

# Governance and Civic Participation at the Peripheries of Europe

Jody JENSEN and Ferenc MISZLIVETZ

New and emerging social movements across the Euro-Mediterranean region are challenging the traditional confines of democratic participation. Jody Jensen and Ferenc Miszlivetz underline the need for what is called regional and global governance, with many movements transgressing national boundaries and illustrating converging aspirations for citizenship engagement. In the end, the authors argue, this could lead to a re-articulation of dynamics between the state and civil society, as well as supra-national institutions.

Recent dramatic events in Ukraine support the assumption that the fundamental crisis of democracy we face cannot be defined and confined by the boundaries of the nation state and national politics. The nation state is no longer the exclusive unit of analysis or framework for civic participation. National governments are proving increasingly less capable of delivering on promises to national constituencies, and do not have the capacity to defend, protect or support their societies vis-a-vis uncontrolled global markets, environmental catastrophes, legal and illegal migration or organised international crime. As a consequence of this, people feel less and less safe in the world.

## Governance, globalisation and civic participation

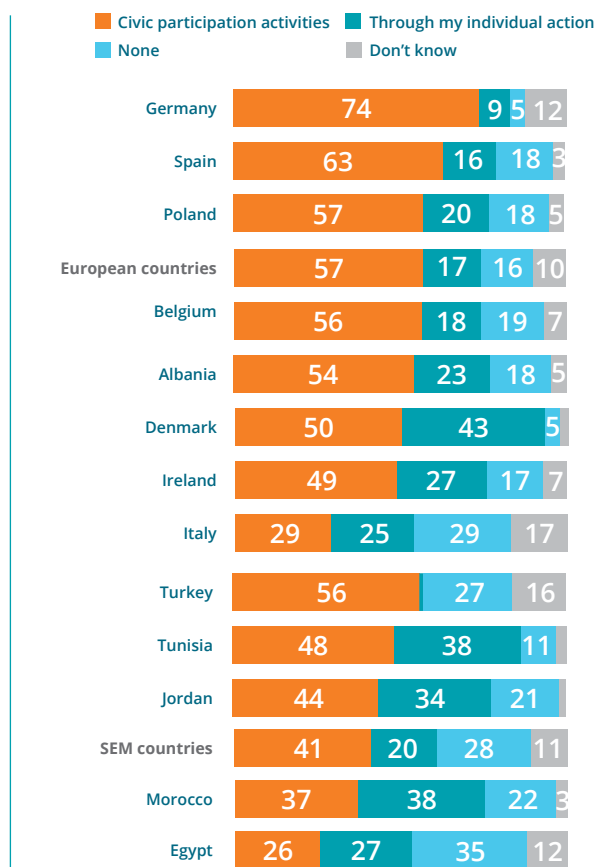
There is, therefore, much need for what is called regional and global governance. The weakness and ineffectiveness of international and global organisations is well known. The EU was seen as a model for regional governance up until it, too, came under pressure from severe and interdependent crises. Paradoxically, it has remained a magnet for outsiders, especially in its southern and eastern peripheries. The democratic promise of the EU is associated with a better life, a more just economy and society, with less corruption, where citizens can take part as active stakeholders in policy making for a brighter future. There is notable agreement, as evidenced in the Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll, between European and SEM countries regarding the content and meaning of democracy: freedom, including freedom of speech and elections top the lists.

Another paradox is that while old and new national democracies face crises of confidence, legitimacy and capacity to deliver, there is an ongoing and increasing need for further democratisation and participation in different regions of the world, such as the Mediterranean, the Arab world, Eastern and Southern Europe. The mismatch between century-old legal and political frames and post-national, globalising local realities creates

new social, political, cultural and religious tensions. Some of these tensions and conflicts, if they do not lead to violence, may provide the seeds for a new thinking about democracy and participation.

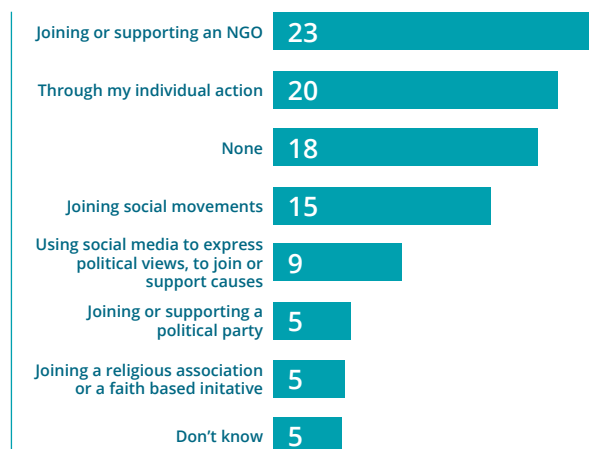
Transgressing national boundaries, as many social movements or waves of migrants do,

**Chart 5.1** Most efficient ways of solving problems in one's society by country



**Survey Question:** How do you think you could most efficiently contribute to solving the problems in your country? **Base:** % of all respondents, % by country (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

**Chart 5.2** Most efficient ways of solving problems in Poland



**Survey Question:** How do you think you could most efficiently contribute to solving the problems in your country? **Base:** All respondents, % by socio-demographics; by age group (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

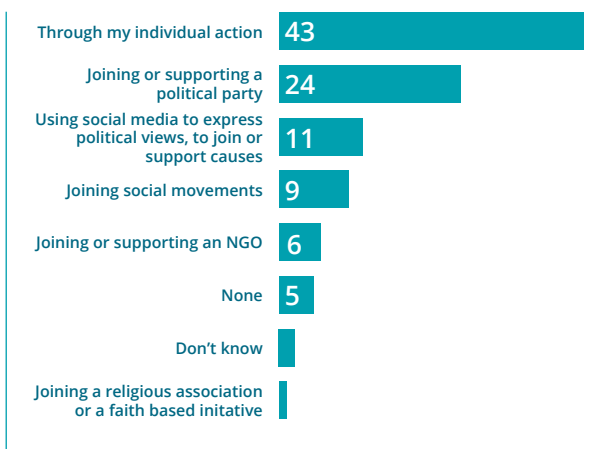
demanding similar rights and conditions of wellbeing, security and human dignity, signal unrestrained momentum for the regionalisation and globalisation of democracy and participation. These new orientations, demands and aspirations need institutional and instrumental responses, legitimation and recognition on the part of major players at all levels. Reality is always far ahead of existing rules, legal regulations and the bureaucratic imagination during periods of fundamental transformation.

### Europe towards a bottom-up approach

A new consensus needs to be brokered through the confrontation and management of positive, concrete examples. The crisis of Ukraine can serve as such a progressive case if all of the major players (protestors and their opponents, political representatives, the EU, Russia and the US) understand their interdependent responsibilities to set up new rules and frames. What is clear and unique, in this immediate and striking example, is a new configuration and potential synergy for local, national, regional and global needs and aspirations for governance and civic participation (reference to Chart 5.1).

Social scientists – for good reasons - have been criticised for their failure to anticipate or foresee the fundamental economic, political and social upheavals of the past decades, or the outbreak of the global financial and debt crisis. Along with politicians and their experts, they were unprepared for the waves of democratic aspirations and spontaneous mass demonstrations for change

**Chart 5.3** Most efficient ways of solving problems in



**Survey Question:** How do you think you could most efficiently contribute to solving the problems in your country? **Base:** % of all respondents (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

of the past years from the Middle East via the US and Europe to Turkey and most recently Ukraine. The waves of protests and unrest across the regions of the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe or the emergence of 'Occupy!' movements in western countries did not fit the conventional mindset or analytical frameworks. Caught in the logic of 'unlimited' capitalist development and the archaic nation state paradigm, social scientific analysis has remained largely confined and reduced to options within the boundaries of the nation state. What analysis does exist has not sufficiently addressed the relationship between globalisation and democracy, governance and globalisation, globalisation and civic participation.

The pervasive nature of new citizen activism inside and outside of Europe in a wide variety of environments necessitates more careful and complex consideration of new approaches, new frames and architectures of analysis. (Charts 5.2, 5.3) It may in fact mean addressing the last taboo that is democratic governance itself. The Austrian writer, Robert Menasse (Boesler, 2012), proposes that democracy in its present forms may no longer be the answer for Europe; that 'the present crisis and the way it is being addressed touches on the last taboo of democracies which believe themselves to be enlightened. This taboo is democracy itself...Can it be that democracy as we have laboriously and inadequately learned it since 1945, and as we have become used to it, simply cannot function at the supranational level?'

It may be that Europe is redefining itself at its peripheries. Aspiring democracies, like the Ukraine, may be able to give new content to a notion of democracy that has become not just static and dysfunctional,

but also corrosive and unresponsive, easily coopted and corrupted by economic interests. One European observer to the Tunisian uprising proclaimed 'If you want to see and feel what democracy is really like, go to Tunisia.' Complacency, cynicism and often arrogance of the European core have not encouraged the successful engagement of citizens at the regional level. No one can explain or rectify the increasing gap between active citizenship at the grassroots level and lack of political agency.

As long as a pro-active demos is missing from European governance, citizens will not be able to affect the top-down, technocratic, closed, unresponsive and opaque policies and policy-making structures that are the EU today. There is a call for an institutional response to the protests and policies that have been the official response to the crisis in Europe. Since its foundation as an elite project of politicians and experts, the EU's legitimacy has rested on output, not input, that is – democracy; and wider publics have not been afforded the opportunity to act either in defense of or in opposition to specific EU policies. This is because national political elites, who were supposed to provide the institutional channels for citizen input to policy, have systematically kept EU policies outside electoral politics (Schmitter, 2012).

Many, often contradictory, causes have been put forward for the recent events in Greece, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Turkey, and now in Ukraine and Bosnia: economic (unemployment and neo-liberal economic austerity measures), political (institutionalised corruption and failure of education), cultural or ideological. It is clear that European countries have unevenly experienced and suffered the impact of the crisis, and generally the tensions are building at European peripheries over different problems that have driven the activism (Pianta, 2013). The multitude and diversity of mobilisations seem to agree that the fundamental causes of the crisis lie in the neoliberal policies and practices of the past decades that became increasingly virulent and destructive to large portions of societies. They also lead to a sense of at least uncertainty, if not of hopelessness as populations and generations look towards the future.

### Civic movements as a wake-up call

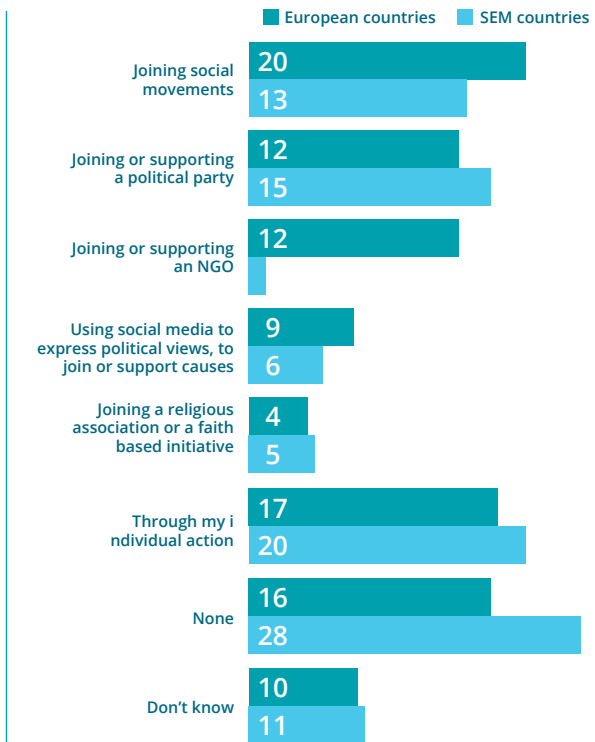
The most prominent reaction to street protests on the part of political and economic elites and in the mainstream media has been one of incomprehension (also contempt and suspicion) because the framing of what needs to be done and how to do it appears to be fragmented along national, thematic and ideological lines. This was and is a major criticism of the 'Occupy!' movements in Europe and the U.S. There is no one political center or organisation directing the insurrections, no single ideology motivating them, no overwhelming demand

put forward. The persistent question, 'What do they want?' often leads to the conclusion that the events are not political because they cannot be integrated into existing analytical frameworks. What seems to unite the protesters is simply refusal: 'No more, enough is enough.' A stubborn negativity has characterised these insurrections. Is this a new type of politics after the decay of democracy? – Insurrection and righteous 'indignation' as a human immune system response to a failing system? When a biological system is jeopardized, the system begins to link more of itself to itself. This could be what we are seeing in emerging and expanding networks of protest, like 'Occupy!' and other global protest and democratic movements. In addition to the insurrection that results from economic injustice, political invisibility and disempowerment, unregulated capitalism is charged by these movements with creating wealth but not effectively distributing it and that it takes no account of what it cannot commodify, neither the social relationships of family and community nor the environment, which are vital to human wellbeing and survival, and indeed to the functioning of the market itself. There has been a surprisingly sustained character to the protests over time and an expansion of protests to unanticipated countries and regions that could signal a new impetus for civic participation and input in future debates on governance.

It is relevant that the Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll supports the evidence that people in Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries (SEM) feel that joining social movements can effectively address problems in societies (20%, 13% respectively), although in SEM joining a political party is viewed as more effective. In Europe, where trust in traditional forms of democratic institutions and participation has significantly decreased, party affiliation is viewed as less effective. This is also expressed in Europe by the equal response (12%) for joining or supporting an NGO that is viewed as much less effective in SEM countries (2%). It may be that current events have led the SEM to lead in the belief that individual action can efficiently contribute to solving social problems (20%), but personal action is also important in the European context (17%) (Chart 5.4). Europe has received another wake-up call, or rather alarm, from its margins and not for the first time. European peripheries have been in motion for decades. The robust and unexpected outburst of Ukraine's pro-Europe – pro-dignity revolution has significantly stirred up the apathetic and inward looking European political spectrum, forcing politicians and institutions to speak out and act in the name of democracy and solidarity. It is as if Europe's heart has begun to beat faster and her disembodied soul is beginning to gain shape and substance in the present. One protestor at the Euro-Maidan, a young police officer and father of two young children, testified that 'We want to build Europe here; we don't want to go to Europe.' Some are even calling

**Chart 5.4**

**Most efficient ways to contribute to solving problems in one's country**



**Survey question:** How do you think you could most efficiently contribute to solving the problems in your country? **Base:** % of all respondents by region (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

the uprising the 'East European Arab Spring'. Global transformation, in social terms, can be observed by the growing interdependence of local, national and regional levels. The growing challenges of cross-border migration and demands for new structures for democratic participation and decision-making do not mean that the nation state has become irrelevant.

On the contrary, nation states have been given new significance in a complex structure of relations. As Guy Lachapelle (2013) stresses in the World Social Sciences Report, the reorganisation and restructuring of state power remains an eminent challenge. If states aspire to play a progressive role in global and regional transformations, they need to become more receptive to the social consequences and dimensions of globalisation. In other words, they need to redefine their role and find effective ways for new partnerships with representatives of multilevel governance and global markets, and with an engaged, active and empowered civil society.

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