people are becoming citizens. This is so not only when they accomplish more or less spectacular actions, or when they intend to protest against institutions. It also happens when they carry out other activities connected with the spaces of their daily lives: setting up an urban vegetable garden or participating in an ecological consumer cooperative, taking part in projects of collaborative economy; working to build a skate park in a project of urban restructuring, or accomplishing cultural activities in a self-organized community center. Through all these citizenship experiences, young people are implementing their civic identity, and discovering new ways of belonging and participating. The “a priori” elements of formal belonging give way to a dynamic process in which identities are built as a response to practices and experiences (Smith et al. 2005).\(^7\)

\(^6\) Delanty (2003) warns us against the dangers of the “disciplinary conception” of citizenship in which young people are educated. In his view, many programs of civic education define learning citizenship as mastering the official values as they are interpreted by authorities.

\(^7\) These features of civic identities are not only exclusive of young people, even though they are more easily perceived among them. On the contrary, as Smith and his colleagues state: “This dynamic understanding of citizenship identity suggest that, as with any aspect of identity is always contingent and continually negotiated, not only in youth but throughout the life course (…) Rather than there being a categorical and meaningful difference between young people’s and ‘adults’ citizenship, we should regard citizenship as a fluid identity, one that will be subject
A common denominator among all the citizenship experiences previously mentioned is that young people seek to be present in public sphere, and try to play a prominent role in the processes in which they participate. In short, they want to be recognized as full members of the community, and therefore, as legitimate actors that should be heard. Consequently, presence and empowerment are the two imperative requirements that guarantee that youth citizenship is not just a mere ideal, linked to the normative model of “good citizenship”. On the contrary, it turns into a key element for the transformation of intergenerational relationships.

On the one hand, speaking about presence implies that young people should dispose of those resources and abilities that action requires. On the other hand, it suggests that elites and institutions should keep open to and interested in new generations’ suggestions and claims. Empirical research has repeatedly proved that, in current democratic societies, the main cause of youth disaffection and lack of interest in institutional politics is the spread perception that nobody cares about their problems, and that politicians do not attend their demands and needs (O’Toole et al. 2003; Henn et al. 2007). In short, young people believe that the conditions for their voices to be heard by authorities are not meet.

Furthermore, speaking about empowered young people implies that they should recognize their own ability to transform the sociopolitical processes in which they participate. In this case, the main problem is usually related to the difficulties young people face to be recognized by authorities as valid partners, and above all, to be granted the possibility of taking part in decision-making processes (Benedicto and Morán 2003).

The conditions that allow young people to be present and to have a leading role in public domain are also closely related to the current nature of youth condition. That is to say, their civic involvement is related to the way in which they organize and structure this life stage, to their needs and interests, and to the relations they establish with adults. In previous decades, the possibility of getting involved in collective matters was identified with the pattern of activism based on specialized organizations, that fitted in a way to be young quite established and predictable. But nowadays we witness a much more individualized experience in accordance with biographies characterized by uncertainty and by the quest of self-fulfillment. Quoting P. Norris in her famous “Democratic Phoenix” (2002), we are moving from loyalties to choices.

We need to avoid dichotomies that confront the old and the new as if we were facing two completely opposite realities, forgetting that these changes take place over

to periods of intense change yet remains continuous and seamless”. (Smith et al. 2005: 440-441)
time, they are affected by many factors, and are due to multiple interrelations. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that we are witnessing a deep transformation both of the context of youth involvement and of the forms in which it is put into practice. Their distancing from institutional and formal politics constitutes, undoubtedly, the most evident sign that the conditions in which we have to analyze their implication have been radically modified. Although their disaffection attitudes don’t necessarily produce democratic mistrust, they frequently make room for a significant decline in their participation in institutionalized political processes (electoral participation, party membership etc.). Therefore, the usual messages that mass media and certain sections of adults spread on the so-called youth de-politicization is encouraged. There are diverse explanations of this phenomenon (Kimberlee 2002), but in any case the results of extensive research point out that their breaking away from formal politics does not necessarily imply lack of interest on these matters. On the contrary, it is another symptom of the reconfiguration of the relations between young people and politics.

In order to get a better understanding of this process of reconfiguration, we need to take into account some phenomena of crucial importance. In the first place, the relation between individuals and institutions is reaching a new equilibrium. In modern societies, social and political institutions were in charge of structuring people’s life-courses; through socialization, they provided the norms and values needed to become an autonomous subject. On the contrary, in current societies the socializing ability of institutions has decreased to the extent that the leading role corresponds now to individuals, who have to build their own biographies in an endless work of searching continuity and autonomy (Dubet 2002). In the political domain, the decay of institutions and the parallel process of individualization result in a smaller relevance of citizens’ organizational compromises, and in an increase of individual strategies in which “organizations and collectivities are considered [by young people] channels that, when they cease being efficient or lose certain attractive attributes, young people can stop supporting and/or abandon” (Rossi 2009: 491). Consequently, political involvement acquires new meanings. Individuals become the ultimate benchmark for action, whereas community involvement is individualized and loses part of its collective dimension.

But we need to take also into account the new conditions for the development of youth transitions, and their impact on their relationship with institutional politics. The increasing uncertainties that young people face in their transitions to adulthood have been caused mainly by the precariousness of their economic situation and by the failure of institutions to guarantee integration processes in accordance with their
expectations and aspirations (Coté 2014). These are the factors that justify the increasing distance of young people from a kind of politics based in state actions, and from politicians that not only do not pay attention to their claims but that, in addition, tend to attribute individually to young people the responsibility of solving their problems and the deficits that they have to overcome.

In this context of individualization, we have to bear in mind another process: the growing relevance of everydayness in young people lives, as a special space in which the experiences that confer meaning to their life courses and to their identities take place. From this perspective, –as empirical research confirms- one of the main problems that they attribute to formal politics is that its discursive and practical language is far away from their ordinary ways of life and of expression. Therefore, they find extremely difficult to understand its connection with their daily lives (Harris, Wyn and Younes 2010). Parties’ and politician’s politics is mainly played in arenas alien to youth everydayness and to those experiences that shape their biographies.

Besides, we would like to emphasize one last process: the role that sociability and encounters with others play in youth political involvement. Although the increasing individualization of juvenile life -or perhaps, precisely due to it-, youth presence in collective actions is affected by their need to establish bonds –more emotional than relational- with other citizens, preferably young but also from other generations. In the society of individuals, quoting Danilo Martucelli, being together, meeting in real or virtual squares to do things together, has become one of the key elements of youth involvement. Participation may be isolated and volatile, but in most cases it is an action which aims to feel among others, in which a great number of emotions are mobilized, and in which many bonds that allow to share experiences, ideas and feelings are activated and deactivated (Perugorría and Tejerina 2013; Benskii and Langman 2013; Castells 2012).

The transformation of the context within which the relations between young people and politics take place results in changes in the expressions of juvenile involvement. In an interesting research on young Australians, Harris and his colleagues point out how many young people, who are nor deeply apathetic nor alternative activists –that is to say, what they call “ordinary young people”- carry out participatory practices that are informal, individualized and daily activities, according with the dynamic that characterizes their life courses. Although they are far away from the spaces and discourses of formal politics, these practices intend to be significant actions, through which they express their wish to be recognized and to be heard (Harris, Wyn and Younes 2010). Informal participation, and its association with everyday experience that highlights the Australian paper, is consistent with the results
of other research that show that young people do not establish differences between diverse ways of participation. On the contrary, they combine different spaces and meanings within a repertoire of participation increasingly broad and diversified (Smith et al. 2005).

In spite of the changes in the channels and subjects of youth interest, we don’t believe that there is a generalized turn towards a postmodern kind of activism. Instead, we consider that there is an increasing plurality of types of involvement, in which new and individualized styles combine with old and institutionalized ones (Hustinx et al. 2012), and in which the barriers between social and political, face-to-face and virtual become blurred. Consequently, a model of fluid involvement arises, characterized by the predominance of informal structures and ‘ad hoc’ mobilizations (“easy entry and easy exit”). The model fits young people, who chose a more individualized and less group-oriented style of participation, and it allows them to feel connected with their equals, without the requirements that impose institutional belonging or ideological identification (Vinken and Diepstraten 2010).

This new model of more ephemeral relations that they establish with politics has a direct impact on the forms in which youth citizenship is conveyed. Experiences of active presence or of informal participation in public sphere coexist with other moments of distancing and indifference. In the latter, disaffection or even rejection of politics prevail, because it is symbolically identified with institutional politics and politicians’ actions. In order to understand this puzzling phenomenon in a context of decreasing ideological identification, we should bear in mind that youth civic identities are characterized by their hybrid character. Therefore, different structures of meaning coming from various political worlds mix together, even among those young people that possess more defined identities. A large proportion of young people inhabit several political worlds simultaneously, combining their interpretations, vocabularies and representations in order to be able to sail through public space in a significant way, according to their needs and life circumstances (Benedicto 2013).

The set of transformations we have just mentioned results in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, the powerful processes of individualization impel them to see themselves as actors that, through their individual agency, are able to take part in the social and political processes in which their lives are embedded. Individualization

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8 In one of our research projects, we have distinguished between three main youth cultures or political worlds: the world of political apathy, the world of democratic skepticism, and the world of political redefinition. But our most relevant finding was that these political cultures were not mutually restrictive, nor were they isolated from each other within the contexts of experience and action of young people. On the contrary, the features and elements of these three cultural structures sometimes appeared simultaneously in their talks. In some cases, they were well founded, and in other they didn’t have an explicit justification (Benedicto 2013).
is, therefore, the source of the new leading role that young people play, setting up new kinds of involvement in accordance with their interests, lifestyles, and ways of belonging. On the other hand, individualization processes, linked with the fragmentation and atomization promoted by neoliberal policies, inspire the creation of identities distant from the conscience and activities that the notion of collectiveness requires. Even after the 2011 cycle of protest, the fact is that the prevailing ideological trends, instead of promoting feelings inferred from shared experiences, encourage specific types of individual agency that focus on individual strains and on personal choices. At the same time, they seek to delegitimize the diversity of ways in which youth collective action is conveyed (White 2007).

Finally, we would like to point out that the transformations we are analyzing lead to a wide redefinition of the civic founding of youth political involvement. Multiple identities, discontinuous involvement, or new forms of individual action –in which collective actors that guide or represent the participant’s interests almost disappear—are symptoms of the significant changes that are altering the bonds between young people and their communities. “Involvement is no longer defined as being adherence to the ideology of a specific group (a “We”), but as an action driven by personal interest (an “I”) for a cause that can eventually become collective, but which originates at the personal level.” (Queniart and Jacques 2004: 179). If we usually think about youth involvement in collective matters as the expression of the bonds that link them with their communities, in view of the foregoing, the focus has to shift, stressing on the personal dimension which, in most cases, is the basis of action, definition of belonging, and construction of civic identities.

3. The relationship of Spanish young people with the public sphere: evolution trends from the beginning of the century

After having presented our theoretical perspective on the civic foundations of youth political involvement, and on the processes of change that we foresee in the relationship young people-politics, we will go back to the Spanish case. We will take into consideration the ways in which Spanish young people understand and express their relation with the public sphere, with politics. At that end, we will focus on how they conceive their civic bonds, and therefore we will take into account certain continuities and changes from the beginning of the XXI century.

But before fully entering into the analysis, we need to mention two factors that affect directly their relationship with the public arena: some singularities of the citizenship cultural bases in Spain, and the transformations that have taken place in the environment in which they live. To begin with, we cannot omit the weight of specific
political cultures embedded in institutional frames that do not encourage expressions of “strong citizenship”. As a matter of fact, the weakness of participatory and symbolic dimensions in Spain’s political culture has been a recurrent issue since the beginning of the political transition (Morán 2001). But, in addition, we need to remember the recent reappearance of several problems -that seemed to have been solved long time ago- that strike at the heart of the conception of citizenship. That is particularly the case of historical memory –of the Spanish civil war (1936-39) and of francoism (1939-1978)-, but it also concerns the notion of belonging itself, in so far as there is an increase of claims and conflicts that bring into question the already weak Spanish “common us” (Morán 2014).

To put it briefly, one of the features that define the institutional context during this period is the recognition of the failures of the political system to address old problems that had only been solved on the surface, and also to respond to new claims of regenerating democratic life. Consequently, a fair proportion of the main conflicts and mobilizations that have shaped this period –in which the role of young people has been particularly significant- include precisely these feelings of frustration with regard to the quality of democratic life.

Meanwhile, we have witnessed the abrupt and unexpected passage from a period of great economic prosperity to a profound economic, social and political crisis. It started to reveal its impact during 2007 and, as we write these lines, although there are voices that envisage its ending, it could continue for some more years. We should remember that the crisis has had a dramatic impact on young people, mainly because the huge unemployment rates have hindered their emancipation processes. Furthermore, the adjustment measures that have been implemented during these last years, especially those related with social policies, might contribute to the transformation of the classic foundations of Welfare State legitimacy and, therefore, to the perception of citizenship rights and duties.

Finally, we have to mention that from the former stage of economic growing onwards –that is to say, from the middle of the 90s- a significant deterioration of the conditions of youth transitions has taken place. Research on Spanish youth emphasize that their transitions are increasingly characterized by their lengthening, insecurity and precariousness. At the same time, they confirm the loss of social and political

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9 The latest available survey results –EPA, Spanish Statistical Institute (INE), third term 2013 – show that the unemployment rate among young people between 20-24 years was 51.06%, and 22.29% among those who were 25-29 years old.
prominence of young people, in parallel with their decreasing demographic weight, and their growing vulnerability.\textsuperscript{10}

In short, in this scenario of changes and continuities, young people adjust their expectations and modify some key elements of their visions of citizenship. Although it is true that their accounts on their relations with public life have many points in common with the ones expressed by the adult generation, there are also significant differences that can only be explained by taking into account the impact of the obstacles and opportunities that they find in their processes of social integration, of civic identities’ building.

In order to add clarity to our explanation, we will distinguish between the stage of economic growth and the crisis. The former covers the decade that begins at the end of the 90s and ends in 2008/2009, when a greater number of young people were able to achieve autonomy. Nevertheless, the diagnosis of “youth as a problem” prevailed and, moreover, it was strengthened due to the increasing perception among young people that there were new obstacles that they had to face in order to be successful in their transitions to adulthood. In particular, although their incorporation into the labor market accelerated, job insecurity grew, and salaries diminished to the extent that for many young people working did not mean any longer a guarantee for emancipating. In addition to this, during these years there was an extraordinary rise in housing prices. All these obstacles were strengthened by the almost complete absence of policies aimed at promoting young people’s autonomy (Du Boys-Reymond and López Blasco 2004).

As a result, the discourse that presented adult world as increasingly hostile was spread, even though it had different emphasis depending on those structural conditions that continued to influence youth transitions (gender, level of studies, social class…). This same reasoning was also applied to the public sphere and originated a generalized frustration of expectations. Nevertheless, in most cases the fact that young people recognized having common problems didn’t turn into collective discourses, and consequently, didn’t arise processes of politicization in the classical sense of the term. On the contrary, the most frequent answer was assuming that they inevitably had to adapt themselves to adverse circumstances, and that everyone had to make use of their own individual resources.

Consequently, the accounts of young people have in common an individualistic tone, although there are significant differences depending on their class background.

\textsuperscript{10} A more detailed analysis of the main social changes that have had an impact on Spanish young people from the beginning of the XXIth century can be found in Benedicto and Morán (2013).
Therefore, there is a natural individualism, a competitive one, and also some kind of defeatist individualism. The latter is more frequent among young people coming from the most disadvantaged groups, that recognize the inequalities of resources and opportunities that they have to face in order to achieve their own social integration (Morán and Benedicto 2003). Theses discourses create different adaptation strategies, and diverse ways of assuming their own lack of social and political prominence. The interesting thing to note is that these strategies are based on a generational agreement which is especially strong among young people from middle classes, but which also works in the other social groups. The main defining feature of this compromise is the acceptance of the subordination to adults in exchange for the reduction of their demands of involvement and of the expression of their claims. This implies that young people accept to extend their “citizenship by proxy”, in which their enjoyment of rights – mainly of social ones- still takes place through their relationship with their parents. At the same time, although they consider themselves as subjects of rights, they delay the assumption of their civic rights and duties. In consequence, they often repeat: “it is not our turn; it is not for us yet”.

In return for this transfer of the exercise of their rights, and their resulting resistance to assume their duties, families commit themselves to extend and to intensify their support to their sons and daughters, especially by investing in their education. Their main objective is to increase their abilities in order to assure that they will successfully complete their processes of emancipation; mainly, they try to afford them better conditions to get into the job market. Compliance with this agreement obliges young people, as we have already mentioned, to set out strategies of individual adaptation; but above all it confines them in very narrow worlds, the ones of their daily lives: family, friends, leisure, neighborhood… As work loses relevance in their life projects their distance with public sphere increases. At most, public sphere is understood as synonym of community; that is to say, an equivalent to what is closer to their daily experiences.

Nevertheless, their struggles to achieve these strategies are not without contradictions. The difficulties to think about the collective sphere and the emphasis on merely personal choices lead them to assume an individual responsibility both for their success and their failures in their integration processes. At the same time, they are conscious of the costs –personal and collective- of their withdrawal to assume the duties that would imply their integration in public live as active subjects. Although they are aware that the image of young people as “irresponsible and problematic” - broadcasted by mass media- is a commonplace, they admit their own responsibility in
its maintenance and reinforcement. These quotations from two different research projects are practical examples of these contradictions:

“It is a very bad age; the only thing we want is to go to parties. Then, that’s the problem: we don’t want to settle down and we don’t want to face reality. //M.-It’s true. We don’t want to grow old for certain things; old as for rights that allow me this or that. And then as for obligations, we want as less as possible…We live as in a bubble in which everything is good and happy. We just consider having fun now, and we don’t care.” (Focus mixed group. Students of professional qualification. Middle class/lower middle class. 16-18 years old. Madrid, March 2001)

“I think that young people, just having a car, having a job, a girl or a boyfriend…, and going to parties… That is they don’t…And I say all that thinking about my friends, from what I see. They don’t get involved in anything social.” (Interview. Women, middle class, member of a squatting movement, 23 years old, Madrid, December 2009)

But they also accept the costs accepting just being passive spectators of public life, and becoming mere subjects of decisions taken by others but that concern them.

“M-Well, I don’t think it is true that nobody cares about things that worth the experience; that no one cares that nobody takes us into account, you know what I mean? I think that this…” (Focus mixed group. University students, 20-23 years old, Madrid, May 2004).

Furthermore, recognizing their lack of prominence in the definition and resolution of their problems contributes to legitimize their individual strategies when facing collective actions. Even though, it is interesting to note that it doesn’t mean that these young people lack civic competences. On the contrary, Spanish and European survey data confirm that young Spaniards have participatory experiences from a very early age, mainly in demonstrations. At the same time, they express a positive assessment of voting, understood both as a right and as a duty. In fact, together with paying taxes, it is the only duty that they admit.

However, the way in which they assert their condition of citizenship contains clear symptoms of political disaffection that, in our view, are a direct result of their weak political prominence. In the first place, a recurring element of their discourse is the lack of interest in politics, which they always conceive as institutional. This indifference is frequently expressed provocatively, even in an exhibitionist way.

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11 In all our research projects—even when we have worked with teenagers or with young people at risk—, we have found that they possess a reasonable level of information about political matters, and a quite rich political vocabulary. Besides, they clearly put into words their status of subjects of rights, and they have significant abilities to orient themselves in the world of public administration in order to have access to those public goods and services that affect them directly (scholarships, health services, social assistance...).

12 According to the ESS survey data, in 2010 20.4% of Spanish young people from 15 to 29 years declared that they had participated in legal demonstrations during the last year, compared with 9.2% of young people from the rest of the UE countries. (INJUVE 2012: 218)
“I think that, above all, politics has to change. For me, politics is pathetic; politics in our country, I mean. But because of government, because of opposition, because of everything, I mean. I mean, I don’t know… I think that they focus in things that are too sensationalistic and they don’t contribute to society, instead of worrying about important things.” (Mixed focus group. Young people with conventional-precarious transitions, 25-29 years old, Sevilla, February 2010).

Their lack of interest mixes with distrust towards institutional democratic life. The latter is defined not so much as corrupt—a more salient feature during the crisis—but as being distant from their interests and concerns; as not being attentive to their problems. Consequently, both characteristics are relevant for understanding the limits faced by young people when they try to politicize their common problems; in short, when they seek to turn these problems into collective claims. Therefore, they seldom succeed in transcending the stage of diagnosis.

Nevertheless, their scarce prominence in conventional political sphere—they can’t and they don’t want to be there— is compatible with their high appraisal of being and participating in the spaces which are closer to their daily lives. “Close to home” is the field par excellence in which their presence may have real consequences; there, they can “make the difference”. This is because it is where they can check the results of their participation in the short term, but also because this kind of involvement gives them immediate personal satisfaction.

We also have to take into account the considerable difficulties that young people face when defining the sphere of civic belonging. On the one hand, they employ a quite depoliticized meaning of citizenship, in which a citizen is just an inhabitant of the community, and a good citizen the one who complies with the rules of civility. Moreover, due to the symbolic weakness of the Spanish civic “common us”, the state/national dimension of belonging is quite blurred, compared to a higher emphasis on the local belonging which, in some cases, is compatible with a global and cosmopolitan citizenship. These obstacles to feel a part of their community also impact on the creation of a youth “common us” which they continue to express in terms of deprivation—without job, without home, without a family of their own—and, in the end, as a problem. This peculiarity appears even among university students who find very

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13 We could quote many examples of this way of putting things. We will just refer to three provided by different focus groups: “A person who complies with the minimum rules of living together and who follows these rules...” “For example, if you are in a certain place where there is a sign saying do not throw paper, do not throw them. If you do, you are not a good citizen.” “The person who belongs to a country, to a city. And the one who has his/her rights as such, and also his/her duties. And who has to behave as such. And who respects other citizens.” (Morán and Benedicto 2003: 119). However, these results are not surprising compared, for example, to those obtained by Smith and his colleagues (2005) in United Kingdom.
hard to consider themselves and to identify with something similar to the students’ body.

Finally, the characteristics of the way in which young people build their citizenship identities would be incomplete if we didn't point out that, during the period of economic prosperity, the increase of individualism was fully compatible with the maintenance of a specific feature of the Spanish political culture, relevant since the beginning of the political transition. We are referring to the so-called reformism of the Spaniards that means, in the first place, the recognition of high levels of economic and social inequality. Thereafter, Spaniards advocate the importance of State intervention in order to achieve a reduction of these inequalities. Specifically, according to the ESS, in 2012 94,5% of Spaniards from 15 to 29 years old considered that government should reduce differences in income level, compared to 69,2 among young people from the rest of UE, and 73,4% of the remaining European countries included in this survey.

Therefore, we have to admit that the period of economic growth didn't solve many difficulties that young people found in order to achieve their autonomy. On the other hand, the main problems related with the quality of democratic life weren’t faced. Although the contradictions that afflicted young people were clearly recognized, economic prosperity imposed a parenthesis that ended abruptly with the outbreak of the crisis (Benedicto and Morán 2013).

In our opinion, the main change is the brisk move from the delayed promise of success that had characterized the previous period to the “unfulfilled promise” that defines this new period. Moreover, this change took place within a context of precariousness of life that was expressed as deadlock of expectations. This young adult fully summarizes the feeling of having been cheated by adults:

“To find a job, that’s the idea that they sold us when we were children. You have to work, that is to say, you have to study, my daughter, you have to go to university, to get a degree...And then, if you get this, everything will follow: a home, a boyfriend, a flat, a dog, a cat... And that’s not true! This is the idea they sold us... And now we all have I don’t know how many degrees, how many masters, foreign languages... And we can’t get the house, or the car, or the dog, nothing.” (Interview. Woman, 30 years old, Master in Sociology, Madrid, August 2013).

The ways in which this situation is put into words are pervaded by bewilderment and frustration, but in some cases they also reveal anger provoked by what many young people consider as a generational fraud. Although they are aware of the blocking in their processes of social and civic integration, the attempts of adapting individually still prevail. Consequently, they establish different strategies according to their own resources and possibilities, even though they admit that they are significantly diverse.
Although the acknowledgment of the inequality of their transitions was already prominent in the previous period, the crisis highlights the fact that the new context produces winners and losers. They accept their own collective responsibility in the outbreak of the crisis—they repeat over and over again that “we Spaniards have lived beyond our means”, but the discourses of individual responsibilities shade when they take into account their current difficulties and failures.

“I don’t think that there is only one person to blame, isn’t it? Because probably in our current situation I consider that everybody is to blame, isn’t it? Because everybody decided to buy houses, and it cannot be that so many people owe such an amount of money. Then, we came to a limit; that is what has happened, hasn’t it?” (Interview, woman, 23 years old, member of squatter organization, Madrid, December 2009)

“(…) In any case, the old style of life that they imposed to us is no longer affordable (…) Consuming, using and throwing away (…)” (Autobiographical narrative, women, 26 years old, university student, Madrid, June 2013)

In short, there is an increase of the unavoidable loss of their prominence in public life, if indeed ever. In particular, their marginalization provokes frustration that, in specific moments, turns into outrage. On the other hand, young people are much more aware of the risks they face, in so far as the generational pact of delaying their socio-political integration in exchange for certain benefits has vanished.

Young people use different strategies to face this new situation that they define as very tough. Their discourses reveal that they are fully aware of the fact that, in a very short time, they have been forced to modify, adapt or sacrifice their projects of future, their expectations (Benedicto et al. 2014). Therefore, in a situation that apparently is only defined by the increase of their traditional disaffection towards public matters, some noticeable changes in their civic identities can be pointed out. There is a shift from the previous meaning of disaffection—growing apart and not being interested in a domain of social life alien to their own concerns—to a new one: dissatisfaction, distrust and democratic discomfort when they face a social and political system that does not provide any solution to their problems. Precisely, dissatisfaction with the functioning of the system together with the feeling of injustice due to the consequences and management of the crisis constitute the sociopolitical roots of the “indignados” movement (Laraña and Díez 2012).

In this regard, it is significant to notice the increase—as among Spanish adults—of their interest in political matters, of their exposure to conventional and non-conventional mass media, and of the frequency of their political talk with family, friends,
and in the working place. 14 Accordingly, the thesis that states that the context of crisis causes new politicization processes should be supported; an idea we will revisit later. But, simultaneously, the bond between citizens and politics –always understood within the institutional domain- also changes: from lack of interest it turns into mistrust. 15 This important change of meaning explains the dramatic growth of citizens’ mistrust –young and adults- about the main political institutions. According to the European Social Survey data, the level of mistrust is much higher in Spain compared to other countries in which the crisis has had a dramatic impact as, for example, Ireland or Portugal. Suspicion increases even more the distance with the actors of conventional democratic life –political parties and unions- but also seems to concern other “non-conventional” actors, such as civic associations, NGOs or social movements. After the associative “boom” that took place in Spain at the end of the 90s (Ariño 2007; Morales 2005), in this new stage a decrease is taking place; it affects mainly sociopolitical associations, and is especially severe among younger population (Jiménez 2011; INJUVE 2012).

The rise of civic helplessness among young people, caused by the development of the crisis, doesn’t exclude the growth of certain ways of politicization. Nevertheless, helplessness conditions the development and understanding of their practices of citizenship. But, even though disaffection clearly prevails, they seldom chose a full “exit” –in the sense stated by Hirschman (1981)- because the majority continues to place themselves and to speak from within the political community, but clearly more in its margins that previously (Benedicto et al. 2014).

4. Youth citizenship in practice: some changing trends
Up to now, we have analyzed the complex interplay between the changes in the contexts in which Spanish youth transitions to adulthood take place and the building of their civic identities. From now on, we will focus on the expressions of these specific conceptions of civic identities, both from a discourse and practice perspective. Therefore, we will insist on the distinctive features of the Spanish case in which, as we have argued, we witness a specific combination of loosely assembled civic identities–in which civic helplessness and democratic discomfort prevail–, and transformations of civic bonds with the collective sphere. This association is producing new ways by which

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14 According to the data of the Youth Reports (“Informes de Juventud”), carried out regularly by INJUVE, between 2004 and 2012 the degree of youth political interest had increased by 75%, from 23,2% to 40,7% (INJUVE 2012, p.208-214).

15 In a 2011 CIS survey, 40,6% of young people between 15 and 29 years stated that politics evoked for them, in the first place, mistrust, boredom for 16%, and indifference for 15%. In comparison, only 11,8% declared that it evoked interest.
youth citizenship is put into practice, compatible with their presence in public sphere but, at the same time, defined by a breakdown of the old logic of representation.

Indeed, these are not last-minute changes, nor are they mere direct and temporary consequences of the crisis. Their roots can be traced from the end of the 90s but, undoubtedly, they have sped up and grown as a result of the impact of the great recession. In any case, these new ways of expressing and practicing citizenship take shape due to two facts. In the first place, Spanish young people recognize that their “impasse” arises, above all, feelings of vulnerability and frustration; for their generations, such emotions turn into shared experiences.

(...)

Here, everything is business as usual; uncertainty. Nobody knows if he/she will be able to withstand one more month or a year; but we all are aware that sooner or later everybody is going to suffer. (…)“ (Autobiographical account. Man, 22 years old, university student, Madrid, June 2013).

On the other hand, we come across the increasing growing apart –real, effective- of young people from the political decision-making processes. This fact, that had created for quite a long time a constant feeling of marginalization, has worsen during these last years.

“I mean that, at the end, they ignore you; because they don’t consider us as important enough, you know what I mean? (...)” (Mixed focus group, university students, middle class, 20-23 years old, Madrid, May 2004)

Consequently, their current statements on citizenship reveal certain original and significant features. Above all, “discourses of emotions” (Jasper 2011) are increasingly relevant. They pervade the way in which they refer to their daily experiences, although they become particularly outstanding when they talk about their involvement in protest politics.

On the other hand, individualization of their personal strategies in order to face the new challenges and difficulties posed by their situation –relying on their own abilities and resources- moves to the public field in two different ways. In the first place, the exercise of civic rights and duties is always understood as something personal, individual. It is so when they refer to the classical patterns of political participation –namely, voting-, but also when they describe how they guide themselves in the public system in order to have access to social goods and services. This “particularization” of the way in which they conceive their relationship with the public sphere fits with the increasing frequency in which young people modify the principles of equal and universal civic rights and duties, adding assumptions of individual merit.

Involvement and activism are also understood as merely personal and individual activities. That explains why they insist on the ethical satisfaction provided by
these actions, and also why they overate the “close to home”, as a sphere that guarantees a quick confirmation of the results of their participation and, therefore, an immediate personal reward. The turn towards the personal level influences their discourse to the point that it is not surprising that their accounts are almost always stated using the first person singular. Together with the difficulties that young people find to talk collectively, the relevance of their own experiences or of those lived by their immediate entourage stand out when they attribute meaning to common life (Dubet 2010). For this purpose, they frequently turn to “storytelling” (Polletta 2008) because it is the most adapted style to reinforce the relevance of experience. Therefore, the latter becomes the key criterion to confer meaning.

The relevance of the subjectivity and the lived events, together with the previously mentioned weakness of some dimensions of civic identities, also explain the frequency of ethical statements, accounts and justifications when they talk about their relations with the public sphere. Collective political vocabulary is largely replaced by a language of personal life and experiences. It is worth noting that this change of the position from which they speak, and therefore of how they speak, has also been pointed out in certain analysis on the recent mobilizations of the “indignados” both in Spain and all over the world (Tejerina et al 2013).16

Thus, Spanish young people increasingly turn to a language of emotions that insists, over and over again, on the frustration raised by their poor presence in the public sphere, the irritation facing the acts of the political class, and the disenchantment with the functioning of the institutions.

“What’s left is only and exclusively to demonstrate, as has sadly happened with the 11-M, and I don’t now, with the Prestige and so on. But, what’s the point, if afterwards they don’t listen and they laugh in your face.” (Mixed focus group, Young non-qualified workers, middle class/lower middle class, Madrid, May 2004)

But, at the same time, they declare the deep satisfaction that they get from their participatory experiences, as shows this young man when he talks about his participation in a youth neighborhood association:

“Yes, it gives me satisfaction…Fine. These kind of things make you feel better, you know what I mean? Because you understand yourself better and it increases your self-esteem. You understand yourself better and, therefore, you can offer something to the others, you know what I mean?” (Interview. Man, 22 years old, working class, Madrid, member of a youth association, December 2009)

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16 In this regard, it is significant that one of the first manifestos of the camp in the Puerta del Sol began: “We are persons who have come free and willingly...”
In their accounts on public matters and in the strategies they implement in their daily lives, flexibility also prevails. Specifically, we refer to a combination of adaptation and rejection when they turn to different interpretative frames in order to describe, negotiate or question their bonds with public sphere, its meaning, the principles of justice that have to govern it, or their individual responsibility in collective matters. Hence, they accept naturally, or simply they do not notice, their frequent inconsistencies when speaking. This combination between their appeal to emotions and their non-problematizing of inconsistencies could be explained quoting Benski and Langman (2013). For them, the explanation of current protest requires to incorporate the role of congruent and contradictory “constellations of emotions”, which increases in moments of crisis. In a certain way, the flexibility with which young people use different interpretative frames -that corresponds with their ability to combine different political worlds as we have previously mentioned- allows us to explain the predominance of a critical but pragmatic legitimization of the sociopolitical system.

Together with these general characteristics, and without forgetting the different discourses that coexist among youth, during this period there is a tendency that becomes more visible due to the crisis: a movement towards a new reformulation of the social contract that links them to their community of belonging. It turns into a reassessment of the ideal of civic bonds that affects their civic identities –their belonging-, the way they understand themselves and the others as political subjects and, finally, the dimension of civic involvement. In the case of young people, this move is especially noticeable in the changes that take place in the “affective loyalties” mentioned by J. Jasper (2011).

Although it is obvious that the conception of civic participation is not homogenous among young people, it is interesting to focus in their similarities. To begin with, there is not a total rejection of voting, except for some very radical accounts. Voting is conceived as a right, but also as a civic duty “hard-won by our parents”. Even if they are suspicious about the real effects of their electoral participation: “if you don’t vote, you cannot complain afterwards”.

“Just voting..., the problem is not voting for one or for another one, I mean..., I think that a person who doesn’t vote..., maybe I am too categorical, (…) I think that he/she has no right to complain. I think that you don’t participate in this society. Perhaps you don’t like voting, you don’t like the options that exist, but you don’t get involved in this society. Then, perhaps you will be able to change a little bit your own world, but not the world around us.” (Interview. Man, 29 years old, working class, member of a parish group, Madrid, December 2009)

Besides voting, they tend to underline the most individualistic forms of civic participation. As we have already mentioned, these are the ones closest to their daily
lives, in which they consider their presence to be significant. In that sense, this conception has many points in common with “life-style citizenship” (Bennett 1998), that gives priority to those forms and means that allow direct involvement. But, above all, freedom of “getting in and getting out” is allowed, and discontinuous activism is possible. In short, in the Spanish case the account set forth in previous pages seems to be confirmed: a more fluid model of involvement is been set up, in which young people act by means of plural forms, spaces and meanings (Hustinx et al. 2012).

Participation in these kind of actions seems to have as its main objective to be recognized as interlocutors by power, although sporadically and discontinuously. Accordingly, we have to admit that, in recent years, Spanish youth presence in protest events –movement for a decent housing, student movement, platform against evictions, movement anti-bullfighting, movement of the “indignados…”- has become a generational experience that, besides, distinguish them from their European peer-group.

That is why we should emphasize the specific meaning that these protest activities have for them; specifically, demonstrations and different ways of occupying public space. Several studies on collective mobilization in Spain point out that a distinctive feature of Spanish political life is “normalization” of protest (Jiménez 2011). According to their results, its main cause is the democratic deficit of a political system which lack sensitiveness to citizen’s demands, together with the generalization of demonstrations and concentrations against terrorism17. These studies also underlie the socialization effects of the generalization of this repertoire.

However, with the exception of the minority of traditional activists, the way in which young people conceive their involvement in this kind of events differs in some aspects from the classical conception. Maybe the most relevant fact is that the format of demonstrations, occupations or camps allows sidestepping the collective dimension of civic involvement. We have already mentioned that in their discourses mobilization appears as a strictly individual expression and, furthermore, it is limited in time and discontinuous. Therefore, this kind of direct involvement does without any mediation between the participant and the event; it doesn’t need to establish a link with any organization. New information and communication technologies allow this direct relationship, because they grant a constant connection, in real time, between the event and the potential participant (Castells 2012). For example, we can take into account,

17 The starting point of this way of making visible rejection to terrorism were the mass demonstrations that took place after Miguel Ángel Blanco—a Popular Party city councilman—was kidnapped and then murdered by ETA in July 1997. But previously, from the end of the 80s, “Gesto por la Paz” had already begun to convene public gatherings in squares all over the Basque Country after each terrorist attempt.
how this participant in a focus group speaks about the role of the internet in his experiences of civic involvement:

“M.-If, at least, you get a message on a demonstration..., if you don't want to attend at least you can forward it to all your contacts. You know what I mean? (...) If I don't attend, at least I contribute to make the information visible, and it keeps expanding.// (...) No, yes, I believe that... the two [demonstrations] I have attended to, I got the information in the Internet. Recently we also did a blackout that was convened on the internet, during five minutes...” (Mixed focus group. Young people of Latin American immigrant background with secondary studies, 20.27 years old, Sevilla, February 2010).

At the same time, the symbolic and expressive dimension of participation stands out, far above utilitarian one. In our research, expressions that assign scarce effectiveness to collective actions are frequent, while their real value is precisely the prominence they give to those who take part in them. This characteristic defines these events as key moments of sociability and political learning.

“Because there, you just need to go and the cameras record you, and you appear in mass media. Only having mass media that are very powerful you have already done something. Just going... and, besides, personally, you have done something; you have participated and you have already done something. Do you get something or not? I believe that in 90% of the cases you never get anything, but...” (Mixed focus group. Young people with conventional precarious transitions, 25-29 years old, Sevilla, February 2010).

As Perugorría and Tejerina (2013) state in their analysis on the Spanish 15M movement, the important thing is “being together”. That is why concentrating in visible physical spaces still remains essential (Castells 2012). Besides, these are movements of feelings, whose origin is characterized by anxiety, fear, humiliation, outrage and anger shared by young and not so young people when they give meaning to their own conditions through an “injustice frame” (Gamson 1995). Besides, mobilization in its own, while it lasts, also spreads completely different feelings: happiness, enthusiasm, pride, hope... Those are feelings they assert as people who share their problems together (Perugorría and Tejerina, 2013: 433).

**By way of conclusion**

Throughout these pages we have focused on the discourses of Spanish young people; namely on how they express their civic identities and their participatory practices. Our point has been that its analysis reveals how, during the last decades, there has been a profound redefinition of the civic foundations of youth political involvement that has been largely intensified due to the current economic, political and institutional crisis.

In our opinion, this fact, together with the characteristics of this process of redefinition, confirm two ideas that we put forward at the beginning of this paper: on the
one hand, the constraints of conventional interpretations of youth political participation; on the other hand, the need to go into the complex combination between the transformations of the contexts in which young people’s sociopolitical integration takes place, the reconfiguration of their civic identities, and the increasing flexibility and individualization of the ways in which they put into practice their civic engagements. In short, it means working from a perspective in which the “flip side of the coin” of disaffection and indifference, traditionally imputed to young people, is no longer classic political activism, such as it has been conceived by sociopolitical analysis.

These series of changes are not just affecting those activities that young people carry out in the political sphere, but also point out to significant transformations that could be taking place in several other dimensions: the meanings given to the bonds between citizens and State, some foundations on which current democracies are built – rights, duties, representation...-, and even some key values –equality, justice, redistribution, universality...- We therefore commit ourselves to continue working in this field of analysis.

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