Social and political impacts of the 15M Movement in Spain

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Abstract

How does one identify and assess the social and political impact of an anti-neoliberal and anti-crisis movement such as the 15M in Spain? In particular, there is a striking challenge when the limits and identity of this movement are very blurred. In this paper we adopt a triple strategy of analysis: 1) we consider that the multiple goals of the movement and, thus, any assessment of its impacts, depend on its structural conditions of emergence and first stage of development; 2) we argue that the self-reproduction of the movement is a significant impact beyond its ability to keep alive the mobilisation although any resulting group, campaign and movement provides specific contexts where claims are meaningful; 3) we distinguish the different scales, contexts and power relationships where the impacts may be identified and qualified, instead of just mirroring the initial opportunities and constraints in a deterministic way. The empirical evidence used in this research stems from secondary sources of information such as mass media coverage, data and opinions provided by the movement organisations and on-line social networks. Our analysis shows that the institutional impacts of the 15M movement have been very limited, in spite of some successful lawsuits and a permanent capacity to challenge the authorities in its first three years of existence. Some specific campaigns (anti-privatisation and anti-evictions) had accomplished many of their goals although the power elites and the prevailing socio-economic structures remained almost intact. What has been a more pervasive effect of the 15M is the provision of a deeper non-institutional and counter-hegemonic political culture as well as a manifold set of practical initiatives of self-organisation. Finally, we argue that these outcomes may be explained by the lingering cohesion of the elites, the lack of effective access of the movement to the State institutions and the increase of the repressive measures against the movement.

Key words: social movements outcomes, anti-neoliberalism, Spain, 15M movement
Introduction

On May 15, 2011, a new social movement, the 15M, ignited a storm of protest in Spain. It represented the first wide challenge to the ruling elites since the Transition, in the late 1970's, from a dictatorial regime to a democratic one (Espinoza 2013, Rodríguez 2013: 273). The 15M was also known as the 'indignants' movement' and the #spanishrevolution. Before and after its appearance there were many episodes of unrest in other countries. This simultaneous wave of contention opened up intense transnational communications with each other in unprecedented manners. This has led to a promising field of research about networked social movements (Castells 2012, Gerbaudo 2012, Toret et al. 2013). However, it is still worth asking what the specific features of the 15M were within this new global cycle of protests (Taibo 2011, Romanos 2013).

In the present article we focus on the social and political impacts of the 15M movement because the little attention paid to this topic by scholars studying the 2011 explosion of social movements. The 15M showed a number of signs for a potential revolutionary change facing the capitalist system in Spain. It was predominantly an anti-crisis movement (Harvey 2012) which reacted against the immediate effects of the austerity and neoliberal policies. “The criticism is focused on financial capitalism and on its influence on government, not on capitalism as such. The movement does not embrace ideologies of the past. Its quest aims at eradicating evil in the present, while reinventing community for the future. Its fundamental achievement has been to rekindle hope that another life is possible” (Castells 2012: 197) However, the political agenda of the anti-capitalist left and a wider social concern about the capitalist system have equally stepped into the scene. A leftist inclination was also preferential among the activists (Anduiza et al. 2013), although it was remarkable the influence of autonomist, alter-global and cyber activists in the renovation of the political discourse beyond the traditional leftist clichés. This expanded the appeal of the 15M demands to a very broad public.

The novel interest of the 15M has been its capacity to disrupt the political order and to challenge the two-party system, at the foreground, and the basis of a representative democracy subjugated by the global capital, at a deeper level. Moreover, not only have net-citizens or the culturally affluent and networked population been mobilised, but also large parts of the impoverished middle and working classes, given the economic basis of the revolt that triggered the discontent. Up to now, over the last three years (2011-2014), no revolutionary change has been brought about in Spain. However, the different reactions, reforms and protests produced by the 15M have paved the ways for such a possible evolution. The movement is a direct opposition to the process of 'de-democratisation' (Tilly 2003, 2007). Therefore, among the proposals to overcome that process, the government, regime or constitutional changes were also shaking the debates.

It would be misleading to conceive the 15M simply as a reformist movement just worried about the drawbacks of the electoral system, the liberal model of democracy and the side effects of corruption (Calvo 2012). From the initial outcry of a "real democracy now", the 15M moved
on to more profound claims aimed to preserve the basis of the Welfare State and to question the oppression coming from the financial powers and the European Union. Screams as those heard in Argentina in 2001, "que se vayan todos" (we want to oust all the politicians) or beloved by the Italian autonomists of the 1960s and 1970s "lo queremos todo y lo queremos ahora" (we want it all and we want it now) resonated in the 15M since the beginning (Díaz 2011).

In any case, the achievements of the movement have been modest regarding the institutional politics, although very notable in terms of a sustained challenging power. Thus, for some observers, the utmost impact of the 15M has occurred in the sphere of the social and political culture: "The 15-M, the tides or the PAH are not conventional social movements but the names and masks self-adopted by an extraordinary process of social politicisation" (Fernández-Savater 2013). Traditional identities have been relegated while a broader and consensual narration about the crisis-ridden-by-the-elites-1% made possible new social coalitions of activism, recalling images of leaderless, precarious and transversal multitudes (Mudu 2009). In a similar vein, it has been argued that this and similar movements have engendered a "networked renaissance... more Enlightenment than revolution, more connections than achieved objectives... Maybe we do not need a definitive model for revolution. It may not be necessary to take power because these interconnected micro-utopias will be replacing the parts of the system. Gradually, inevitable." (Gutiérrez 2014)

Our optimism does not go that far. An empirical analysis of the outcomes of the 15M in different dimensions will show that, in fact, there was a greater impact on the spheres of politicisation and micro-utopias, than in the institutional realm of politics. But this is not an obstacle to make accurate observations of the different scales and contexts relevant in the whole structure of impacts. For doing so, we start by asking some crucial theoretical problems regarding the kind of claims raised by the movement, the contexts in which they are meaningful the organisational and tactical boundaries of the movement, its evolution and the power relationships in which the impacts can be identified. As we shall see later, the political potentials of the movement are closely related to the prevailing political arrangements (mainly institutional and State-oriented) in a given society. This, however, does not imply that the politics of social movements leads necessarily to a replacement of the sovereign power or the government. Instead of a State-centred perspective, we should focus preferentially, as one of the relevant scales of the analysis of impacts, in understanding how sustainable and capable of enlarge their legitimacy are the social movements, how do they reproduce and evolve within varying contexts, and what kind of diverse counter-powers or movement institutions are they able to create (Viejo 2007: 34; Holloway 2002).

Thus, in our view, the success of a social movement does not depend exclusively on the reaction of the authorities or elites to its demands, although political and policy impacts produced by movements are some of the key events that deserve analytical attention. The creation of new identities, cultural values and forms of communication may be crucial elements in the process of mobilisation and collective action, but it would be simplistic to use them as the main indicators of social and political changes brought about by social movements. The disruptive and menacing power of the movement addresses, after all, the major political and economic
elites. This interactive conflict needs to be regarded at the core of the analysis. Simply put for now, in our approach we focus on the multidimensional outcomes of movements according to the goals born (and changing) within particular contextual conditions and out of conflictive (and productive) power relationships.

Furthermore, movements can produce impacts on different social groups and structural aspects of society, not only on the actions of their main enemies or opponents, or in the symbolic spheres. This approach, thus, entails the necessity of identifying the scope of the changes achieved by given collective actions. In sum, as Giugni (1998: 374) points out, we need to “specify the conditions that foster certain types of impact” and “to put movements and their outcomes in their larger social and political context”.

Our thesis is that the 15M has been a very successful movement although it has not fulfilled yet many of its most explicit goals, not to say its revolutionary aspirations. For the first time ever, since the Transition period, large numbers of the population have actively engaged in politics, an intense convergence of different social movements have happened (Martínez and García 2014) and a manifold of practical initiatives of self-organisation has taken place (Fernández-Savater 2013, Gutiérrez 2014, Bonet 2014). There has been, then, a success in social mobilisation which has facilitated the rise of a broad range of political ‘micro-effects’ (or against the ‘power effects’: Foucault 1982). The 15M has widened the public sphere of politics by creating deliberative spaces, empowering deprived social groups and achieving short-term political victories in its resistance to the neo-liberal patterns of government. As mentioned, the 15M has produced less significant impacts in the major governmental policies and did not catalyse any substantial transformation of the main political and economic structures.

Firstly, we discuss the theoretical approaches to research the movement outcomes and introduce our own criticisms and proposals. Secondly, we interrogate whether the often-blurred boundaries of the 15M in terms of identity, goals, opponents and evolution, allow setting a frame of intended effects. The analysis will describe the contextual features in which the various movement goals arise. The next section is devoted to distinguishing the social and political impacts according to different scales, dimensions, groups, contexts and power conflicts. The empirical evidence for this study stems from secondary sources of information such as mass media coverage of the 15M movement and the data and opinions provided by the movement organisations and participants included the direct observations of one of the authors until July 2013.
Theoretical framework: contexts, interactions and scales

Social movements evolve according to periods of heydays and decline. The most evident success of a movement is its continuation over time and to make socially visible its claims to the surrounding society. The attraction of participants to its activities of organisation, protest and mobilisation and, not the least, the social support obtained and its reputation among bystanders may be seen also as positive outcomes. The persistent challenge to social forms of domination and inequality is one of the most immediate proofs of how some movements are able to reach a political influence even without taking State power (Scott 1990, 2012). Other impacts tend to occur after the initial forms of success are achieved and before the extinction of the movement. Concessions, co-optation and institutionalisation may contribute to that final fade out, although these phenomena are not necessary results of the movement evolution (Neidhart and Rucht 1991). Concessions can fuel further demands, co-optation of some members or movement organisations might not erode the active core of the movement, and movements can give birth to 'anomalous social institutions' as practical means of survival (Martínez 2014).

A review of the academic literature about movement outcomes provides several precise concepts but few integral perspectives. Sometimes the self-reproduction of the movement is neglected as a success because State-centred perspectives focus more or almost exclusively in policy changes. Other times the impact of movements in social identities and cultural values are presented as the same level of importance as the repercussions in the political arena. Usually the significant contexts and the processes of interaction and evolution of the movement are not sufficiently specified and related to its demands. Therefore, in order to overcome these problems we should elaborate more on the premises of a consistent, holistic and heuristic approach.

A strand of research has argued that strong and cohesive organisations, as well as clear and single-issue goals, help movements to achieve success (Gamsom 1990). This argument has often been challenged. For example, Piven and Cloward (1979: 5) distinguished ‘formalised movement organisations’, on the one hand, and ‘mass movements’, on the other, as a means to suggest that apparent goals expressed by the organisations and their leaders tend to overshadow the “collective defiance as the key distinguishing feature of a protest movement” (ibid.). It would be, then, the context of collective defiance to political norms and to the ruling classes, including the location in the class structure of the protesters, what would explain the outcomes of the movement.

For Piven and Cloward, movements win when the context of interactions between protesters and authorities (including, above all, repression, concessions and co-optation) and the social changes affected in the disruption created by the movement, allow them the opportunities to win (Piven and Cloward 1979: 7, 14, 27-36). Furthermore, they convincingly argue that specific goals and demands are shaped along the process of social conflict expressed in the collective action (ibid.: 17) and their fulfilment depends not exactly on the power of disruption itself but on the politically mediated impact of the disruptions according to the audience, the measures adopted by the government and the electoral system (ibid. 23-27).
One common assumption is that disruptive tactics and the use of violence correlate positively with the two measures of success proposed by Gamson (1990: 28-29): the acceptance of protesters as legitimate political actors and the advantages obtained for those represented by the protesters. Several researchers have also disputed this observation. It has been claimed that, above all, specific events of violent riots, contentious and non-institutional politics should be clearly distinguished from the durable challenges of social movements to power-holders (Giugni 1998: 376-378). Secondly, the scope of the conflict, the acceptance of violence by society and the type of demands at play are some of the crucial circumstances that determine whether violent repertoires lead to successful outcomes or to a defeat of the militants.

Instead of considering goals, organisations and repertoires of protest isolated as possible explanations of the movement outcomes, we argue that they arise within specific social and political contexts. On the one hand, the concept of ‘political opportunity structures’ (Tarrow 1994, McAdam 1996, Kriesi 2004, Meyer 2004) contributes to specify key dimensions of the environment in which movements emerge, evolve and, consequently, impact as well. These structures are the relevant political context which either facilitates or constrains the development of social movements. It is in the interaction with these structures where the claims are more or less formalised and it is this significant context where the different groups in conflict may argue that the goals are attained, or not. In short, the political opportunity structures consist of the openness or access to State institutions, the connection of the movement with political allies or third parties involved in its support and recognition, the cohesion of the elites and the degrees of repression in order to keep the movement under control. In addition, some critics have also proposed to take into account the activist agency (subjective debates about the degree and types of success), the cultural frames (in terms of agenda setting, public opinion, collective identities and hegemonic discourses) and the shifts in the cycles of protest (Giugni 1998, Meyer 2004). One typical example is the analysis of the antinuclear movement in several Western countries where the few victories hinged upon the combination of access to the State institutions and the constraints stemming from the political culture and media coverage (Kriesi 2004: 82-85).

Social class divisions and struggles, and the whole economic organisation and contradictions of a given society or territory, are the crucial material basis behind social uprisings and waves of protest, although it is highly controversial to assure their causal relationship with the wills of movements (Melucci 1994). Accordingly, if these specific contents of the original context in which the movement is born help to explain its identity, purposes and course, the same context and its variations over time should be considered to evaluate the effects of the movement. In an attempt to bridge the ‘political process’ approach and the ‘new social movements’ or constructivist one (Touraine 1978, Melucci 1994), McAdam (1994: 58-63), for example, has expanded the cultural impacts of movements beyond the political and economic arena, to the following spheres: a) the spread of political ideologies and beliefs; b) the prevalence of certain frames of protest; c) the dissemination of collective identities; d) the innovation in terms of tactics of protest; e) changes in different cultural and linguistic expressions. According to McAdam, the more revolutionary the movement is in pursuing multiple goals of change, the
greater the potential to engender cultural transformations in spite of its failure in the most ambitious political and economic aspirations.

Nevertheless, we should admit that some social movements rise up as a simple reaction to certain policy decisions. If the movement is able to halt or alter that decision, there is a linear-causal way to interpret the outcome as a success. This happened in Hong Kong, for example, in 2002-3. The movement against the legislation intended to develop Article 23 of the Basic Law in Hong Kong in the post-colonial period, after its handover to China in 1997, was the largest one in the history of this ‘special autonomous region’. The movement opposed the bill launched by the government to enact national security legislation because this was seen as detrimental to already established civil liberties and in accordance to the authoritarian state control prevailing in mainland China (Ma 2009: 56-59). The massive opposition movement succeeded because the government postponed the legislation and the responsible minister stepped down. However, as Ma notes (2009: 59-60), the main organisational coalition running the movement failed in terms of enduring the mobilisation to push forward further claims of human rights and universal suffrage which were also implicit demands at that time.

Frequently the consequences of social movements go beyond specific policy changes such as the mentioned above. Following Tilly (1999), even when the movement goals are clearly defined in a not very controversial way for both activists and observers, we should distinguish between: a) ‘direct success’ of the movement when the claims are met due to its own actions; b) ‘indirect success’ of the movement when its claims are met due to others’ actions and outside events; c) ‘joint success’ when the effects of the movement actions and the effects of outside events and actions overlap and the movement demands are satisfied; d) ‘unintended consequences’ in case of other movement and outsiders’ actions produce impacts different to the most explicit movement claims.

Of course, ‘joint’ outcomes (either of success or failure) and unintended consequences (as new repressive measures) are more likely to occur, especially in absence of complete information available from all the groups involved in the conflict. In the example about Article 23 in Hong Kong, the hidden role played by the leaders of the People’s Republic of China might be crucial to understand the temporary defeat of the bill. A similar problem of interpretation appears in the case of the movement in Spain that opposed the compulsory military conscription over the 1980s and 1990s. The conscription was abolished in 2001 and the movement claimed it was a direct effect of its own campaigns and the sacrifice of thousands of jailed activists. However, the conservative government who took the decision argued that the reform was due to general circumstances of the world politics and to technical arrangements in order to shape a more efficient army. In addition, the movement was not absolutely satisfied since its more utopian goals in the long aimed at the eradication of all the armies (MOC 2002).

Burstein et al. (1995) propose another useful classification. They define six types of ‘policy responsiveness’ that represent an increasing success as well as “greater resources at each succeeding stage” (Burstein et al. 1995: 284): access (to achieve recognition or acceptance of the movement by the challenged authorities), agenda (to place movement demands in the political agenda), policy (to produce policies and legislation according to the movements
claims), output (to implement effectively the policies desired by the movement), impact (to alleviate the grievances of the protesters by the actions of the political system), structural (to transform the political structures and institutions). Letting aside the authors’ emphasis given to the SMO (Social Movement Organisation) and formalised objectives, which are not common features of all the movements, it is worth noting that their ‘bargaining perspective’ focuses on the interactions of movements, targets (political authorities or society at large) and the political context. Movement outcomes, thus, depend on those interactions or power relationships, not simply on movement capacities, resources and identities which can vary enormously. In a similar vein, Kriesi (2004) distinguishes an ‘interaction context’ and the ‘processes of actor and coalition formation’ which result into categories, identities, organisations and networks. In short, the actors involved in a contentious process of interactions could be divided into ‘activists’, ‘allies’, ‘adversaries’ and ‘bystanders’.

Burstein et al.’s proposal may be enlarged by adding more ‘scales’ to the less institutional stages of the model (access and agenda). As we argued before, the capacity of the movement to recruit, self-organise and mobilise needs to be regarded as a contribution to nurture the political arena at large (Fuchs 2006; Calle 2007: 139). The movement, then, can achieve challenging power to defy the authorities and, once it has been accepted as a legitimate political actor; another possible success is to accumulate bargaining power. While the notion of ‘scales’ may help to decide among different degrees of intensity of the distinct claims met, the presupposition of a continuous escalation of the movement outcomes, as suggested by Burstein et al., relies on an external rationality that can easily neglect their mutual overlapping.

Burstein et al.’s concepts shed light about the institutional effects of social movements, but they cover only one part of the picture. Movements claims may fall apart from the dominant political institutions when, for instance, try to address, above all, public attention and raise social awareness about formerly considered private issues, such as gender violence, women’s discrimination, homophobia or racism. Furthermore, either intended or unintended, movements can have spillover effects (Meyer and Whittier 1994), transnational diffusion (Tarrow 2005) or converge (Martínez and García 2014) with each other. These effects on other social movements, in our view, must be distinguished from other “third parties” or allies every time they effectively mediate in the achievement of one movement objective.

As Koopmans (2004: 25) noted, both diffusion processes and political opportunities can be found at the original context of a movement, as a part of a ‘wave of contention’, usually crossing the national boundaries: “Most movements, in fact, borrow inventions from other movements, either within the same polity or from abroad. By incorporating such innovations in their established repertoires, they not only introduce an element of novelty in their interactions with the regimes they oppose, but may also, if successful, establish a new recombination of identities, tactics, and demands that can in turn inspire other movements.” Thus, the 15M resembles many features of the alter-globalisation movement (Calle 2007, Scholl 2012) and of the citizen movement in Spain during the late 1970s (Castells 1983). Comparisons to them and to other early predecessors in the same social and political context may, then, illuminate the analysis of its impacts (Observatorio 2011, Toret et al. 2013). It is also worth making room for
the transnational connections and the new cosmopolitan activism (Tarrow 2005) that the 15M established with the wave of contemporary revolts and similar movements occurred in other countries (Egypt, Iceland, Portugal, Brazil, Turkey, etc.) where deep struggles for the democratisation or against the de-democratisation took place as well.

One undesired consequence of movements is the emergence of counter-movements, such as the conservative ones who opposed the feminist claims about abortion rights, gay and lesbian families, and sex education (Whittier 2004). Movements also create and spread symbols, such as the peace logo or the Guy Fawkes mask, that can enjoy a wide social recognition or even become mainstream cultural icons. Last but not least, another avenue of research has focused on how personal participation in social movements may affect individuals for the rest of their lives in terms of shaping their social identity and their political preferences (Meyer and Whittier 1994: 281; Giugni 2004).

Therefore, social movements may produce impacts in different social, cultural, political and economic scales. It is an empirical matter to distinguish, verify and, if possible, to measure them. However, the theoretical controversies highlighted here require a thorough discussion and to adopt a manifest stance. In brief we contend that the political context of origin is the crucial one to be specified in order to understand the challenge, either systemic or limited in its scope, engendered by the movement. The movement's goals and outcomes shall refer, above all, to that context. Secondly, goals and organisations do not tend to be so formalised as to allow straightforward and objective measures of cause-effect relationships. Moreover, impacts may include 'indirect successes' and unintended consequences, as it was suggested above. Over time, the significant contexts around the movement and the movement itself evolve in a way that, again, needs to be explained according to the expression, more or less explicit, of desirable goals.

We argue that the socio-cultural impacts of a movement, if any, cannot fully explain their relationship with the key political aspects involved in the dynamics of protest. In addition, the socio-cultural aspects tend to be framed by the movements as implicit claims, means to achieve utmost political ends or as substitutes of the latter. Notwithstanding, both institutional and non-institutional politics are the primary target of social movements. As a consequence, the political culture and other socio-economic dynamics cannot be downplayed as mere residues. Finally, a holistic approach that takes into account the protest cycles indicates that other movements, collective actions or specific campaigns may be crucial to know how the original movement produces relevant political impacts apart from the State institutions. That is to say, how the original claims and tactical innovations are adopted and sustained by other movements or SMO closely tied to the movement under scrutiny. Figures I and II represent a synthesis of the arguments and concepts drawn above with our further elaboration based on the ground-breaking contributions made by Kriesi et al. (1995: 209-215), Burstein et al. (1995) and Giugni (1998).
FIGURE I. Social and Political Context where Movement's Goals Emerge and Go Visible

Political Opportunity Structures
- Access / Exclusion to State Institutions
- Cohesion / Division of Elites
- Public Recognition and Third Parties as Allies
- Tolerance / Repression of Protest

Systemic Contradictions
- Socio-Economic Cleavages and Conflicts
- Cycles of Socio-Economic Crisis / Stability
- Dominant vs. Counter Hegemonic Cultures

Waves of Contention
- Local-National Movements as Predecessors
- Transnational Diffusion of Movements
- Global Arrangements and International Geopolitics

Strong and/or Formal SMO (Social Movement Organisation)
- Mass and Heterogeneous Social Movements

Form of Collective Action
- Single-Issue
- Movement's Goals
- Formalised
- Multiple-Issues
- Diffused

Violence and Disruption
- Non-Violent Combination of Institutional and Non-Institutional Actions

Prevailing Repertoire of Protest

FIGURE II. Social and Political Impacts of Movement's Goals

Movement Impacts
- Positive-Success (Fulfilled Goals)
- Negative-Failure (No Goals Fulfilled and Collapse)

Direct Effects (Claims Met Due to Movement's Actions)
- Indirect Effects (Claims Met Due to Others' Actions)
- Proactive (Obtains Concessions)
- Reactive (Halts Policies or Veto Power)

Unintended Consequences
- Contradictory Consequences

- Inconsistencies in Movement Discourses and Goals Over Time
- Opposed Movement Discourses and Practices
- Increased Repression
- Co-optation and Neutralisation
- Counter-movements

Self-Reproduction of the Movement
- Increasing Participation, Mobilisation and Legitimation of the Movement
- Political Recognition and Access (punctual or permanent) to State Institutions
- Increasing Bargaining Power to Negotiate

Movement's Claims in Political Agenda
- Policies and Laws Changed According to Movement's Claims
- Implementation of Reformed Policies
- Effectiveness of Implementation
- Revolutionary Change of Government or Regime

Social Visibility of Movement's Claims
- Social Awareness and Political Socialisation on Movement's Issues
- Legitimation and Hegemony of Movement's Agenda and Tactics
- Collective Identities and Activists' Careers
- Revolutionary Change of Socio-economic and Cultural Structures

Social Movements

Spillover and Diffusion Effects
- Convergence in Actions of Protest, Campaigns, Organisations, etc.

Power to Change the Institutional Political Process

Social and Cultural Changes

Disruptive and Challenging Power
Goals within a context

In March 2014, almost three years after the 15M exploded, the discourse that frames the current political initiatives of mobilisation remains tightly close to what was expressed in the first months after May, 15, 2011. For example, take the most repeated slogans displayed in the Marchas por la Dignidad (Marches for Dignity, different columns of demonstrators reaching the city of Madrid on March 22, 2014, after walking several weeks from different corners of the country, in a replication of a similar action which took place in July 2011). These are: against unemployment and precarious work, claiming for more jobs and decent working conditions; against cuts and privatisation of public services, claiming universal access to and defence of the Welfare State; against foreclosures and unaffordable housing, demanding decent and effective rights to housing; against corruption and the “illegitimate debt”, in favour of getting rid of the rule of the major political parties and of changing the basic consensus underlying the institutional structure of the Spanish and European representative democracy (SR 2014).

A second example is provided by DRY (Democracia Real Ya), the main organisation behind the coalition of groups that called for the simultaneous demonstrations in 57 Spanish cities in May 15, 2011. Its local node in Madrid said recently that the first Manifesto is applicable nowadays. In addition to the same claims of the Marches for Dignity, they emphasised a broader range of issues: stop public bailouts of banks, set up a participatory and direct democracy, social and just economy, etc. (DRY 2014). Astonishingly, it was unexpected that such a revolutionary-like set of demands and profound changes could have appealed so successfully to thousands of demonstrators and participants in the occupied squares the next weeks, not to mention the millions who were involved or sympathised with all the protest campaigns that followed.

A third example of how alive the 15M movement is nowadays comes from the event launched by the Movimiento por la Democracia (MPD, Movement for Democracy), on March 13, 2014. The same claims were mentioned while adding other more specific ones such as the implementation of a Universal Basic Income or the regularisation of undocumented immigrants, as well as a more revolutionary call to develop a participatory writing of a new constitution (the present one was approved in 1978, three years after the Dictator Franco’s death) (MPD 2014).

Going back to May 2011, the various thematic working groups and regular assemblies that formed the most active core of the occupied squares at that time, produced hundreds of wishes: reform of the electoral system and the regulation of participatory mechanisms (referenda and popular legislative initiatives), derogation of the labour and pensions reforms, measures to end unemployment, etc. (Pastor 2011: 111) In the first weeks of the movement life, during the burst of protest camps, DRY also added new demands such as the reduction of the military expenses, the reform of the fiscal system, public control of the banks and the warranty of citizen liberties.

Even more, the occupation of the plaza Puerta del Sol in Madrid hosted thousands of individual messages (not all pointing to concrete demands) hanging over the self-built structures, walls
and sculptures. Beyond the highly expressive power of that myriad of texts by using a fine sense of humour and by overwhelming the style of the traditional leftist organisations, two types of slogans may be highlighted among all: the criticisms against the representative democracy and the bi-party dominance of the institutional system (PP and PSOE “do not represent us”) on the one side; and the furious discontent for the economic crisis with its manifest consequences in form of unemployment, poverty, precariousness, privatisations and cuts on social welfare (“we won’t pay for this crisis” and “this crisis is a fraud”) (Adell 2011: 162).

Once the movement was evicted from the squares and turned into a web of decentralised local assemblies, different working groups and new struggles in the fields of public education and health, its transnational sound was more intense. The peak of this process was the demonstration of October 15, 2011, which occurred in more than 90 countries and 1,000 cities all over the world (AcampadaSol 2011). This event was still based on the same vague spirit of manifold claims related to the same topics of criticism to the political and economic crisis. Although continuous demonstrations and direct actions, in addition to a vibrant internal dynamics of self-organisation, occurred, only in few occasions there were attempts to make explicit claims in the form of a short political programme. This was the case, for example, of DRY Barcelona aiming to articulate the events to commemorate one year of uprisings. Thus, in May 2012 this group proposed five sets of precise goals with the hope of being more achievable than the former ambiguous ones, and aiming to provide guidelines for the movement: citizen audit of the debt without any transfer of public resources to the banks; opposition to the cuts and to the privatisation of public services; fair wages, jobs for all and refusal to extend the retirement age; right to decent and affordable housing, provision of social housing, promotion of housing cooperatives and cancellation of debts in case of foreclosures; Universal Basic Income and fiscal reform in order to get a just distribution of wealth (DRY 2012). These would entail such ‘radical reforms’ (Alford and Friedland 1985) that would not be in contradiction with the path to a revolution traced by other participants.

The so called “spirit of the 15M” pervaded most of the mobilisations between 2011 and 2014. This was due to that implicit and diverse set of claims as well as to its appealing organisational style - horizontal assemblies, inclusiveness, autonomy from formal organisations, prevailing pacific civil disobedience in combination with some institutional actions, etc. The specific campaigns of “tides” around different colours (white for the defence of the public health system, green for the public education, black for the civil servants, purple for the protests against the reform to limit the right to abortion, etc.) fed the movement with abundant motivations, grievances and demands to remain indignant and mobilised. With the prospect of forthcoming elections in May 2014 new political parties and movements also made attempts to translate the diffuse identity of the 15M into explicit political claims. Figure III summarises all these more or less formalised objectives of the 15M.

The above selection has evident implications:

a) There were always (between 2011 and 2014) explicit claims raised by the 15M movement.
b) There was also a diverse range of varied and specific claims that were not so visible for the public opinion, the media or other participants in the movement (diffuse claims).

c) There were many groups, organisations and ways of expressing the demands (that is, a mass and heterogeneous movement without any leading SMO).

d) The most overt claims were formalised as short programmes in order to mobilise society in the light of particular calls or events, but there was no consensus about them between all the branches of the movement.

e) There were multiple claims that somehow pointed to deep transformations of the economic and political regime, although most called for immediate actions to halt the consequences of the economic crisis and its political governance.

f) Most of the issues raised framed the Spanish movements’ political agenda over the last three years.

g) There was a general support to this wide set of movements’ claims insofar as it crosses previous ideological and electoral alignments which has facilitated a broad coalition of activism from lower and middle classes, without dominant expressions of class-identity.

Originally, the label 15M was applied to the pioneering demonstrations, the camps that followed and all the subsequent mobilisations fuelled by them. Further campaigns, organisations and political initiatives identified themselves as part of the 15M while also focusing on their specific sectors of struggles. The 15M, thus, was the general umbrella to name the hope of a revolutionary change for some and of urgent radical reforms for others. Neither one nor the other were ready-made political programmes, though it is evident the influence of activists with experience in former autonomist and global justice movements. In our view, the 15M participants formalised demands within the particular structural opportunities and constraints of the significant contexts where the movement emerged.

First of all, the 15M up-surge within a local and international wave of contention. The most significant movement before the 15M was the one against the war in Iraq in 2003. It was far in time, but still in the memory of many activists. This movement combined large mobilisations, especially in Madrid and Barcelona, with a novel international coordination. The target of that movement was the conservative government (PP) who declared the war in Iraq against a reluctant public opinion. One year after, in 2004, the PP in the central government was again the main target of a more concentrated mobilisation the day before the national (legislative and presidential) elections, and two days after the train bombings that killed around 200 people. The innovation, in this case, was the unknown gesture (in the form of flash mobs) of a remarkable civil disobedience when the protesters violated the prohibition of public “political demonstrations” before the general elections (Flesher 2011). These two were, in the Spanish context, the last major events of the cycle of protest with an alter-globalisation or global justice scope (Romanos 2013: 209).
In the years of the economic boom that followed in Spain less and more isolated movements showed up. Two of them were relevant in terms of their legacies to the 15M. The Movement for a Decent Housing in 2006 was also known as *V de Vivienda, VdV*, because the Guy Fawkes / Anonymous masks, based on the graphic novel and film *V for Vendetta*, started to be used in public, instead of the classic black scarfs and hoodies of the autonomist blocs. This movement mobilised, above all, the youth up to the late 40s and avoided the flags of any political party or labour union - in a similar manner as the two previous movements did. Its major innovations were the massive use of Internet as a tool for coordination and the generation of a consistent and also creative discourse about the role of urban speculation in the polarised economic growth (Blanco 2011). By pointing to unaffordable housing as a crucial systemic contradiction this movement was able to widely make visible claims also expressed by other more radical and long lasting ones such as the squatters (Martínez and García 2014). The PAH, one of the key pieces of the 15M, as we shall see later, was a clear heir of that movement (Colau and Alemany 2012).

A more mature and developed hacktivism or, broadly speaking, techno-politics (Toret et al. 2013) gained public support in 2010 and 2011 due to the campaigns launched by Wikileaks and Anonymous. These protests extended significantly the “just in time” self-organisation - sometimes considered as clicktivism or slacktivism in a pejorative sense, when only engages online-connected individuals from their homes. They also continued with the appeal to autonomous mobilisation beyond the traditional right and left-wing political identities (Padilla 2012: 68-71).

A final predecessor of the 15M is the struggle of university students against the reform of the European higher education -the so called Bologna Process. In spite of its transnational dimension, this European policy produced very local and disconnected reactions in different countries (OM 2011: 73-75). The students’ campaigns and demonstrations in Spain were not very massive and faced a brutal repression. However, this movement kept alive a continuous mobilisation of the student population while addressing public concerns about the precarious work and the privatisation and commodification of education.

Thus the anti-neoliberal and anti-crisis claims of the 15M were deeply rooted in previous local and transnational movements, mobilisations and protest campaigns. These created discursive frames which still resonated as valid claims in 2011. To a certain extent, the 15M just selected its political goals among the sources provided by preceding movements. These also offered political innovations and practical experiences available for any upcoming grassroots self-organisation such as the 15M: autonomy, civil disobedience, national government as an opponent target, techno-politics and transnationalism. The latter aspect deserves a further attention.

The 2008 financial crisis provoked an immediate social unrest – first in Iceland, then in Greece, France, the UK, Portugal and some Arab countries. All were inspirational and crucial references for the 15M. The case of Iceland was the most admired because the movement forced the president to resign and pointed to the banks as the main contributor culprits of the crisis. A new constitution also resulted from this. Several general strikes were the dominant way of
protest in Greece, France and Portugal, although without achieving substantial changes. In the UK the main movement focused on the raising fees, cuts and decreasing working conditions in the universities, and on the privatisations elsewhere. The defeat of this movement by the conservative-liberal coalition, nevertheless, left a bitter message for other European movements. Since January 2011 the lights turned to the revolutionary regime changes in the Arab countries - basically, in Tunisia and Egypt, although there were other various attempts in various countries which ended in civil wars in Libya and Syria. These processes showed more extreme costs as well as higher achievements in overthrowing authoritarian governments while revolting against the local consequences of the capitalist crisis. Since then, the occupation of Tahrir square in Cairo became the symbol and model for ulterior occupy-like movements in Madrid or New York City. The major difference is that the revolutionary process in Egypt left thousands of casualties in addition to serious drawbacks and the reproduction of former military elites.

A common thread of this wave of movements in Europe and its surroundings is that the masses addressed not only the economic deprivation, but the complicity of the politicians in office with those local and supranational powers who were worsening the situation. The legitimacy of representative governments was severely damaged and even identified with non-democratic regimes. Except the issue of autonomy, given the varied coalitions that were formed in many the cases, and the limited cross-national cooperation, this context of mobilisations shared some of the features we have attributed to the early Spanish movements prior the 15M - civil disobedience, national government as a target of opposition and techno-politics. Therefore, the multiple claims displayed by the 15M activists had more chances of resonating nationally and transnationally if they participated in the more general European-and-beyond earthquake. The closer they were framed as belonging to that wave of precedent and contemporary mobilisations, the better for the 15M in order to win public recognition and alliances.

We now can fine-tune the analysis and look at other structural windows of opportunities and constraints of the context that shaped the goals of 15M. As Stobart (2014) has noted, in the spring of 2010 the social-democrat or centre-left government of the PSOE made a substantial shift under the pressure of the European Union, the US and other international institutions (MIF). Cuts in the public sector wages were implemented, reforms of the labour legislation and the retirement age justified a general strike in the fall of that year. Other neoliberal measures following the Germany-Merkel-led austerity policies intended to satisfy creditor interests. The unemployment volume soared beyond 5 million people in 2011. Privatisations were also the flagship of the other major political party, the conservative PP, in the regions and municipalities where they were in office. Between 2008 and 2011 hundreds of cases of corruption of politicians were portrayed in the mass media as colluding with the companies behind the construction boom of the past decade. The huge stock of vacant houses (approx. 15%) and the difficulties in gaining access to affordable housing for a large number of underpaid workers supplemented the grievances. At the same time, the few progressive social policies put forward by the PSOE suffered continuous attacks by religious and right-wing mobilisations in the streets that, reversely, overshadowed the aforementioned movements of those years due to their favourable coverage by the conservative mass media.
The consequence of these accelerated, accumulated and interrelated events was the rebirth of radical and anti-neoliberal politics. The 15M, thus, was an intense response to cuts and unemployment by assembling the experiences, resources and references provided by the local and transnational wave of contention. However, it was not a mechanical response to that profound economic crisis. Given the political context described, the 15M was, above all, an organised way to force the PSOE to disobey the so called austerity programme and to maintain a basic Welfare State. The PP was included in the same criticism as that party was already applying neoliberal policies at the municipal and regional instances, while demanding to deepen them at the national level. This dominant two-party system with similar policy outcomes undermined the beliefs in the representative democracy and the electoral system as effective instruments for the population to get an influence in the government. Thus, the repeated claim of participatory and direct democracy by the 15M became a strategic election of an aspirational frame given the closed access of social movements to the institutional establishment.

The demand for a deeper and stronger democracy coincided with increasing poverty, the elimination of public subsidies and, in short, the erosion of middle and working class' income. This reinforced the contents of equality, public services for all and social rights within the concept of democracy, which were not usual in the years of economic growth. For many, then, a new foundation of the pillars of democracy was needed. Moreover, a declining quality and usefulness of representative democracy, or de-democratisation, was perceived as a general threat that added to the whole set of grievances. Not too surprisingly, the popularity of the issues of autonomy, self-management and direct democracy within the 15M stems from the influential criticisms largely sown by the autonomists and global justice movements (Romanos 2013) which also opposed the poor capacity of the labour unions to mobilise against state power. The 15M also represents a massive barrier, if not a certain kind of counter-movement, to the recent far-right movements who protested exclusively against the social policies of the PSOE.

In sum, the 15M addressed the core of the political system in a loose form of attempting a revolutionary regime change if understood mainly as a halt to the de-democratisation drift of the predominant two-party, representative, corrupted and neoliberal structures of democracy because these proved unable to deal with the global economic crisis and to assure basic living conditions for large numbers of the population. Obviously, this argument implies that the 15M was able to push forward far-leftist claims in a non-stigmatised language, without the burden of the ossified institutional left, the leftist organisations and the cleavages of voters according to the traditional leftist discourses.

On the one side, the analysis of the context of emergence of the 15M may be developed more in-depth by understanding the local political history of interactions between movements and authorities -especially by looking at the repressive measures against far-left activism and its insignificant translation in the institutional arena of politics (Fernández 2009). On the other side, it is worth noting the different mechanisms used by the elites to reproduce their domination -especially with the global expansion of the former State-owned companies and the
attraction of foreign investments in the real-estate sector (López and Rodríguez 2010, 2011). This would provide a richer picture of the context but we do not expect a substantial alteration of our main argument: the 15M chooses its preferred goals according to the most salient tensions and conditions of the political context. However, we should distinguish between the 'genealogical context' we have portrayed until now and the 'context of emergence' that propitiates an initial growth of the movement. In particular, the long list of claims made by the different participants in the 15M was produced mainly over the first weeks of the protest camps. This obliges to specify the conditions and mechanisms that helped the movement demands to gain recognition in its first stage:

1) DRY was a celebrated coalition of organisations who reached a basic consensus in terms of discourse and methods with the aim of calling to the initial and simultaneous demonstrations. Afterwards, DRY and its former allies entrenched to a secondary role during the protest camps (Romanos 2013, Abellán 2014).

2) The municipal and regional elections of May 22, 2011, were a very unusual opportunity window for the movement to achieve international media coverage due to the abundant presence of journalists from all over the world trying to verify how the PSOE will lose power after its neoliberal turn and its replacement by the PP (Adell 2011).

3) The occupation of the Sol square in Madrid with tents was a catalysing event of further occupations and actions because its central location, the media visibility that achieved, its diverse social composition of activists and involved passers-by and its intense political activity in form of working groups. The camp in Sol also had strong bonds with squatted and autonomous social centres located in the surroundings (Martínez and García 2014). The camp also enjoyed the tolerance of authorities for almost one month. Then, it was due to those circumstances that the camp succeeded not because the form of protest as an urban camp which was not new for social movements (only in Madrid there was 42 protest camps in the previous 25 years, and two of them were able to last 64 and 183 days while located in a not so central area, Paso de la Castellana: Adell 2011: 151).

These three aspects, then, provide the context of emergence of the 15M where its multiple claims were expressed and successfully listened to. The fact that no claim gained a clear priority over the others resides in the diversity of groups and organisations who were engaged in the birth of the movement, no less than in the multi-dimensional layers of the political and economic crisis which affected the activists.

The forthcoming electoral date also reinforced the focus on the shortcomings of the representative democracy and the two-party machinery that ruled. In accordance, the external pressure on the 15M and the proposals of some participants led to intense deliberations about how to reform the electoral procedures, which options small political parties and social movements have to alter the dominant balance, whether corrupted politicians might be punished, how to expand or create more effective ways of citizen participation and accountability, and so on and so forth. Beyond these specific demands the search for a genuine
or true democracy has been permanent over the last three years of the 15M, but the victory of the PP in the general elections of November 2011 delayed this more general debate until the period before the European elections of May 2014. The debate persists because both the defects of the existing democracy and the regressive policies applied by the central governments are incapable of preserving the Welfare State. As a consequence, the threat of an ongoing de-democratisation process contrasts with the terrain gained during the Transition when new democratic institutions were achieved thanks to wide resistance to the remnants of the Dictatorial order.

As for the relative toleration of the Madrid protest camp, while others were violently suppressed much faster, it was a very exceptional condition that facilitated the proliferation and ambitions of the demands. The longer the camp existed as a solid organisational infrastructure and served as an international symbolic speaker, the higher the expectations were of changing the government, the democratic regime and even the economic and cultural basis of the society. The repression of the movement increased in the coming months, but the camp(s) fed the remaining movement with broad aspirations to social change. It was the movement, then, in interaction with initially low repressive authorities, that created the opportunity to outline multiple goals as an escalation of the claims already introduced by previous, similar and contemporary movements.

**FIGURE III. Claims raised by the 15M Movement**

- **Explicit claims**
  - Improvement of participatory democracy
  - Reform of the electoral system
  - Derogation of the labour and pensions reforms
  - Non privatisation of public services
  - No cuts in the Welfare State
  - Control and punishment of corruption
  - Public control of the banks
  - Social audit of the public debt
  - Stop evictions of foreclosed principal homes
  - Implementation of non-recourse debt in mortgages
  - Effective warranties of citizen liberties
  - Stop evictions of protest camps

- **Diffuse claims**
  - Unconditional Basic Income
  - Decent working conditions and fair wages
  - Progressive fiscal system
  - Affordable and decent housing
  - Just distribution of wealth
  - Overthrow the government (PSOE and PP)
  - Direct democracy based on assemblies

- **Specific organisations’ claims**
  - Social rental housing of bank-owned houses (PAH)
  - Observation of human rights in cases of unpaid mortgages (PAH)
  - Sanctions to owners of empty houses (PAH)
  - Promotion of housing cooperatives and ethical banks (PAH, DRY)
  - Penal responsibilities of the bailout to banks (15MpaRato)
  - Compensations to those cheated by banks (15MpaRato, TCI)
  - Free access to culture (DRY, Anonymous, 15m.cc)
  - Environmental sustainability (DRY, Rurales Enredados)
  - Reduction of military expenses (DRY)
  - Universal access for all to the public health system (Marea Blanca, Yo Sí Sanaid Universal)
  - Regularisation of undocumented immigrants (MPD)
  - Collective writing of a new constitution (MPD)
  - Stop evictions of squatted houses (PAH) and social centres (Local Assemblies)
  - Halt to repressive legislation and measures plus warranty of arrested protesters (Comisión Legal So)
  - Free and publicly granted right to abortion (Feminismo So)
  - Rights for out-migrant Spaniards (JSL, Marea Granote)
Impacts out of power struggles

If the 15M goals are so elusive, so despairing might be the measure of its impacts. Facing the question about whether the 15M movement has succeeded or failed entails a process-like approach. The multiple goals of the movement have not changed substantially over the last three years. However, they have been claimed in different ways and under different circumstances by different groups. Every expression of goals and the attempts to satisfy them hinge upon particular contexts. Furthermore, the final results, if any, occur as products of the power relationships, usually by way of conflictive interactions, in which different social groups are engaged, rather than in a functional relationship between means and ends. Therefore, goals and the chances to meet them are just part of the groups’ strategies within the constraining and changing contexts of interaction.

From an organisational-like point of view, in order to understand the groups and contexts involved, we can summarise the evolution of the 15M as follows:

a) The foundational cross-city demonstrations in May 15, 2011 and the organisations that launched the primal call.

b) The protest camps in Sol and imitated in other cities.

c) The working groups and committees generated in the protest camps.

d) A series of demonstrations, actions, initiatives and campaigns also born in the camps.

e) The de-centralisation of the camps to the neighbourhood-local assemblies.

f) The occupations of houses and social centres by 15M local assemblies, working groups, the PAH or participants in the camps.

g) The gatherings to halt evictions from foreclosed homes.

h) The emergence of sectorial tides in the public education and public health systems, above all.

i) The transnational demonstration in October 2011 and the setting up of overseas groups.

j) The general and sectorial strikes where unions worked along with 15M working groups, assemblies and tides.

k) The events to commemorate every year after May 15, 2011.

l) A series of demonstrations, actions, initiatives and campaigns promoted by groups created in or inspired by the protest camps (with an increasing addition of and convergence with formal organisations and labour unions).

m) The emergence of political parties intending to give an institutional continuity to the 15M.
Some of these manifestations overlap, some last longer than others, and some are made of a very different nature although all involve core groups of activists – apart from supporters at various levels. Some activists jump from one group or event to another, while others simply quit at a certain point, with the option of reincorporating themselves later into the general stream of protest still later on (a graphic representation of all the collectives and initiatives has been attempted by www.autoconsulta.org).

Politicians, journalists and academics usually referred to the 15M movement as something more or less vague, but there is a general consensus that the 15M has modified the whole political life in Spain. The inauguration of a new political cycle due to the 15M resembles the memories of the Transition or the 1968 wave of protests – while the alterglobalisation movement is seldom held up to the same category of political distinction.

In particular, we argue that one of the reasons for such a consideration is that the movement has shown an extraordinary capacity to self-reproduce itself and to keep high levels of participation and mobilisation along the three years of its existence. Of course, since the first forms of organisation and protest are not the same as the subsequent ones; a straightforward observation is that every new form is an impact of the pioneering ones. This is an obvious assessment but it requires two additional reflections.

On the one hand, some organisations (such as the PAH) were already active before (since 2009), but it was due to the 15M that their direct actions, demands and campaigns gained popularity, resonance, legitimation, engaged participants and support (DeClós 2013, El País 2013). On the other hand, the development of single initiatives or campaigns such as the lawsuit against the managers of one of the aided and partially nationalised banks (Bankia) combined or simplified some of the 15M goals into concrete contexts (15MpaRato 2014). As a consequence, given this specific evolution, neither the success nor the failure of the 15M depend on the general goals of the movement at large but rather on the impacts of every single form of its reproduction at different stages. In sum, if the memory and diffuse identity of the 15M movement was still invoked three years later by a nurtured number of political actors it was because its general disruptive and challenging power was still widely recognised, in spite of its organisational and expressive mutations.

Some points need to be clarified in order to understand the social and political impact of the 15M on its environment as a ‘challenging power’. First, all those who claim to be part or be inspired by the 15M accepted a general commitment to peaceful means of protest. In the Spanish context, every direct action of protest involving riots, clashes with the police or the destruction of urban furniture, was rapidly framed by the political and media elites as (low intense) “terrorism”. The conflict between the Spanish State and the Basque separatist armed group ETA provided the ground to divide the whole arena of politics between “violent militants” (labelled as “terrorists”) and “non-violent demonstrators” (labelled as “democrats”). Both social-democratic and conservative governments enacted severe anti-terrorist legislation and harsh police procedures which were eventually applied to different social movements (Fernández and Ubasart 2008, Fernández 2009). Police repression and arrests in demonstrations, thus, were very common when facing, for example, any disruption of the motorised traffic or any
overdue licensed time to demonstrate. Those highly polarised views around the legitimate violence employed by protesters, remarkably constrained the movements’ options, despite ETA declared a cease fire in 2010 and confirmed it in 2011. Thus, the 15M gained wide social support, recognition and legitimation granted on the explicit embracement of non-violent means of protest. And, reversely, this contrasted with the widespread anger that the increasing police violence generated.

Regarding the impact of violence on the legitimation of the 15M, we must highlight three significant events:

1) In Barcelona, June 15, 2011, some members of the Catalonian Parliament were insulted, spat on and jostled by activists.

2) On the 29th of March, 2012, many 15M groups were involved in the general strike jointly launched by the two major and most of the minor labour unions, so the pickets, sabotages and riots that happened in many places were partially attributed to the 15M.

3) A call to demonstrate in front of the Parliament in Madrid in September 25, 2012, warned activists that violent confrontation with the police could occur since some groups threatened with getting access by all the possible means.

These and other episodes of certain violence involving 15M activists as apparent promoters (for example, the so called “escraches” or to single out politicians who were against reforming the Spanish mortgage law) engendered some internal splits and slightly undermined the public legitimation of the movement. However, they were isolated cases and also combined with other factors so that the movement did not lose the general support already achieved.

Moreover, given the continuing abuses by the police, especially in the most dramatic cases of evictions of residents from their homes, and the rapid decline of the terrorist-like frame, the public was more prone to back more intense and risky forms of civil disobedience, including violent resistance to the police. This was evident in the street battles that happened in January 2014 in the city of Burgos. The spark that set off the riots was ignited by the works of urban renewal of a street in a working class neighbourhood within the context of local corruption and severe cuts. Instead of just radical youngsters, residents of different age and political background took part in the mobilisations and the wave of solidarity with those arrested. A progressive current of opinion, thus, justified the dwellers’ violent resistance beyond the boundaries of the local conflict (López 2014).

More recently, the riots that occurred at the end of the Marches for Dignity in March 2014 were slightly less controversial among the 15M supporters than previous ones (Al-khimiya 2014). Some international precedents such as the confrontational conflicts in Istanbul and Rio de Janeiro provided more justifications for the groups of youngsters who fought back the police, set up barricades and smashed the windows of banks. The political authorities were also accused of conducting abusive interference and disruption of a highly successful and peaceful demonstration with the only aim of labelling protesters as violent people (DISO Press 2014).
However, the success of the 15M regarding the access to State institutions and the production of bargaining power was hardly met with the exception of some specific groups. When successful, the goals were fulfilled in close relation to a number of issues that the 15M was able to incorporate into the political agenda.

1) In particular, it was the PAH the most salient and effective organisation in doing so. The PAH is not a pure 15M group, but a housing movement based on a strong SMO and narrowly-defined demands. However, its convergence with the 15M was very intense and fruitful since its first participation in the coalition with DRY (Colau and Alemany 2012, Deklós 2013). The PAH was involved in negotiations with municipal governments, offered legal aid and, above all, launched a Citizen Initiated Legislation that obtained 1.5 million of signatures but that was rejected in the Parliament.

2) On the other side, many local groups and assemblies of the 15M actively participated in the municipal councils and deliberations, although their access to these institutions was usually very unstable (see many examples in the publication Madrid 15M 2014).

3) A third example of this punctual impact was the campaign “15MpaRato” which consisted of a penal lawsuit, backed by a popular crowdfunding, against the managers and political authorities responsible for the activities of one of the major banks bailed out by the State, Bankia (15MpaRato 2014).

4) The so called “white tide” within the public health system was also very successful with their legal opposition to the privatisation of hospitals in Madrid (and elsewhere), and the highest regional authority (Secretary of Health) stepped down once his plan was defeated in court (Sánchez 2013).

5) Regarding the occupation of buildings, one of the 15M local assemblies in Madrid (Montamarta) was able to negotiate and be granted the right to use one old city-owned market even after the sudden eviction of the squatters (Martínez and García 2014). It was not an isolated case of negotiations, concessions or legal victories for squatters within the general umbrella of the 15M. Other squats for housing purposes, promoted by the PAH or by other 15M groups, in Catalonia and Andalusia for instance, were also empowered to negotiate with the authorities and to reach practical agreements or for the provision of public housing (the Corrala Utopia in Seville being one of the most famous cases: Stelfox 2013, Granado 2014).

Nonetheless, the 15M was very ineffective in changing the core of the institutional political process, at least over the first three years. Furthermore, new neoliberal, regressive and more authoritarian policies were enacted. Instead of the latter definitely knocking out the movement, it counteracted every time with new faces and protest actions. The movement failed but did not give up speaking out. This persistence made possible to have a say in the political agenda in very subtle and transversal manners.

A central dimension of both the political agenda and the institutional political process is the electoral one. In general, the 15M has contributed to erode the voters’ support to the two major
parties (PP and PSOE), to improve the results of other minor political parties (IU, UPyD, ANOVA and CUP), and to slightly increase the percentage of non-valid and blank votes, as well as the abstention from voting (Anduiza et al. 2013). The blank and null ballots were more significant in the local and regional elections on May 22, 2011, than in the general elections of November 20, 2011, because there were many discussions in between regarding the benefits for the small parties (Anduiza et al. 2013: 15).

These are not great achievements since the two-party dominance is still quite strong and the 15M claim of challenging the representative model of democracy has not been followed by the electoral constituencies. Voting and protesting seem to be parallel paths. Even worse, the November 20, 2011, general elections ended with the victory of the conservative PP who openly declared to bring forward new labour reforms and to reduce State spending. A similar result occurred in the elections in Catalonia (November 2012), won by the conservative and nationalist CIU. It was only in some regional elections where other political parties adopted some elements of the 15M anti-neoliberal discourse in order to get access to their respective parliaments (ANOVA in Galicia, CUP in Catalonia) or even to the government (IU in Andalusia). Nevertheless, none of these political parties behave as mirrors or electoral expressions of the 15M.

Even more, it is important to note that the elections were a controversial and very much discussed issue since the beginning of the 15M. Initially, most of the participants in the 15M never absolutely opposed the elections. The criticisms focused more on the current electoral system, the pervasive political corruption in the principal political parties, and the similarity of neoliberal policies implemented by the principal parties. This is why the activists endorsed measures to improve more participatory, direct and on-line mechanisms of democracy. The favoured options, in the end, did not prevent activists and sympathisers from voting, but, quite the opposite, encouraged them to vote and to punish the two-party (plus CIU) hegemony by different means, whether electoral or not. In short, the effects of the 15M on the increasing blank and null ballots were less significant than the increased voting for small parties (Anduiza et al. 2013: 17).

It was in relation to the highly criticised Senate where the blank and null casts rose, for the first time, to 9% in November 2011 (Pastor 2011, Adell 2011). In the May 2011 elections non-valid votes counted for 1.7% (against 1.2% in 2007) and blank ballots were 2.6% (compared to the 1.9% in 2007). These variations were proportionally lessened in the November 2011 elections: null votes counted for 1.3% (against 0.6% in 2008), blank votes counted for 1.4% (versus 1.1% in 2008) (Anduiza et al. 2013: 16). The percentage of the non-voters amounted 28.31% in the November 2011 elections, a marginal increase of 2.2% compared to the previous general elections (Ministerio de Interior 2011).

In addition, the 15M forced most of the political parties to include some of its more moderate demands in their electoral programmes, such as the reform of the electoral system, the regulation of citizen initiated legislation, administrative transparency, punishment of corruption, the creation of public banks and the bill to enforce the non-recourse debt for unpaid mortgages (Calvo 2011, Gálvez 2011). Letting aside the low accountability of the
Spanish political parties once they win seats in the representative bodies, it is evident that the 15M affected their electoral strategies without even a single vis-à-vis negotiation. Thus the movement obtained a partial and unintended success, still far away from its broader goals.

The 15M had no partisan affiliation either and most of the groups and organisations did not reach, as we have seen, a direct access to State institutions. However, many left wing political parties (IU, Equo, Compromís, CUP, ANOVA, etc.) tried to persuade the 15M activists that they could represent them faithfully. As argued, the support of the 15M to these parties was implicit and merely tactical, in order to undermine the power of the dominant ones. Many things changed when in January 2013 a new political party called “Red Ciudadana Partido X” aimed to give an institutional and stable continuity to the core claims expressed by the 15M. It focused mainly on electronic devices to improve democratic participation and the struggle against corruption. Initially, Partido X emphasised more the “democratic method” they wanted to develop, than possible candidates or a political programme -which were a blank at that moment. With a view to the European elections in May 2014, they presented a distinct style in party politics by developing an original procedure of selecting candidates (not necessarily proposed by the party, but also by any individual citizen) and the collaborative writing of the electoral programme. In March 2014 Partido X proposed a “functional cooperation” with two other other political parties on the left (Podemos and Demos+ launched by civil servants) and one with an ecologist orientation (Equo). Nothing came of this, however, notwithstanding the pronouncements of commonality (Ajanovic 2014).

Among the newest political parties, Podemos is the one which also more overtly intended to represent the 15M’s clamour. Equally to Partido X, Podemos did not want to represent the 15M. Both parties emphasised their commitment to respect each other’s autonomy. Podemos was born in February 2014 as a joint initiative of a well-known leftist media leader and a far-left political party (Izquierda Anticapitalista) backed by several intellectuals. They proposed an initial draft of a basic political programme –in favour of a deeper participatory democracy, a defence of public goods, human rights, equality and social control of economic powers as the central planks. In order to imitate the 15M and to channel part of its activism, it was conceived as a decentralised organisation of “circles” of membership with a strong bottom-up and federative configuration –quite different, then, to the more individual and on-line participation envisioned by Partido X. Podemos unsuccessfully approached IU in order to strengthen a further electoral coalition based on participatory methods to set candidates and the electoral programme in a similar fashion as it was made by Partido X.

Both initiatives, Partido X and Podemos, were singular and somehow contradictory. They can neither substitute the 15M nor claim its direct representation. The partisan autonomy of the 15M contributes to its credibility and legitimacy (Alabao 2014). These two new political parties, then, are just political experiments in order to have a say in the State institutions since the 15M was not capable of doing so. However, both Partido X and Podemos want to behave as ‘institutional interfaces’ to help the 15M expand its institutional impact. The European elections are used as a platform for that aim given the opportunity of a proportional representation for the whole country as a sole constituency, instead of the differentially weighted geographical
constituencies in force in the general, regional and municipal elections. In our terms, *Partido X* and *Podemos* contribute to the access of the 15M to the institutional arena, the agenda setting and the deliberation about bills and policies, with the movement remaining independent. These two political parties, then, are also unintended outcomes of the 15M due to the absence of strong formal organisations within the 15M. For many activists, the confrontation with the core of the institutional system did not lead to tangible results. Once the autonomy and the loose organisational structure of the 15M became uncontested features of its identity, the contradiction with its ambitious goals also became more unacceptable for many. Therefore, *Partido X* and *Podemos* were conceived as parallel instruments to the 15M but sharing the same origin—this follows the experience of the Green Party in Germany with respect to the anti-nuclear and the environmental movements (Rucht 1999). At this stage, these new parties are just strategic allies who contribute to maintain 15M challenging power.

The 15M has also tried to influence decisive institutions by using alternative means. Among the most relevant ones were two public consultations against the privatisation of the water supply and six hospitals in Madrid (Sánchez 2013). Both were very successful in terms of signatures collected (165,000 and 1,082,300 votes, respectively) and they were also combined with other institutional (suing legal trials, meetings with political representatives, participation in municipal plenums, etc.) and non-institutional initiatives (demonstrations, sit-ins in public roads, human chains around hospitals, organised disobedience to facilitate health services to undocumented migrants, etc.).

With a less sectorial focus, but sharing a similar concern about fuelling participatory democracy outside the State institutions, in March 13, 2014, the Movement for Democracy (MPD) called for the creation of decentralised groups and a forthcoming general public consultation in order to produce a new constitution or a chart of social rights that all the political parties ought to observe. For the MPD, the forthcoming municipal and general elections in 2015 are the institutional targets of this bottom-up process of writing, above all, a new bill of rights.

Other interfaces or attempts to establish ‘movement institutions’ were less ambitious, but added diversity and particular focus on public affairs that arose in the squares (for example, *Comisión Legal Sol, Oficina Precaria* and *Tribunal Ciudadano de Justicia 15-M*).

The above analysis shows that the capacity of the 15M to affect the institutional process has been low, punctual and, in general, poor compared to the profound challenges that the movement has produced along three years. Due to some very professional campaigns settled in court, the 15M won some judicial battles. However, the movement has been unable to halt most of the neoliberal and austerity policies that were imposed by the PSOE and the PP (as well as CIU in Catalonia), and failed after the strong mobilisations of the “green tide” in the public education, for example (Sánchez 2013).

Another indicator of failure was manifest in August 2011 when both the PSOE and the PP agreed upon the change of a fundamental article of the Spanish Constitution by which, after the reform, the payment of the public debt will have priority over any other spending of the public
budget. The 15M responded late and inefficiently to that serious decision. All the efforts at the time were dedicated to preparing the transnational demonstration in October 2011. Other regressive measures such as the reforms of workers’ rights and wages, the educational basic law, the exclusion of some social groups from access to the health system, the conservative regulation of abortion, the amnesty given by the government to corrupt politicians and businessmen, the cuts in public services or the inclusion of new behaviours as criminal offences, clearly overwhelmed the limited capacities of the 15M.

Why, then, is the 15M so paramount to inaugurate a new political cycle in Spain? Is it responsible for a more ‘silent revolution’ in the social and cultural spheres? Is it because the movement has been able to fuel ‘real utopias’ (Wright 2010) as micro-alternatives to capitalism or, at least, to neo-liberalism? There are different dimensions here that usually overlap each other that should be disentangled.

On the one side, the 15M created a social concept against the crisis and the neoliberal policies that transcended traditional left and wing political alignments. Even more, it was able to break the cultural hegemony that prompted people on consumerism, preserved politics as an exclusive field for professional politicians and experts, and censored or dismissed radical protests. The 15M brought together different social movements and social groups to unite in a common cause. This had not been achieved on this scale since the Transition. It gave birth to a stream of strong public deliberation that politicised many aspects of daily lives. Politics was no longer the sole realm of institutions and political parties. Even the labour strikes gained more social engagement and comprehension, despite the low rate of union affiliation and the corporatist image of the main labour organisations. Social attitudes, then, were profoundly affected.

The flaws of the current representative democracy, the global financial powers driving the governmental agenda and the decisions imposed by the Troika (the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the Monetary International Fund) triggered anger and infinite debates. The strategic goals of the movement, regardless of how vague and varied they were displayed, and its tactical actions of protest won general sympathy and legitimation (INJUVE 2011a, 2011b; CIS 2011; Campo 2012). This shaped a distinct non-institutional and autonomous ground of politics that was largely disconnected from the electoral participation and preferences, as we have seen before. Civil disobedience, for example, never before was widely practised and justified -unlicensed camps and demonstrations, human barriers to oppose forced evictions by police and judicial authorities, illegal squatting of abandoned buildings, employees in hospitals providing services to those who were legally excluded, online downloading of copyright products, etc. Therefore, the 15M promoted a new political culture, very much in debt with the autonomist legacies, and opened cracks in the hegemonic discourses about politics and capitalism.

On the other side, a day-to-day politics was embraced in terms of specific practices where the above discourses were produced, circulated, used and fed back. The most well-known landmark in this learning process is the practice of assemblies and horizontality (Corsin and Estella 2013, Moreno 2013). While assemblies as a form of direct democracy and deliberation were
very important in the Transition period, the difference now is that the technique has been very much enhanced and the manipulation attempted by political parties and partisan militants is not so easy. The global justice movement and the autonomist movements also left fruitful examples of working horizontally, without leaders and within a very diverse range of contexts, social groups and identities. The 15M endorsed those principles and behaved accordingly, although the targets now were not the global summits but the local-national context of political decay and soaring poverty.

The array of self-organised projects that emerged as a result of the initial push of the 15M may be understood simultaneously as active members of the movement and alternative ways of production and reproduction of life. Some working groups, such as Economía Sol or La Unión en la Calle, were like outdoor schools while combining collective and accessible production of knowledge with explicit political claims. New working co-operatives started up and all kinds of social economy initiatives (such as ethical banks) received much more attention than ever before because the belief in the 'free market' lost ground (Pare 2012, Ebola 2012, Oliénden et al. 2013). Collaborative libraries on-line (Bookcamping) and solidarity networks to provide food, for example (Bancos de Alimentos) extended the notions of social economy to projects of mutual aid.

The squatted buildings especially when owned by banks, were applauded and sparked a regular media attention that in many cases facilitated negotiations with the authorities instead of quick and violent evictions as was the trend hitherto. Everyday political activities were also embedded in the widespread use of cameras, phones, blogs, websites, digital press and social networks as tools to communicate about demonstrations, police abuses, cases of corruption, etc. apart from their value to deliberate collectively.

These outcomes are not just a mechanical reaction to the crisis and the neoliberal policies. Citizens felt encouraged to participate in that way because the collective input and organisation of multiple groups provided examples, knowledge, skills and other resources. Even an open-source wiki-encyclopedia of the 15M (15m.cc) was set up as a live engine of collective and reflective knowledge and not just as a mere collection of the movement's memory.

Although the movement has also developed imaginative ways of on-line and off-line protest (see, for example, the campaign Toque a Bankia), one striking aspect of its evolution is the extension of broader coalitions with formal organisations, labour unions and even some political parties. These alliances occurred also in the first stages, but most of the flags and symbols of the institutional actors were relegated to the background –at least, that was the general will of most of the activists and participants. The Green Tide (Marea Verde) and the White Tide (Marea Blanca), for example, incorporated in their struggles not only workers in the public services, but also professional and labour organisations, users of all ages and a number of supportive groups that made collective actions very hybrid, horizontal and cooperative -for the first time ever in Spain. Of course, as usual some labour unions tried to lead the assemblies, the rhythm of the mobilisation or the meetings with the authorities. The general and sectorial strikes, as noted, gathered different labour unions together in order to mobilise and raise awareness, along with many 15M groups, which was seldom a practice in
the past decades. Finally, the Marches for Dignity showed new instances of ‘united fronts’ and transversal politics in which no classic leftist identity occupied the foreground and the final stage as a dominant one, except in the headlines of the right-wing newspapers (Alvarez 2014, Hidalgo 2014).

The most successful movement within the 15M, the PAH, was able of establishing strong and completely novel networks of solidarity between people threatened by evictions and activists with many different backgrounds (linked to migrants' associations, neighbourhood activism, political parties, squatters, students, lawyers, accountants, psychologists, etc.). In this case, the celebrated leadership of the PAH as its official spokesperson made a difference with the rest of the political culture disseminated by the 15M. In March 2014, the PAH showed a banner on its website with the figures of avoided evictions (1,074) and people rehoused (1,049), many of them in more than 20 squatted buildings (Colau and Alenany 2014). However, the total number of evictions from all kind of properties, not only from the principal home, was strikingly unbearable: 82,860 in 2013; 91,622 in 2012; 77,854 in 2011 (against 25,943 in 2007) (CGPJ 2014). This is just a bare indicator of the huge endeavour concerning the socio-economic inequalities and structures that the 15M faces, in spite of the various pokes of resistance that have been articulated.

![Figure IV. Social and Political Impacts of the 15M Movement](image-url)
Conclusions

Social movements can succeed or fail, but the knowledge of their outcomes is quite controversial. Their assessment depends, above all, on a clear identification of the movement’s goals which is not always clear when its composition is diverse and its evolution may alter their meaning. Movements can also succeed not necessarily due to their own actions of protest, but others’ actions, such as allies, third parties, judges or voters. Movements can also produce effects that were not related to their goals or even contradict them.

In the present research we have proposed a theoretical framework in which, first of all, movement’s impacts are evaluated according to the movement’s capacity to disrupt the social order and challenge the powerholders. This includes the self-reproduction of the movement, its legitimation, recognition, access to State institutions and bargaining power. Some of these aspects were neglected or overvalued in other theories, but we argue they form the pillars of an understanding of social movements as crucial non-institutional political actors in a permanent conflict with the prevailing institutional order.

Our second contribution is to conceive the movement’s goals as expressive products closely dependent on the significant contexts where it emerges rather than just the words of the actors’ wills. Goals, then, can be single or multiple, more or less formalised. They need to be expressed and defined by participants in the movement but, more importantly, they are selected among the options offered by specific social and political circumstances before it starts up or in the different stages of its persistence —usually, in the first one. Thus, we have distinguished the waves of contention, the political opportunity/constraint structures and specific systemic contradictions as the major contexts where the movement’s goals can be determined to be meaningful and successful regardless of how explicit they are. In addition, the organisational form and the means of protest adopted by the movement will punctuate and connote the goals’ relevance at different moments.

The third standpoint of this perspective deals with the distinction of various kinds of impacts and their explanation. We use a similar grid of general categories to the ones referred to identify the goals: power to change the institutional political process, power to change socio-economic and cultural structures and influence on other social movements. However, our emphasis here is given to the detailed contents of each category since they differ substantially with the causes and grievances that originated the movement. In addition we give analytical priority to the institutional changes because they offer a better translation of the political challenges of the movements, although we admit that some very few and specific social movements may dismiss purposively the political sphere —such is the case, for example, with sub-cultural movements affiliated with “new age” spirituality or those exclusively focusing on particular music styles.

Finally, we consider both the measure of the impact and the context of its production as embedded in variable and conflictive power relationships, instead of searching for a causal
relationship in the organisation, the repertoire of protest or the genealogy of the movement. Impacts, thus, are usually by-products of the movement, not necessarily immediate consequences according to the claims. Different actors may participate in producing the impact while they are engaged in the conflicts of power and hegemony framed by the social movement of reference. We focus on research, then in the analysis of this whole process where the movement’s identity, resources, composition, goals and impacts should be explained properly.

The case of the 15M serves to check how valid the above theoretical premises are. On the one hand, the institutional impacts of the movement are reduced by some authors to a bunch of superficial reforms not shared by all the participants. The revolutionary or anti-systemic features of the movement, then, are disregarded. On the other hand, the impacts on the institutional sphere of politics are relegated by some authors who prefer to focus solely on the changes produced in the political culture. This option tends to hide the failures of the movement according to its aspirations and potentials. These two types of mistakes suggest the need of a more holistic and theoretically grounded analysis.

In the 3 years of existence the 15M has impacted the Spanish political life in such a profound manner that it can be regarded as having inaugurated a new political cycle in which the movement, with all its different manifestations, has played a crucial role. The 15M opposed the immediate effects of the economic crisis starting in 2008 but also emerged against the continuing process of de-democratisation. This was rooted in the neoliberal policies applied by two major political parties, the anchored corruption behind the curtains of politics and business as usual, and the soaring impoverishment of society. The 15M unveiled all of this and protested with energy. Necessarily, alternative futures were also envisioned over the process of self-organisation and mobilisation. Therefore, the M15 was not exactly or consciously an anti-capitalist movement although it was able to fuel leftist and revolutionary ideals by embracing a transversal discourse. That is to say, the movement tried to avoid, to some extent, the old language of the left (based on class interests, above all) and the leadership of traditional leftist organisations. The people, the 99% or framing emotions such as the anger, the outrage and the hope were the simple ways of conceptualising that transversality of the M15 (and similar contemporary movements), but these approaches tended to ignore the specific contexts in which the movement’s goals and the modes of expressing them became meaningful for activists, supporters, rivals and the ruling elites.

As we have explained in the above sections, the 15M is constituted by multiple groups, campaigns and forms of protest and involvement in continuous change. There was no partisan alignment and no leader organisation within the movement although coalitions with formal organisations were in progressive growth. Therefore, the goals of the movement were also multiple and sometimes blurred or too broad. A loose identity, however, gave birth to a plentiful number of claims and also to the desires of profound social transformation—for example, not only to halt the cuts and privatisation of public services, but to collectively write a new constitution to institute a more participatory and egalitarian democracy. Additionally there was a dominant rejection of establishing alliances with political parties and the labour unions. The first attempts to transform the movement into a political party or a formal organisation with
capacity to set up an institutional interface were also refused. As a consequence, the M15 had no access to the State institutions as such, although some organisations and campaigns did.

However, the 15M was able to mobilise large portions of the working and middle classes. In doing so a transversal language was employed, instead of repeating leftist clichés. In our analysis, this discursive performance needs to be combined with other aspects in order to explain the successful capacity of the M15 to defy the elites over three years. We suggest first to point to both the autonomy of the groups and initiatives that catalysed, and to the hybridisation obtained with other organisations and supportive groups. Second, the context of economic crisis and the damage caused by the austerity policies were increasingly affecting more members of the middle and working classes so that a transversal language, without a strong emphasis on class interests, fitted in well with the situation.

The 15M was also very successful in terms of the political culture that it created. The non-institutional sphere of politics was enhanced and widened. Politicisation of many public and private affairs as well as deep exercises of deliberation and participation reached thousands of citizens for the first time ever. Civil disobedience to unjust laws and to economic injustice were also more legitimised than ever before, following closely precedent social movements. A myriad of self-managed organisations, projects and co-operatives, as well as solidarity networks, mutual aid and squats burst out. These all were social and political achievements of the M15 although there is no direct correspondence with its utmost goals of addressing the responsible elites of the crisis.

In other words, the M15 did not make a revolution. For example, precarious work, unemployment, poverty and socio-economic inequality were not removed by the M15. Voting was still a legitimate mechanism of the representative democracy. Governments were not overthrown by protesters. A Second Transition and a new Constitution were widely demanded and some groups worked in that direction, but until now the movement was more capable of producing a huge political re-constitution of the society and a de-legitimation of the elites. This is not a minor impact because it invigorated the non-institutional realm of politics in a deep way very much in accordance with the legacies of previous autonomist movements—and without suffering the same media marginalisation that the autonomists received.

The major success of this recent cycle of mobilisations falls on the side of the PAH. This formal organisation was the principal example of hosting an inter-class composition in a campaign focusing on the "criminal banks" (this expression of its spokesperson in a Parliamentary hearing was widely applauded) and the public policies that threatened basic human rights. The repertoire of protest combined radical actions such as blockading the houses of the people evicted by the police and the squatting of buildings, and various institutional initiatives at different political instances (municipal, central and European).

The PAH was also a model of combining activism, directly affected people by the crisis, workers and professionals, with a strong concern about the legal changes, particular negotiations and active participation in lawsuits. The "white tide" striving against the privatisation of the public health system followed a similar path and achieved some victories as a balance. In this and
other less successful struggles under the same umbrella of the M15, not only was civil disobedience praised and widely legitimised by society at large, compared to previous years, but police repression was also more criticised than ever. The reason is that the broad range of protests experimented along this cycle widen the limits of expression and repression. The clash is even more evident when the appeals to basic rights and conditions of living are supplementary channelled through the institutional ways.

The satisfaction of the movement’s demands, then, does not occur as a logical result of employing adequate means and resources to accomplish an original programme of claims. On the contrary, it is a product, if any, of every battle between the social groups involved within every single context of struggle and the more general contexts where the movement take place. Movements have their own politics not necessarily defined by the State power or a leading organisation or political ideology. But the M15, as alike anti-systemic movements elsewhere, has shown that State power is a relevant instance to be substantially modified when the capitalist crisis shakes and destroys the foundations of society. That endurance of the M15 was due to both the continuity of the crisis and the self-reproduction of the movement. In addition, the movement remained widely excluded from decisive State institutions and the elites remained cohesively insofar as to preserve their benefits and command the repression of protests. The M15, on the other hand, succeeded in cracking the hegemonic discourses that justified the prevailing system and benefited from the help of a transnational wave of contention with many shared concerns.

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