**Title of the Research Project:** Ideational Change through Collective Learning: Public Deliberation and the Decentring and Recentring of Structures of Meaning

**Acronym:** LearningDemoi

**Scientist in Charge:** Prof Dr Klaus Eder

**Research Fellow:** Dr Marcos Engelken-Jorge

**Funding:** Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowships for Career Development (IEF), 2013.

**Host Institution:** Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Kultur-, Sozial- und Bildungswissenschaftliche Fakultät
Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

**Contact Details:**
Marcos Engelken-Jorge
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Institut für Sozialwissenschaften
Lehrbereich Vergleichende Strukturanalyse
Unter den Linden 6
10099 Berlin
Email: marcos.engelken-jorge (at) hu-berlin.de

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**DELIVERABLE D.1.**

**A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON THE ABOLITION OF UNIVERSAL CONSCRIPTION IN SPAIN AND GERMANY, AND ON POLITICAL DISCONTENT IN SPAIN**

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The LearningDemoi Project and Deliverable D.1.

The LearningDemoi project is pursuing two interrelated goals. First, it seeks to contribute to the understanding of the processes of ideational change that take place in the medium of public communication and which trigger the decentring and recentring of socially shared structures of meaning. This is an empirical question. The aim of the second research objective is to reconnect this piece of empirical research with normative debates on deliberative democracy. This should contribute to the development of a more realistic, though still critical, image of public deliberation, which is one of the programmatic goals of current debates within deliberative theory.

The first research objective is addressed by means of three case studies; namely, public debates on universal conscription in Spain and Germany between 1987 and 1996, and 1987 and 2010, respectively (for the period before 1990, West Germany is referred to as “Germany”), and the process of increasing political discontent in Spain between 2008 and the present day, focusing in particular on the debates sparked by the so-called indignados or 15M movement after May 2011.

The working hypothesis of this research is that the theoretical framework developed by Habermasian cognitive sociology can be used to illuminate the communicatively rational dimension of certain processes of ideational change; in other words, that some cases of ideational change can be conceived of as the outcome of collective learning. This hypothesis, if confirmed, will warrant the linking of the empirical part of this research (i.e. the three case studies on ideational change) with its normative-cum-theoretical part; that is, the insights gained through empirical research will be used to develop a more realistic, yet normatively informed, perspective on public deliberation.

To accomplish these goals, a number of different tasks have been identified. This first deliverable of the LearningDemoi project (Deliverable D.1.) is a summary the main results of the first task, and it consists of a review of the relevant academic literature and an analysis of secondary data.

The academic literature on the abolition of conscription in Spain and Germany and on political discontent in Spain is at the same time both large and limited. It is large in the sense that an initial research in standard academic repositories yields a high number of documents, especially ones regarding political discontent in Spain. However, on closer inspection much of this literature is of only secondary interest to this project: a number of papers concentrate on particular details which are of limited relevance here; other publications have been rendered obsolete by more recent research or subsequent social developments; and some texts are more like partisan
interventions in public debates than scholarly analyses. Thus, this deliverable is not a systematic review of the literature on the aforementioned case studies; rather, it draws on previous research with the aim of identifying the main actors, events and factors related to the abolition of military service in Germany and Spain, as well as to the political discontent in Spain. Thus, this is a selective rather than systematic review of the research conducted on these cases, which will provide some of the contextual data necessary for the subsequent chapters of the LearnigDemoi project.

In the next section, some background information related to the abolition of military service in Spain and Germany is provided. The Spanish case will be presented in the third section, followed by the German one. The fourth section addresses the current political discontent in Spain. Finally, some theoretical, though provisional, notes on the possibility of conceiving of these three cases as cases of collective learning will be provided.
Structural Transformations and the Abolition of Universal Conscription

Three phases can be distinguished of the abolition of military service in the West (Biehl et al., 2011). First, the United Kingdom (1961) and the United States (1973) put an end to conscription during the Cold War. In the 1990s and at the beginning of the 2000s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a number of countries decided to reform their armies and abolish military service: Belgium (1995), Netherlands (1996), France (2001), Spain (2002) and Italy (2005). Finally, in 2010 and 2011, further countries took the decision to abolish or, as in the case of Germany, “suspend” conscription: Germany, Poland, Albania and Sweden. At the same time, countries such as Austria, Denmark, Greece, Turkey, Finland and Estonia still maintain conscription, which means that the trend towards abolishing military service is not inevitable.

According to a common narrative in military sociology, this trend is the result of the decline of mass armies. This theory can be traced back to the 1970s, and it has been announcing the disappearance of military service ever since (Ajangiz, 2003: 57-61). In essence, what this narrative argues is that a number of factors, which will be briefly reviewed below, have contributed to this decline. Most studies agree in identifying the same set of intervening variables, although they differ occasionally in the relative weight that they attribute to them, so there is considerable consensus among scholars on this topic. Furthermore, country-specific studies usually consider this same set of variables, although they add further factors to explain the peculiarities of each case; for example, Germany’s recent economic context and the unique significance of military service to this country’s national identity, and the campaign of civil disobedience launched in Spain by the anti-militarist social movement during the second half of the 1980s, among other elements. In the remainder of this section, the main factors identified by this theory will be briefly introduced, as they describe the main structural changes that have created a favourable context for the abolition of military service in both Germany and Spain.

Three interrelated processes characterised the evolution of the armed forces during the last two decades or so of the twentieth century in Western Europe: their reduction in size, the shrinkage of the military budget and the decline of military service in terms of its duration and the ratio of the drafted forces to the total size of the military, eventually leading to its abolition in some countries (Ajangiz, 2002; Cañorio, 2004: Werkner, 2006: 17). As said, these developments are usually traced back to a number of factors, the most important of which are as follows.
First, scholars speak of a decrease in the number of threats faced by West European States, as well as of their qualitative change (Caforio, 2004). Especially after 1989, with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the enlargement of NATO, a new more benign security environment emerged for most West European countries. Thus, the ending of the Cold War seriously undermined the justification for mass armies (Ajangiz, 2003: 73-78; Haltiner & Tresch, 2008; Longhurst, 2003; Meyer, 2011). Further changes should be added to this that are in some cases not even primarily the result of geopolitical factors. New actors gradually entered the international arena, from NGOs and social movements to international and transnational organisations, as well as multinational corporations. This dramatic increase in the number of “essential actors” (Olmeda Gómez, 1997: 129), together with the growing importance of economic goals, which greatly (though by no means completely) displaced the objective of national defence, led to a transition from what some authors called a “state-centric” to a “multicentric” world (Rosenau, 1990). Finally, new types of challenges became more salient, such as inter-ethnic conflicts and civil wars, international terrorism and organised criminality, as well as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and nuclear disasters. In other words, national and international interests usually placed outside the national territory became to a great extent substitutes for threats to the territorial integrity of the state. These developments have been interpreted as demanding increasingly specialised, flexible and movable armies.

Second, in line with this altered security environment, a change and diversification of the missions for which armies are deployed has occurred (Caforio, 2004). Crisis-response missions, which usually take place out-of-area, and peace missions have acquired greater importance. Given the resistance of national populations to sending drafted soldiers abroad (Ajangiz, 2002; 2003: 112-119), the proliferation of out-of-area interventions has also encouraged the hiring of specialised military personnel.

Thirdly, together with the diversification of military objectives, technological developments have been cited as encouraging the internal specialisation of national armies, again increasing the demand for better trained, more professional soldiers (Ajangiz, 2002; Caforio, 2004; Olmeda Gómez, 1997).

Last, value changes have been cited as having eroded the unconditional commitment to the state and its army. Irrespective of whether one sees these changes as the result of a process of continuing individualisation (Ajangiz, 2003; Haltiner & Tresch, 2008), increasing hedonism (Caforio, 2004; Lipovetsky, 1983) or as a change from materialist to postmaterialist values
(Inglehart, 1997), and irrespective of the causes of the said changes, the fact remains that there has been a shift away from the values usually associated with the military, such as physical security and deference to authority, to values such as self-expression, tolerance and “emancipation” (Welzel, 2013). Not only have value changes altered, and are still altering, the way people perceive wars and the military, but also the kinds of wars that have been taking place in the last decades have led some scholars to speak of a “post-heroic” society, meaning that wars are no longer fought in the name of great (and convincing) ideals or to combat major powers, but that they have more modest aims and consequently try to avoid high numbers of casualties (Olmeda Gómez, 1997: 132). In this context, ideals such as (military) discipline or self-sacrifice for the good of the community have lost much of their appeal.

This set of factors, identified by this narrative about the decline of mass armies, accounts for much of the trend towards the abolition of military service. However, it neglects country-specific differences, which not only explain the timing of each country’s decision to abolish conscription, but also the contrasting paths followed in each case; for instance, whereas in France the abolition of military service was firmly managed by the political elites according to what they considered were the strategic interests of their country, in Spain social mobilisation and public opinion forced public authorities to take this decision (Ajangiz, 2002, 2003). Furthermore, whereas in Germany the suspension of military service can be said to be the outcome of what Günther (1989; Günther & Farrell, 1988; Peterson, 2014) called a “discourse of appropriateness”, in Spain it was the legitimacy rather than the appropriateness of conscription that was questioned (see the section “Ideational Change through Collective Learning?” below). Thus, the aforementioned key factors should be taken into account when analysing the end of military service in Germany and Spain, as they characterise the favourable context in which these decisions were taken, but attention should also be paid to the specificities of each country’s situation and to the sequence of events that eventually led to these decisions.
The Abolition of Universal Conscription in Spain

The scholarly literature on the abolition of military service in Spain provides two different accounts. The first tells the story of a failure. In a nutshell, it claims that Spanish political elites mismanaged this public policy by both failing to anticipate certain challenges and then reacting inadequately to them. The situation was aggravated by certain actors, especially from the judiciary, who acted irresponsibly and undermined any consistent interpretation of the law on this and adjacent matters (such as conscientious objection). The confluence of an uninformed citizenry, who opposed military service, the use of this policy by political parties to gain electoral support, and an increasing number of young people who, acting opportunistically, declared themselves conscientious objectors to avoid doing any military or social service, eventually led to the abolition of conscription.

The second narrative, in contrast, tells the story of a success rather than a failure; namely, the success of Spanish civil society, which managed to open up the policy-making process on universal conscription, enabling Spanish citizens to express their opposition to military service and thus forcing the government to abolish conscription.

Both narratives show clear ideological biases: in the first, those aspects with anti-militarist connotations are dismissed as “irresponsible”, “uninformed”, “opportunistic” or “unimportant”, whereas the second tends to exaggerate the allegedly anti-militarist attitudes of the Spanish citizenry. However, it is the second narrative that has attracted most scholarly support including, among others, the two most important studies on conscription and conscientious objection in Spain, namely, the PhD dissertations of Sampedro and Ajangiz, which embrace this narrative. Furthermore, unlike the first theory, this offers a more inclusive perspective by attempting to pay attention to all of the actors involved, political as well as social, and by providing greater and more consistent evidence than the first narrative. In any case, given that most aspects of the first narrative can be integrated into the second one, I will briefly introduce it.

In general terms, the Spanish policy-making process on national security and defence has been described as “reactive”; that is, it is unable to anticipate challenges and is characterised by a “symbolic” and “precarious” consensus, which is subordinate to short-term electoral interests, rather than a genuine consensus (Olmeda Gómez, 1997: 145; similarly, Sampedro, 1996). This also applies to public policies regarding military service and social service. According to this account, then, it was a largely “uninformed” public opinion (Olmeda Gómez, 1997: 143) that opposed conscription, which eventually
motivated opportunistic and electorally-focused parties to put an end to military service.

Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this style of policy making is the first Spanish law on conscientious objection, which was passed in 1984 (Pomel Sánchez, 1994). According to Sampedro (1997: 146), it was an outdated law in comparative terms, and it met with such great resistance that the ombudsman eventually lodged an appeal against it. Notwithstanding its obsolescence, the 1984 law and its subsequent developments and revisions have been regarded as too permissive, considering the fact that the Spanish army was barely professionalised at that time and that there were no plans for a significant increase in the number of professional soldiers (Sampedro, 1997). Thus, regulation failed to contain the number of conscientious objectors and to keep them within the limits necessary for the good functioning of the system.

First, the number of conscientious objectors was partly underestimated. Moreover, the mechanisms responsible for managing conscientious objection and ensuring that the motivations of young people opting for this status were genuine had serious flaws. In practice, most, if not all, applications for conscientious objector status were admitted. Furthermore, in 1992, for instance, a quarter of the applications contained irregularities or lacked necessary information, but they were accepted nevertheless (Sampedro, 1997: 160). In turn, one of the consequences of this unexpected and unintended increase in the number of conscientious objectors is that many of them did not ultimately do any social service either, as Spain simply lacked enough social service positions for them. For some commentators, the further increase in the number of conscientious objectors was precisely because applying for conscientious objector status maximised the probability of not being drafted and, thus, of being freed from any social or military obligations whatsoever (Ajangiz, 2003: 31; Klein, 2004: 10). The expression “convenience objectors” was coined to refer to these young people.

The number of objectors soared: in 1986, two years after the first law on conscientious objection was passed, there were around 6,500 objectors in Spain, in 1989 there were 13,000, in 1990 there were 27,000, in 1993 there were 68,000, and so on (Ajangiz, 2002: 71). Thus, in 1995, for example, there were in principle 59,015 social service positions in Spain, but only 39,666 conscientious objectors were actually doing social service, whereas 190,397 objectors were still waiting to be drafted to fulfil their social obligations (Ajangiz, 2002: 78). In this dysfunctional context, the 1996 general elections – so the story goes – simply precipitated the decision to abolish military service (Olmeda Gómez, 1997: 146).
Among other things, this narrative dismisses the role played by the Spanish anti-militarist social movement, and it fails to explain why Spain’s public opinion was rather unsupportive of conscription (to a larger extent than other constituencies). Although most scholars have acknowledged that Spanish political elites were not particularly efficient in regulating military service and conscientious objection (e.g. Ajangiz, 2003: 31-32; Olmeda Gómez, 1997; Sampedro, 1997), they have supplemented this narrative with a closer account of the Spanish anti-militarist social movement and public opinion’s attitudes vis-à-vis military service. According to this second reading, the abolition of universal conscription in Spain is not so much the result of a failure on the part of political elites, but is due to the success of civil society.

Regarding Spanish public opinion, which is one of the major actors of this second narrative, it would certainly be an overstatement to speak of Spanish society’s “explicit rejection” of the military (Ajangiz, 2003: 30). However, it might be accurate to say that Spain both exhibited and supported a “low military profile” (Ajangiz, 2003: 99). The size of the Spanish armed forces and the level of public spending on them (Ajangiz, 2002) and people’s opposition to increasing this level of spending might be taken as a proxy indicator of people’s relative satisfaction with this low military profile. Other authors, in turn, have spoken of “popular pacifism”, which they trace back to Spain’s military defeats (especially in Sahara and Morocco), the tragic experience of the civil war and the experience of neutrality (Sampedro, 1997).

Against this background, the cluster of ideas that emerges from the data on public opinion can be better understood. Analysing data from the 1980s, Alvira (1992) highlighted several features of Spanish people’s beliefs about national security and military service. Over 50 per cent of Spaniards thought that Spain was not really threatened by any foreign enemy and that there was no serious risk that the country would be involved in war. This was consistent with their demand for a cut in military spending, albeit they regarded the

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1 Such a statement is not consistent with survey data. On average, Spanish people rate their trust in the armed forces consistently over 5 on a 0–10 scale, which is not a bad result considering Spaniards’ lack of trust in many public institutions. This is based on data provided by Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) for the years 1994, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013 and 2014 (available online at: www.cis.es). Ajangiz (2003: 99) provides data for the years 1984–1999, which further supports this observation.

2 CIS provides time series data on Spanish people’s assessment of the level of military expenditure for the years 1997–2011 (available online at: www.cis.es). Spanish citizens consistently deemed the level of military expenditure “adequate”, followed by “excessive”. Only between 9 and 15 per cent of the interviewees thought that it was “insufficient”. However, the level of non-responses to this survey question is very high (between 33 and 38 per cent), so the results should be interpreted with caution.
Spanish army as poorly prepared and inefficient, partly because they saw military service as an inadequate means of training soldiers.

Negative opinions about conscription could be found among young people in particular. Survey data varies to a great extent because the wording of the questions as well as the available answer choices changed from one survey to the next. So, just for illustrative purposes, in 1986 only 26 per cent of young people thought that military service was beneficial to young people, whilst 49 per cent believed it to be prejudicial. Interestingly, these negative attitudes were more clearly expressed by young people doing military service and by those who had just finished it (Alvira, 1992: 168; see also Ajangiz, 2003: 120-121; Carnes i Ayats, 1987; Riaza Ballesteros, 1986; Zulaika, 1989).

Among adults, by contrast, views on conscription were not as negative, but again there is the same problem as with the data on young people’s opinions, namely, the question and the answer choices varied from survey to survey, yielding different results. In 1989, for example, 39 per cent of Spaniards thought that military service was beneficial for young people, whereas 32 per cent believed that the contrary was the case; yet, 44 per cent of them supported the claim that military service was “a legacy from the past which does not make sense nowadays”, against 38 per cent who disagreed with this statement. Nevertheless, in the 1980s and 1990s Spanish public opinion was consistently in favour of an all-volunteer (i.e. professional) army.

Given inconsistencies in the wording of the question and answer choices, the next table simply illustrates public support for different models of recruitment in Spain:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Support for Different Models of Recruitment (%)</th>
<th>1986(1)(2)</th>
<th>1989(1)</th>
<th>1990(1)</th>
<th>1990(1)</th>
<th>1994(3)</th>
<th>1996(4)(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An army with professional officers and conscripted soldiers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>n.a.(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An army with both conscripted and professional soldiers</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>n.a.(6)</td>
<td>n.a.(6)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>n.a.(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An army only with professional soldiers</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Data taken from Alvira (1992: 168)
(2) People surveyed aged 16 - 24.
(3) Data taken from study no. 2085 of the Spanish Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS; Centre for Sociological Research).
Data taken from the study no. 2221 of CIS.
People surveyed aged 15 – 29.
This response choice was not available.
This response choice was not available. Instead, the available alternatives read: “Keep military service unchanged” (6.4%); “Keep military service, but shorten it and include women” (8.5%); “Abolish military service and introduce a professional army” (82%).

A more interesting question, yet a difficult one to answer, is: where did these attitudes come from? As we shall see, the anti-militarist social movement gained public prominence, especially in the 1990s (Sampedro, 1996, 1997b), so support for an all-volunteer army predated public debates on universal conscription – or at least it existed before these debates intensified. One common answer is that opposition to conscription in Spain is the result of changes in values, as briefly discussed in the previous section (e.g. Ajangiz, 2002, 2003; Alvira, 1992; Riaza Ballesteros, 1986). Whilst this might well be true, it does not explain why support for military service was, for example, much higher in Germany than in Spain.

Some authors have alluded to changes which eroded the plausibility of various justifications for military service. For instance, according to Alvira (1992: 165) the lack of “universality” of conscription in Spain undermined the arguments claiming that military service had a community-building and democratising value; in other words, it made the political community more cohesive and contributed to integrating the armed forces into the community. Again, the decline of conscription equity might explain the general trend toward all-volunteer forces, but it can hardly account for Spain’s unusually high rates of opposition to military service in the European context (Ajangiz, 2002), given that conscription equity also declined in other countries (e.g. Kujat, 2011; Steinbach, 2011).

Similarly, one can allude to certain historical events: military service in the UK (called “National Service”) was abolished in 1960, and in the United States in 1973. Furthermore, in April 1982, the UK professional army defeated the Argentinian military, which was composed of drafted soldiers – some Spanish commentators even spoke of “humiliation”.

This might partly explain why Spanish people refused to see conscription as “the only way to create an efficient army for the defence of Spain”, a statement which could be found in some surveys. Yet, once more, this begs the question of why these events failed to trigger opposition to military service in other countries to the same extent as in Spain.

Werkner (2006), for her part, alludes to a factor specific to the Spanish case, namely, the sometimes deplorable conditions under which drafted soldiers had to fulfil their military obligations. She quotes from an interview (2004) with the marine attaché in Madrid: “...zumindest während der...”

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Franco-Zeit [wurden] Wehrpflichtige behandelt wie der letzte Dreck. Das hat sich so ein bisschen hinübergerettet. Die Wehrpflichtigen hatten sehr wenig Rechte. Sie hatten eine ganz miserable Bezahlung . . . Sie haben kaum vernünftige Aufgaben gehabt” (Werkner, 2006: 234). Similarly, a Spanish general staff officer is cited as saying: “Man glaubte, dass die Armee die jungen Leute benutzt hat. Man hat sie für ganz einfache Arbeiten genommen. Viele sind in die Armee gekommen als Kellner oder als ganz einfache Arbeiter” (Werkner, 2006: 234). This might explain why, according to a survey conducted in 1989, 42 per cent of the interviewees described military service as a “más bien desagradable” (“rather unpleasant”) experience⁴ or 51 per cent agreed with the statement that military service “is the loss of a year of life”.

Finally, one might also speak of “popular pacifism”, as advanced earlier, and trace it back to certain historical experiences (Sampedro, 1997). Be that as it may, it seems that neither secondary data nor any of the arguments in the scholarly literature are conclusive about why Spanish opinion opposed military service to a greater extent than its European counterparts.

The other major actor of this second narrative, namely the anti-militarist social movement, is the “hero” of this story. The main thrust of this narrative is that conscription was essentially a policy firmly controlled by political elites and not open to public debate and citizen influence. The achievement of the anti-militarist movement was precisely to open up the policy-making process and trigger public debate on this matter, to resist (through legal means and social campaigns) political elites’ attempts to close this down again, and to allow the consequential expression of citizens’ preferences on this topic (Ajangiz, 2002, 2003; Sampedro, 1996, 1997b, 2002).

Ajangiz (2003: 143) placed the activities of this movement within the second wave of the antimilitarist protests, which began in the 1960s and 1970s and extended until the 1980s, and included protests against the wars in Korea, Algeria and, in particular, Vietnam, as well as anti-nuclear campaigns. Partly as a result of this, conscription was abolished in the United States and conscientious objection was recognised and regulated in those European states which had not done so thus far: France in 1963, Belgium in 1964, Italy in 1972, Portugal in 1976 and Spain in 1978⁵ (Ajangiz, 2003: 144).

In this context, the Spanish Movimiento de Objeción de Conciencia (MOC; Movement for Conscientious Objection) was created in 1977. It led the opposition to conscription until its abolition in 1996/2001 (i.e. the decision to abolish military service was taken and announced in 1996, but officially it was not ended until 2001). Unlike other European countries,  

⁴ CIS study 1784; 36 per cent saw it as “rather pleasant”.
⁵ In the cases of Portugal and Spain, conscientious objection was recognised constitutionally. The legal development of this constitutional recognition happened at a later time.
where conscientious objection was largely an individual matter, conscientious
objectors in Spain had presented, since the 1970s, their refusal to do military
service as a political project: first, they tried to force the Franco regime to
recognise conscientious objection as an expression of religious beliefs, then
they secularised their demand for recognition and finally they advocated the
abolition of military service altogether (Sampedro, 2002).

A new socialist government was formed in 1982, which passed the 1984
law on conscientious objection. As advanced earlier, this law had serious
flaws and was met with great resistance. The anti-militarist movement
deemed that the regulation of conscientious objection was just an attempt at
control, which simply sought to “neutralise” objectors, drawing them away
from the military and instructing them to fulfil certain services that were
neither directly linked to their pacifist beliefs nor contributing to promoting
these values. Thus, in their view the main justification for social service was
the existence of military service in the first place (Sampedro, 1997: 153).
Hence, they adopted a new strategy of insumisión, which was a form of civil
disobedience that consisted of refusing to do both military and social service.

Although it is hard to estimate the exact number of insumisos, the most
accepted figure is 20,000, which is seen as a spectacularly high number of
people, at least for Europe and considering that this happened during peace
time (Ajangiz, 2003: 182). Repression, often in the form of jail sentences, was
publicised by the movement, and this contributed positively to the relevance
and moral character of their actions and also attracted public support. In this
regard, for example, 61 per cent of Spanish young people aged between 15
and 24 agreed with the statement that “in general terms, insumisos are people
with strong moral convictions, capable of facing the prejudices derived from
their opposition to military service” (CIS study 2105, 1994). Furthermore, in
1996 40 per cent of Spanish young people (aged 15-29) considered this form
of civil disobedience to be “good” or “very good”, and 25 per cent believed
that it was regular (“fair”; CIS study 2221). Adults, however, were not so
sympathetic: in 1994, for instance, 57 per cent of the population thought that
refusing to do both military and social service was “bad” or “very bad”, but
at the same time 53 per cent believed that this form of disobedience should
not be considered a criminal offence (CIS study 2085).

It can be argued that to some extent the insumisos sought to be punished
in order to publicise their actions and attract public attention and support
(Ajangiz, 2003: 177-182). For instance, years after their acts of civil
disobedience had been de facto “de-punished”, some of them found new, non-
violent, ways of attracting legal punishment by joining the army as conscripts
and then deserting. This brought them again under military jurisdiction and
punishment.

The actions of the anti-militarist social movement triggered public debate
and media coverage of military service, and it did so against the government’s
claim that conscription constituted no problem at all (Sampedro, 1996). Its success in attracting media attention and public support has been explained as being the result of three factors (Sampedro, 1996, 1997b).

First, the movement framed its claims not as an attempt to promote an individual right (to conscientious objection), but to abolish military service altogether. Secondly, its non-violent actions and non-violent forms of civil disobedience managed to attract much positive coverage, especially against the background of ETA’s terrorism. Thirdly, it succeeded in attracting the support of other social and political actors (e.g. Izquierda Unida – United Left) which, in turn, increased the attention paid to the anti-militarist social movement. In this way, by triggering public debate and resorting to civil disobedience, the anti-militarist movement managed to involve other actors, not only the parliamentary opposition, but also the judiciary, which had to judge the insumisos. The judiciary became involved by passing contradictory sentences, which further contributed to the relatively high number of people willing to resort to civil disobedience, since on many occasions the punishment was relatively mild or even non-existent (Ajangiz, 2003: 177-178).

A study by Sampedro (1996; 1997b) analysed media coverage of the anti-militarist movement and debates on universal conscription in Spain from 1976 to 1993. According to this study, in 1989 the Spanish mass media started to pay greater attention to conscientious objectors – at least El País, ABC and El Mundo (founded that year) did, which are the newspapers analysed. In addition, the electoral campaign in that year further contributed to triggering debate on conscription, with most public commentators arguing for abolition (Olmeda Gómez, 1997: 143). While three articles per month dealing with the topics of conscription and conscientious objection could be found in El País and ABC between 1985 and 1988, after 1989 this number increased to 10. However, this attention was distributed unevenly: El País and El Mundo provided greater coverage than the conservative daily ABC, which held that the Spanish armed forces should not be an object of public debate and media coverage (Sampedro, 1996). Thus, most of the information provided by ABC on conscientious objection was restricted to communicating new laws and public measures, not their surrounding public controversies.

Insumisión attracted much media coverage, especially between 1991 and 1994 (Ajangiz, 2003: 175-6; Sampedro, 1996, 1997b), which reached its peak during the Gulf War and the concomitant demonstrations against it, as well as during the first half of 1992 after the first acquittal of an insumiso. On average, El País published seven articles a month on this topic, ABC four and El Mundo nine (Sampedro, 1996). However, according to these figures it can hardly be argued that public debate on military service was very intense.

During the second half of 1992, media coverage started to decrease, notwithstanding the fact that the number of conscientious objectors,
insumisos and trials increased. Sampedro (1996, 1997b) speaks in this regard of “informational saturation”. Not only did the number of articles decrease, but so did the attention paid by them to the anti-militarist movement, but this was in favour of attention paid to political elites and the judiciary, which became more visible.

On average, between 1976 and 1993, ABC tended to concentrate on what the political elites were doing vis-à-vis military service and conscientious objection, while El País and El Mundo focused on both political elites and social organisations. Apart from the fact that the social conflict about military service lost some of its public appeal, two other factors help to explain this decrease in coverage. First, in 1991 a new law regulating military service was passed with the support of the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE), People’s Party (PP) and the Catalan Convergence and Union (CIU) Party. This was the outcome of a broad political consensus which apparently closed down the political opportunity for further changes, at least in the short term. Secondly, social conflict over this issue was institutionalised: insumisión began to be seen primarily as a legal matter, which had to be dealt with by the judiciary, not through public debate (Sampedro, 1996, 1997b).

However, while media coverage started to decrease during the second half of 1992, this did not mean that the issue ceased to be contested. In fact, the number of insumisos and conscientious objectors increased (Ajangiz, 2003: 31). In 1993, reforms were introduced to tackle the latter by increasing the number of social service positions, but as seen earlier, these measures were unsuccessful (Ajangiz, 2003: 32).

The dramatic increase in the number of conscientious objectors was partly the unintended consequence of one of the anti-militarist movement’s strategies (Sampedro, 1997: 158). Not only did conscientious objection resonate with the values and beliefs of many Spanish people, especially the young, but it turned out to be a de facto way of avoiding any military or social obligations because, as we have seen, many conscientious objectors were eventually not drafted. The lack of social service opportunities, which explains precisely why many conscientious objectors were not recruited, was partly the result of a campaign by the anti-militarist movement to undermine the normalisation of social service, which was construed by activists as an “instrument” used by political elites to maintain conscription (Sampedro, 1997: 164). More specifically, this movement managed to obtain cooperation from many NGOs and some public institutions (especially those in the hands of Basque nationalists in the Basque Country), and these refused to offer any social service positions. As a result, in 1995 there were over three times more conscientious objectors waiting to do social service than social service opportunities.

A year earlier, in 1994, the then Minister of Justice, Juan Alberto Belloch, drew attention to this challenge, which he defined as a major problema de
Estado ("state problem") since it put the Spanish army at risk of not being able to recruit enough soldiers sometime in the near future.

Meanwhile, noticeable changes were taking place: since 1989 Spain had been moving away from the national defence paradigm towards a more active participation in peace missions (Werkner, 2006: 216). Newspapers such as El País and El Mundo changed their editorial line during the early 1990s and embraced the idea of professionalising the Spanish military (Sampedro, 1996), while opposition parties like Izquierda Unida (United Left) and the Catalanian and Basque nationalists (CIU and PNV) also expressed their support for the abolition of military service. Within the Spanish armed forces, opinion was divided: some wanted to retain conscription, whereas others saw an all-volunteer army as an opportunity for improvement (Werkner, 2006: 233-235).

In this context, the electoral campaign for the March 1996 general elections started with all political parties, except for the major ones (the PP and PSOE), arguing for the abolition of military service. In February that year, France announced the suspension of conscription. This decision was made for two reasons: first, given the number of exemptions the fairness of conscription was no longer guaranteed; second, the new geopolitical situation demanded a new kind of army that was smaller and had better trained soldiers (Ajangiz, 2003: 25). The conservative Partido Popular (PP) won the elections by a simple majority, and a few days before the investiture of José María Aznar as the new Prime Minister, this party and the CIU, which was going to support Aznar’s government, reached an agreement to abolish military service within a period of six years. Officially, there were two reasons for this decision (Ajangiz, 2003: 29): firstly, new technologies and new security threats, which required out-of-area interventions, demanded a better trained, more flexible and, in sum, more professional army; secondly, Spanish society demanded this change in the belief that future military conflicts would take place in advanced technological environments, which required well-trained and professional personnel. No parliamentary group opposed this decision.

The abolition of military service was well received by Spanish public opinion. According to survey data, around 80% of Spanish people supported the professionalisation of the army.\(^6\)

\(^6\) Time series data provided by CIS (available at www.cis.es) indicates agreement or disagreement with the statement: “The professionalisation of the Spanish army is the only possible alternative given young people’s rejection of military service”.

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The Suspension of Military Service in Germany

The process which led to the *Aussetzung* (“suspension”) of military service in Germany is marked by an apparent paradox. In the 1990s, while a number of European countries decided to abolish conscription, Germany resisted this trend. Why this was the case was not self-evident to many scholars who attempted to answer this question. However, over a decade later military service was suspended rather quickly and unexpectedly, partly as the result of austerity requirements (Mutz, 2011; Nachtwei, 2011). The editorial of a special issue of *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (48/2011: 2) spoke of a “rasche und relativ einvernehmliche Aussetzung der Wehrpflicht”. So, any narrative about the abolition of military service in Germany should account for this apparent (but only apparent) paradox.

In this respect, most authors agree on the reasons for the delay in the suspension of conscription. For one thing, military service was a central element of Germany’s self-image during the second half of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It was related to both Germany’s militarist and anti-democratic past and its later success in overcoming it. Moreover, social service, which was closely linked to military service, was a well-established institution that greatly contributed to Germany’s welfare system. Apart from other factors of secondary importance, these two elements prevented conscription from being abolished in the 1990s, according to most accounts.

What we witnessed during this period and later on was a gradual shift of paradigm: from a conception of the Bundeswehr as an army intended for the defence of the national territory to an understanding of it as an army for out-of-area interventions. In this context, the suspension of conscription was seen as a “rationalisation”8 of the military system, which was particularly pressing under the financial constraints brought forth by the 2008 economic crisis.

To contextualise this narrative, it is necessary to pay attention to Germany’s political culture and its relation to the military (Werkner, 2004). Other than Prussia’s militaristic orientation and the negative experience of the military during the Weimar Republic, the most significant element shaping

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7 Military service has been technically *ausgesetzt*, since its abolition would have required rewriting Germany’s Basic Law; in this paper I will use the terms “suspension” and “abolition” (or further near synonyms) interchangeably. Irrespective of some technicalities, conscription has in fact been abolished, according to most commentators (e.g. Kujat, 2011: 5).

this country’s relations with its armed forces is its experience under National Socialism. After World War II, West Germany tried to rebuild itself as a political community by explicitly rejecting those elements that were construed as having led to Nazism: nationalism, militarism and antidemocratic traditions.

More specifically, concerning Germany’s international and security policies, the country developed a so-called Politik der Zurückhaltung (policy of restraint) based on three elements. The first element, anti-militarism (Berger, 1998), was grounded in the slogan “no more war” and was the expression of a sceptical attitude towards military power and the use of the armed forces as a political instrument. Partly as a result of this, the German military acquired a primarily defensive character after 1945. This anti-militarism and the historical experience of Nazism also led to the constitutional recognition of the right to conscientious objection, which played a crucial role in the 1990s, when Germany resisted the temptation to avoid military service. The second feature is multilateralism, which is closely related to the third element, namely Germany’s orientation to the West – in particular to NATO – and to the European Union. The three principles were supposed to preclude any Sonderwege (“special paths”) and make Germany’s international policy more predictable and reliable, consolidate its normative orientation to democracy, help it overcome nationalism and, in sum, provide it with a new national-cum-European identity after its collapse under Nazism. Although this international and security policy had evolved after 1945, these principles were not been abandoned (Werkner, 2004).

Concerning the organisation of the armed forces specifically, Germany’s interpretation of its historical experience led it to two complementary concepts which were intended to regulate the military’s relations with civil society: Innere Führung (“inner guidance”) and universal conscription. The first notion was supposed to ensure the democratisation of the German army and the hegemony of civil society over the military. The second was, in turn, expected to satisfy the demand by the armed forces for personnel, guarantee the loyalty of the citizenry to the army, ensure that citizens lived up to their duty of contributing to the collective defence of their community and prevent the development of a “state within the state” phenomenon (Longhurst, 2003: 152), as had happened during the Weimar Republic.

Universal conscription was introduced in the mid-1950s, when the issue of rearmament and the role of the new armed forces were under debate in West Germany. Although one of the major political parties, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), was hesitant about introducing conscription, it was finally Adenauer’s and Christian Democratic Union’s (CDU) view that won
through, and in 1956 a law on compulsory military service was passed (Longhurst, 2003: 152). However, when the SPD became the main party of government in 1969, conscription was supported by a “broad cross-party consensus” (Longhurst, 2003: 153), a consensus which was further strengthened in 1972/1973 by the conclusions of the Wehrstruktur Kommission, initiated by the SPD and Free Democratic Party (FDP) coalition government (Longhurst, 2003: 153).

This consensus underpinning universal conscription started to disintegrate with the fall of the Berlin Wall. After 1989, a new, more benign security environment emerged with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the enlargement of NATO, so that by 1999 Germany was bordered to the east only by NATO states (Longhurst, 2003: 154-155; Meyer, 2011). In this changed strategic context, the 1990-1991 Gulf War contributed decisively to shaping the post-Cold War military strategy, which was in part characterised by the relatively frequent recourse to out-of-area missions. Thus, Germany’s security policy began to acquire a more “normal quality” (Longhurst, 2003: 154) through the deployments of the Bundeswehr in Cambodia, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia, and “out-of-area missions became acceptable right across the political spectrum” (Longhurst, 2003: 154). This post-Cold War context meant, among other things, that two models of the Bundeswehr started to emerge and compete for scarce resources: the old model, which focused on the defence of the national territory and was built upon the conscription of soldiers, versus a new model, which specialised in out-of-area missions requiring smaller, more flexible, better trained and better equipped forces (Longhurst, 2003: 149).

As already stated, these and further developments favoured decisions by countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, France or Spain during the 1990s to abolish military service. In Germany, for its part, the Green Party began to oppose military service in 1990 (Werkner, 2006: 111). By the end of 1996, while still in government with the CDU/CSU, a group of young members of the liberal FDP also began to argue that conscription was no longer necessary and attempted to incorporate its abolition into the FDP’s policy platform (Longhurst, 2003: 157). Although the liberals resolved in 1997 not to make the abolition of conscription part of the party’s policy profile, due to the pressure exerted by its coalition partner, the abolition of military service was eventually introduced into the FDP’s electoral programme for the 2002 elections.

Public debate over conscription, sparked by this changed security environment, revolved around a number of issues and arguments. Champions of conscription presented military service as the most efficient means of
ensuring the democratic character of the Bundeswehr and of keeping citizens’ interest in the armed forces alive and preventing them from becoming a “state within a state” (Ajangiz, 2003: 42; Dinter, 2004; Longhurst, 2003: 159). This influential argument alluded not only to the dark facets of Germany’s military history, but also to its success in overcoming this history. Detractors, however, were unconvinced; not only was this line of thinking not confirmed by other Western countries’ experiences with professional armies (Münkler, 2002), but also critics saw military service as precisely one of the elements that contributed to the militarisation of society during the German Empire, culminating in the disasters of the First and the Second World War (Dinter, 2004). Interestingly, for some people, in particular Chancellor Kohl (Longhurst, 2003: 160), conscription discouraged the militarisation of society; quite the contrary, it was construed as a civilising force which prevented military adventurism, since the presence of conscripted soldiers was supposed to contribute to raising moral questions and strengthening the accountability of decision makers (Dinter, 2004). This argument, however, lost in influence after the deployment of the Bundeswehr in Kosovo.

A second point of controversy was related to the definition of the purpose of the Bundeswehr, a question which rose to prominence after France’s announcement of the suspension of conscription in spring 1996 (Longhurst, 2003: 158). For supporters of military service, the main task of the armed forces was first and foremost to defend the national territory, as stipulated by Germany’s Fundamental Law, and second to participate in the collective defence of the allies. Although these tasks might be supplemented by participation in out-of-area missions, they remained the highest priority. Conscription, according to this argument, was necessary to guarantee the attainment of the said goals. This line of reasoning was further strengthened by the alleged instability of Germany’s eastern neighbours, which was supposed to justify its concentration on the defence of its national territory (Ajangiz, 2003: 41). However, one crucial weakness of this argument was that major political actors implicitly or explicitly acknowledged the rise of new security threats (e.g. terrorism) and new challenges for the Bundeswehr (e.g. the need to invest more in equipment, which meant allocating less funds to personnel). This undermined the rationale behind the aforementioned argument, namely that the defence of the national territory was the Bundeswehr’s main aim and that military service was an efficient means for achieving it (Rose, 2003).

This is closely linked to a third point, namely, conscription’s usefulness as a military instrument. As shown by the 9/11 attacks, security issues might change radically in a short period of time – hence, the abolition of
conscription would mean, especially given the difficulties of reintroducing it, depriving the military of a strategic instrument that could prove useful in an uncertain future (Dinter, 2004). Furthermore, for the defenders of military service, conscription contributed to making the armed forces more “intelligent” (Longhurst, 2003: 160; Dinter, 2004), not only because draftees could contribute to the military in their field of expertise, but also because professional soldiers were usually recruited from previously conscripted ones; therefore, the abolition of conscription could result in a shortage of people willing to join the army. Then again, military service was seen by others as inefficient for recruiting and in particular training soldiers, for several reasons (Münkler, 2002). First, in technology intensive armies the number of soldiers had become a matter of secondary importance in comparison to their “quality”, that is, their skills. Furthermore, military service was too short to provide the necessary skills to draftees.

Regarding the economic costs of conscription, which was a further issue related to this instrumental vision of military service, both defenders and opponents found economic arguments to support their respective stances (Dinter, 2004).

Communitarian arguments were also formulated in favour of the preservation of conscription. According to this perspective, if Germany wanted to be more than a simple community of taxpayers, it had to involve its members in the defence of the nation (Dinter, 2004). Besides, military service was presented as one of the few remaining spaces where people from different backgrounds could come together. Thus, it was depicted as a crucial institution of socialisation that fostered social cohesion. However, it was precisely these communitarian arguments that were greatly discredited by an issue which rose to prominence over the years, namely, that of Wehrgerechtigkeit (conscription equity). Leaving aside the question of why only men, and not women, had to do military or social service (which further discredited these communitarian arguments; Münkler, 2002), the fairness of conscription was questioned by the diminishing proportion of young men who were actually doing military service of the total number of potential conscripts. These concerns became more important in the 2000s (Kujat, 2011; Steinbach, 2011) and they partly contributed to reducing the length of military service until it became ineffective – as fewer draftees were needed, one way of guaranteeing the “universality” of the system was to shorten military service in order to be able to call up a greater number of young men – and this was explicitly cited in 2011 as one reason for suspending conscription altogether (Meyer, 2011: 16).
Interestingly, proposals such as that of introducing a *Dienstpflicht* ("general compulsory service") instead of a military one attracted little public attention and were mainly debated from a legal perspective (Werkner, 2004). It seems that the legal basis for such a general service was questionable at best. Furthermore, some negative historical experiences, mostly related to the Nazi period, provided detractors with strong arguments to martial against this idea (Dinter, 2004).

Whereas the SPD and CDU/CSU stuck to conscription during the 1990s and 2000s – though the SPD was internally divided on this issue – the Green Party and the Free Democratic Party opposed military service on the grounds that it was no longer justifiable in security policy terms (Werkner, 2006: 109-111). This meant two things: first, that conscription was ill-suited to the security needs of Germany, and second, that it constituted an intrusion into the life of German citizens that was no longer warranted, not to mention that it was increasingly unfair given the declining equity of conscription. Furthermore, both parties believed that the democratisation of the armed forces could be secured by other means such as enhanced parliamentary control and greater transparency (Longhurst, 2003: 157-158). The anti-conscription stance of the SDP, in turn, was the result of its broader aim of demilitarising Germany’s foreign and security policy (Longhurst, 2003: 158; Werkner, 2006: 111). Moreover, both supporters and opponents of conscription could be found within the *Bundeswehr* for similar reasons to those outlined above (Werkner, 2006: 113).

The data about public opinion varies depending on the source, but overall it seems that opposition to military service was not widespread. In general terms, conscription was supported by between 68 and 80 per cent of the population, depending on the year being considered (Werkner, 2004, 2011). However, when explicitly confronted with the alternative of whether to maintain or abolish military service, opinions were more divided. In 2003, for instance, 46 per cent of those surveyed agreed with the statement that military service should be abolished and the army converted into an all-volunteer force (Werkner, 2004), but by 2009 this view was held by only one third of the people interviewed (Werkner, 20011: 44). Unsurprisingly, the support for conscription was stronger among older people than younger ones (Holst, 1995; Meyer, 2004), although even among young men aged between 16 and 29 positive opinions of military service prevailed (Bulmahn, 2008, 2010). These differences notwithstanding, it is safe to argue that the abolition of conscription was not an option embraced by the majority of the German population, in either the former West or East Germany. There was also relatively widespread social support for social service, regarded as equally
important as military service by approximately two thirds of those surveyed (Werkner, 2004, 2011).

Thus, during the 1990s and early 2000s, military service was not seriously challenged: despite public debates on this topic and some political and social actors’ changes of stance, the major political forces of the CDU/CSU and SPD as well as public opinion continued to support conscription. For many scholars, this sturdy support was due to conscription’s symbolic value: “conscription has come to embody … the Federal Republic’s security policy identity as a whole” (Longhurst, 2003: 162; see also Werkner, 2004). Essentially, the belief behind this was that without military service the armed forces would become undemocratic; or to put it in a more positive way, in the field of security policy conscription came to symbolise Germany’s success in overcoming its undemocratic past.

There were also more pragmatic reasons for sticking to conscription, namely, the civilian servers’ contribution to the welfare system. Germany’s anti-militarism after 1945 and the historical experience of Nazism led to the constitutional recognition of the right to conscientious objection (Werkner, 2004). Thus, social service, which was derived from this right, was in principle conceived of as an alternative to military service and gradually became one of the pillars of the German third sector, attracting much social support to the extent that it was no longer conceived of as an exception to the rule. As such, social service became “an inexpensive part of a delivery system of social services for which there [was] no readily available replacement” (Kuhlmann & Lippert, 1993: 105). For many scholars, military service’s interdependence with the alternative of social service contributed to creating a self-reinforcing feedback mechanism which made it harder to change this policy (Ajangiz, 2003: 43, 164-165; Dinter, 2004; Longhurst, 2003: 162; Steinbach, 2011: 15).

A third reason found in the literature for Germany’s resistance to the abolition of conscription in the 1990s is reunification. In particular, the CDU/CSU, FDP and SPD saw military service as an opportunity to bring together young people both from the east and the west, in this way fostering social integration and to some extent contributing to the democratic socialisation of young people from the former German Democratic Republic (GDR; Meyer, 2011).

What was witnessed after the late 1990s and until 2011, when military service was finally suspended, was a succession of events related to the decline of the old model of the Bundeswehr, focused on the defence of the national territory, and its shift to a new paradigm, which required a smaller and more flexible army that was better suited to out-of-area missions. The
issue of conscription equity, for instance, became a judicial matter, and several courts examined whether military service was or was not violating the principle of fairness. However, more interesting were the government’s efforts to reform the armed forces.

In 1998, the Greens entered into government with the SPD, and their opposition to military service became more consequential. As a compromise, the Weizäcker Commission was asked to study the future of the Bundeswehr (Longhurst, 2003: 157). In addition, it was becoming evident that the German armed forces were increasingly ill-prepared to fulfil their role, especially abroad (Steinbach, 2011: 12), which, given Germany’s growing economic influence and willingness to assume foreign responsibilities, was a role expected and demanded of it by its allies (Kujat, 2011). In 2000, the report of the Weizäcker Commission was made public; it argued for the downsizing of the Bundeswehr and the extension of military service to be reconsidered (Longhurst, 2003: 149), although some of the members of this commission argued for the professionalisation of the German army and the suspension of conscription altogether (Ajangiz, 2003: 41). A process of reform began, which was blocked in 2002 for financial reasons, leading in turn to what some authors have called a Reformstau (“reform jam”; Kujat, 2013: 3).

In April 2010, the new CDU/CSU and FDP government that resulted from the 2009 elections formed a new commission, Weise-Kommission, again with the assignment of making a proposal to reform the Bundeswehr. It was asked to contemplate proposing a cut in military spending given the economic situation in Europe. Already by May that year, the Minister of Defence, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, unexpectedly proposed the suspension of conscription to his colleagues in the Bundeskabinett,9 which triggered some debate within the CDU/CSU. Moreover, the proposals of the Weise commission were published in October 2010 and argued, among other things, for the suspension of conscription. In December that year, the reform proposal was put forward by the Bundeskabinett and discussed and passed by the Bundestag in February–March 2011. During the said discussion, the Minister of Defence deployed three arguments: first, that conscription was no longer justifiable in terms of national security; second, that it was not necessary from a military point of view; and third, that Wehrgerechtigkeit (“conscription equity”) was no longer guaranteed (Meyer, 2011: 16). In July 2011 conscription was finally suspended.

For most authors, the abolition of conscription was essentially the upshot of a lagged transition to a new model for the armed forces and security policy

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(Kujat, 2011; Meyer, 2011; Steinbach, 2011). Although most scholars and commentators agree that Germany’s security policy is still informed by its past and thus by anti-militarist and anti-interventionist beliefs, it seems that the emphasis has shifted from beliefs that are against the use of military force to acceptance of the principles of multilateralism, partly as a result of the pressures exerted by Germany’s allies in this respect (Berger, 2002; Werkner, 2006: 101, 116-117, 288-289; see also Hellmann, 2011 and Hellmann et al. for a more critical assessment of these foreign policy changes). In this context, the suspension of military service has been seen as a “rationalization”\(^\text{10}\) of the military, which was particularly pressing under the financial constraints brought about by the 2008 economic crisis.

Public opinion seems to be relatively satisfied with this decision. According to survey data from June 2010, 59 per cent of those asked supported an all-volunteer force, against 36 per cent who favoured conscription.\(^\text{11}\) Similarly, a survey conducted by Ipsos Operations and the Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut der Bundeswehr\(^\text{12}\) during September–November 2010 found that 61 per cent of those interviewed preferred either the abolition (41 per cent) or suspension (20 per cent) of military service rather than its continuation (37 per cent). Even among CDU/CSU voters, those who agreed with the suspension of military service (49 per cent) outnumbered those who opposed this decision (46 per cent), although opinion was divided.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^{11}\) Data from the ZDF Politbarometer, retrieved from the online repository Statista.
\(^{12}\) Data retrieved from the online repository Statista.
\(^{13}\) Survey conducted by Forsa in August 2011. Data retrieved from the online repository Statista.
Political Discontent in Spain

Citizens’ satisfaction with Spanish politics has plummeted in recent years. Whilst people’s expectations about the future evolution of the political situation have slightly declined, their assessment of the current political situation has worsened dramatically, reaching its lowest point in November 2014 when the index of satisfaction with Spanish politics was 12.6 on a 0–100 scale, which markedly differs from its record high of 58.4 in April 2004 and March 2000.\textsuperscript{14}

The appraisal of the government’s achievements (currently in the hands of the conservative PP) as well as of the main opposition party (currently the social-democratic PSOE) reflects this decline, too. From a record high of 58.1 in April 2004, public confidence in the government-opposition system dropped to 23.6 in October 2013, again on a 0–100 scale.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} Data source: CIS. The red line reflects citizens’ perception of the current political situation, while the green one shows their expectations of the evolution of the political situation. The index of political trust simply results from averaging the other two indexes.\textsuperscript{15} Data source: CIS. The red line reflects citizens’ assessment of the Spanish government and the green line their appraisal of the main opposition party. The index of public confidence in the government-opposition system is the result of averaging the two previous assessments.
However, this sharp increase in political discontent is not unique to Spain. Similar trends can be found in other European countries hit hard by the economic crisis, especially in those that suffered a public debt crisis, that is, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Portugal (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2014: 73-77).

Thus, discontent is widespread, affecting most political actors and institutions. Although assessments of the said actors and institutions have usually been critical in Spain, survey data shows that the current level at which they are being appraised is below the usual standard. For instance, citizens’ evaluation of the government has fallen from 4.79 in 2007 to 2.42 in 2013 on a 0–10 scale. On the same scale, political parties had a punctuation of 3.69 in 2007, which dropped to 1.83 in 2013. The same applies to most political actors and institutions: the Monarchy changed from 5.54 in 2008 to 3.68 in 2013, the Congress of Deputies from 4.60 in 2008 to 2.53 in 2013, the Constitutional Court from 4.65 in 2008 to 3.51 in 2013 and the trade unions from 3.91 in 2007 to 2.45 in 2013, and so on (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2014: 67, who analysed the data produced by CIS). Similar trends can be found in indicators of public distrust: between 2008 and 2012, citizens’ distrust of the national parliament rose from 23 per cent to 51.1 per cent, for political parties from 54 per cent to 78 per cent and for politicians from 53 per cent to 76 per cent (Torcal, 2014: 1549).

The political culture of Spain has been described as combining three distinctive sets of attitudes: a high level of support for democracy, varying
levels of political satisfaction/discontent (usually correlated with perceptions of the economic situation), and diffuse negative feelings about politics ranging from lack of interest to distrust and overt hostility, which some authors have labelled “political disaffection” (Montero, Gunther & Torcal, 1998). In a similar vein, the anti-party attitudes in Spain seem to be the result of “cultural”, and thus stable, orientations, which are part of the broader phenomenon of political disaffection and of “reactive” considerations usually related to political discontent and, again, to economic discontent (Torcal, Montero & Gunther, 2003). It comes as no surprise, then, that many authors have looked at the Spanish economic situation in order to explain (at least partially) the unprecedented levels of political discontent.

Economic figures make this relation between political and economic discontent plausible. From 2007 to 2013, the unemployment rate, as measured by the Encuesta de Población Activa (INE), soared from 8.23 per cent to 26.06 per cent. Among people aged 16 to 29, unemployment rocketed from 17.6 per cent in 2007 to 53 per cent in 2013. According to the latest figures (i.e. third quarter 2014), the unemployment rate is still 23.67 per cent and is over 42 per cent among young people (i.e. those aged 16–29). In 2011, when the indignados mobilisations began, the unemployment rate was 21.39 per cent (44.22 per cent of those aged 16–29). In the first quarter of 2014, 53 per cent of jobseekers aged 16–29 were affected by long-term unemployment, that is, they had not had a job in the previous twelve months or more, and for jobseekers between the ages of 30 and 34 this percentage was 61 per cent.16

Further indicators are also telling. The net income of Spanish families (9,603 euros in constant 2000 euros) has fallen to the same levels as those of 1999–2000,17 while social inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient increased from 32.20 in 2008 to 34 in 2012,18 and the quintile share ratio S80/S20 varied from 5.7 in 2008 to 7.2 in 2012 and 6.3 in 201319 (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2014: 118-126).

Proxy indicators are also informative. For instance, Royo (2014: 1581) provides data from a survey by Simple Lógica, according to which the number of people aged 65 or older who support family members (usually with their pensions) increased from 15 per cent in 2010 to 40 per cent in 2012. Besides this, although data on evictions are not completely reliable given the different ways in which the data are created and presented, it had been estimated that...

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16 Data source: report of the Observatorio de Emancipación del Consejo de la Juventud de España for the first quarter of 2014
17 Data source: Barómetro Social de España.
18 Data source: INE.
19 Data source: Eurostat.
in 2012 there were around 30,000 family home evictions in Spain (Romanos, 2014: 296).

A further relevant issue is the precarious working conditions in Spain, which especially affect young people. According to a report written by the Observatorio de Emancipación del Consejo de la Juventud de España in the first quarter of 2014, only 22.3 per cent of those aged 16–29 have managed to leave their parents’ home and become independent, while 25.5 per cent of those between 30 and 34 are still living with their parents. This can be traced to the fact that, on average, a working person under 30 has to spend over 61 per cent of his or her salary to buy a home or over 52 per cent to rent it – the average salary of those under 30 is 11,858 euros per year. Moreover, over 23 per cent of those under 30 who have a job would like to work more hours, and around 55 per cent of those working have a job for which they are overqualified.

In this context, political discontent has soared and in the past few years Spain has as a result witnessed some of its greatest mobilisations. This has happened, however, in an environment that was already mobilised, both at the international and the national level. For Perugorría and Tejerina (2013), the Spanish mobilisations, particularly what later became known as the indignados or 15M movement, should be placed within a wider cycle of protest that encompasses two mobilisation threads. Namely, those movements in the Arab world that have pushed for greater democracy, as well as those movements expressing discontent over “the erosion of the welfare state and the political mismanagement of the socioeconomic crisis” (Perugorría & Tejerina, 2013: 425), which encompass the Spanish 15M movement, the indignez-vous protests in Italy, Greece and France, the Occupy Wall Street movement, and the less visible mobilisations in Belgium, Israel and the United Kingdom, as well as “Iceland’s silent revolution” and the mobilisations of the “Portuguese Desperate Generation”. From among these varied experiences, it is Iceland that most inspired the Spanish activists, according to Postill (2013: 63).

At the national level, Spain was already by 2010 a relatively highly mobilised country (Oñate, 2013). The number of citizens participating in demonstrations increased from 20 per cent in the 1980s to 50 per cent in 2010. Furthermore, from the second half of the 1990s demonstrations underwent a process of increasing normalisation in Spain: by 2010 women were participating in demonstrations almost as much as men, especially women from the younger generation; the overrepresentation of young people in demonstrations as well as citizens with higher levels of education decreased during this period; demonstrations ceased to be an instrument of left-wing
social sectors and political parties, and so on (Jiménez Sánchez, 2011). Furthermore, although the level of most forms of political participation have usually been lower in Spain than in other European countries, participation in demonstrations has normally been higher.\footnote{According to the 2012 European Social Survey, around 26 per cent of the Spanish respondents affirmed that they had participated in a lawful public demonstration in the last twelve months, which is notably higher than the equivalent values for other countries (the average of all countries is 6.8 per cent). CIS surveys (e.g. time series A.3.05.01.051) do not usually yield such a high value, but the results that they produce, although varying depending on the year, are clearly higher than is usual for most European countries.}

This international and national context clearly favoured the mobilisations of May 2011. Certain specific events that year and the year before have also been cited as leading to these *indignados* mobilisations (Perugorría and Tejerina, 2013). In May 2010, the Spanish Prime Minister, Rodriguez Zapatero, announced some adjustment policies after having denied that the Spanish economy was in trouble. In September 2010, a labour market reform was approved and the general strike called by the trade unions had a “negligible” impact (Perugorría & Tejerina, 2013: 427). In January 2011, a pension reform was approved, raising the retirement age from 65 to 67. An unexpected event in February 2011 also contributed to the 15M movement a few months later: an internet-based initiative, #nolesvotes, called for the withdrawal of votes from the political parties that supported the Sinde Law (i.e. PP, PSOE and CIU), which was intended to shut down websites that enabled free downloads and thus violated copyright laws. Finally, in March 2011 a general strike was called for by university students to protest against cuts in education, the Bologna Plan and the rise in tuition fees, and also against the unemployment rate and the precariousness of labour.

So we come to a decisive date in the expression of Spaniards’ political discontent, which marks the beginning of a new social movement and a subsequent series of events that still exert great influence over Spanish politics. The said movement came to be known as the “*indignados* movement”, which is taken from the Spanish translation of the title of Stéphane Hessel’s book, or the “15M movement” from the date of its start on 15 May.

On that date in 2011 a demonstration was called in over 50 Spanish cities, organised by a rather new and unknown association, *Democracia Real Ya* (“Real Democracy Now”), and supported by over 400 organisations (Anduiza et al., 2014: 751). While the call did not find resonance in the traditional media (Anduiza et al., 2014: 752; Perugorría & Tejerina, 2013: 428), the demonstration still succeeded in attracting a considerable number of
participants and subsequent media attention. Arrests were made at the end of this event, and as a way of protesting against them, a number of demonstrators decided to camp in the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, which eventually ensured the continuity of this mobilisation (Pastor Verdú, 2011: 112). A call for support was made over through the Internet, as activists feared that they would be evicted by the authorities. Interestingly, “the first person to join them learned about their action on Twitter” (Postill, 2013). In the following days, police efforts to evict the encamped people from Puerta del Sol were met with further demonstrations. In five days, the number of people in the Puerta del Sol square soared from 200 to nearly 30,000 (Postill, 2013: 54). The fact that this happened the week before the 2011 Spanish local elections (held on 22 May) contributed to the success of these events, at least in terms of their capacity to attract media, public and political attention (i.e. the attention of political parties; Casquete, 2011). Further demonstrations were organised for the night of the 20–21 May on the eve of the local elections. According to Spanish law, which prohibits any overtly political events on election day or the day before, these demonstrations were illegal, but they were tolerated by public authorities and become a “massive act of civil disobedience”, giving further momentum to this social mobilisation (Pastor Verdú, 2011: 112; Perugorría & Tejerina, 2013: 428). According to a post-election survey (CIS, study 2920), 11 per cent of the Spanish population participated in at least one of the protest events associated with the 15M movement.

Gradually, from the end of May 2011, local assemblies and working groups began to be organised throughout Spain, and from mid-June the movement began to move towards local spaces. This was accompanied by a decrease in the number of participants, but also by an internationalisation of the protest (Perugorría & Tejerina, 2013: 428–429). At the national level, however, several events showed that the 15M movement had not lost its mobilisation capacity: on the 14 and 15 June gatherings in front of the Catalan Parliament were organised, which resulted in clashes between protesters and police forces. A few days later, on 19 June, countrywide public protests against the Euro Plus Pact attracted over 250,000 participants (Anduiza et al., 2014: 751). Furthermore, between 20 to 25 June and 24 July 2011 the Marcha Popular Indignada (“Indignant People’s March”) took place – eight columns departed from different parts of Spain and walked towards Madrid, visiting

rural areas on their way, collecting their demands and creating local assemblies. These eight columns came together in Madrid on 23 July and participated in a demonstration the next day under the banner, “It’s not a crisis, it’s the system”. At the international level, in turn, the first “Global Day of Action” under the slogan of “United for #GlobalChange” was called by Democracia Real Ya for 15 October 2011. It took place in over 900 cities, mostly in Europe and North America. The second Global Day of Action, organised by the Occupy Movements, took place on 12 May 2012.

Although social actors linked to this movement, such as Democracia Real Ya and Juventud sin Futuro (“Youth without a Future”), did have their own list of specific demands, there is considerable consensus about the description of the 15M movement as “expressive” and “symbolic” rather than programmatic, a feature that is seen as contributing to amalgamating the movement’s inner plurality (e.g. Anduiza et al., 2014; Casquete, 2011; Martí Puig, 2011; Pastor Verdú, 2011; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2014: 160-161). For instance, the first demonstration on 15 May 2011 was called under the banner of “Real democracy now! We are not merchandise in the hands of politicians and bankers”, and people demonstrated for a rather heterogeneous set of goals, many of them abstract ones such as justice and “real democracy” (Anduiza et al., 2014: 752). In any case, activists had clear targets – the political and economic elites – and actively sought to sideline traditional mobilising agents such as trade unions, against which the movement created its own identity (Anduiza et al., 2014: 752; Pastor Verdú, 2011; Perugorría & Tejerina, 2013).

There is disagreement, however, on whether certain ideas and demands prevailed within the movement, and if so, which ones. For instance, for Sánchez-Cuenca (2014: 160-161) the 15M movement was basically a “reactive” movement that sought to defend the welfare state and to strengthen democracy against the challenges coming from the (international) markets; it was not, however, a movement seeking to break the rules of the game in the capitalist democracies. Casquete (2011) sees the indignados movement primarily as a reaction against the Spanish political system and its perceived shortcomings – its aim was first and foremost to promote democracy, and only secondarily did it express criticism of the economic system and demand greater social justice. Taibo (2013), however, believes that the 15M movement had “two souls”, although he acknowledges that there is no clear separation between them (similarly, CIS, 2012). The first stemmed from “alternative social movements” and was explicitly committed to grassroots democracy and self-management, and was the bearer of anti-capitalist proposals. The second referred to the “young indignados” (Taibo, 2013: 155),
that is, young people who in many cases lacked previous mobilisation experience and who wished to address public authorities in order to change certain policies and political decisions.

Anduiza et al. (2014) has used the concept of “connective action” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) to highlight some interesting features of this movement. First, the organisations behind the 15M movement were younger than those of other protest events: they existed on average for less than three years, were mainly internet based, and few of them had formal membership or affiliation. From a survey of over 2,200 demonstrators, Anduiza et al. (2014) identified 27 organisations associated with the indignados movement. However, just four of them accounted for 88 per cent of the responses: Democracia Real Ya, Juventud sin Futuro, Attac and No Les Votes. Moreover, the mobilisation process happened primarily through alternative online media and social networks, to the detriment of traditional media and mobilising agents. Regarding the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, women and the unemployed were overrepresented compared to previous demonstrations, and participants tended to be younger and better educated than at other protest events. Similar results were yielded by earlier, although more modest, studies (Calvo et al., 2011).

Finally, two features of the 15M movement are worth mentioning, as they might help us to understand the mobilising capacity of this movement. First, the movement was seen “as a social movement of persons concerned with common problems” (Perugorría & Tejerina, 2013: 426), which means that 15M members were not willing to portray themselves as militants or activists. Rather, they encouraged individuality and self-expression by, for example, urging people to develop their own individual messages and placards and to formulate personal claims and complaints. This emphasis on individuality also led to the rejection of flags, acronyms and leaders (Casquete, 2011). Perugorría and Tejerina (2013: 436) aptly described this as the “do-it-yourself-with-others spirit” (Perugorría & Tejerina, 2013: 436). Interestingly, this inclusive character of the 15M is partly the result of a previous learning process on the part of some of the activists who had reflected on the likely causes of their earlier failures (Romanos Fraile, 2013).

The second crucial feature of this movement is that it not only imagined possible better futures, but actually enacted “the utopia of doing real democracy now” (Perugorría & Tejerina, 2013: 426) – or at least its participants perceived this to be the case. In the encampments, for example, committees were organised around practical needs such as cleaning and cooking, and decisions were taken by consensus or by majority rule, and they had rotating spokespersons (Postill, 2013: 55).
Since its inception, the *indignados* movement has succeeded in attracting extensive support from public opinion. In June 2011, around 70 per cent of the Spanish population valued positively the social mobilisations that had taken place in the preceding weeks (CIS study 2.905; Oñate, 2013: 33). This sympathy was widespread among all age groups, not just young people, and was particularly strong among citizens with higher levels of education. Since then, survey data has shown its support has remained firm and widespread among people with different socio-demographic characteristics (Sampedro & Lobera, 2014).

Apart from the 15M movement, the closely related *movimiento social de las mareas* (“tide” movements) should also be mentioned; particularly, the white and green “tides” that were mobilised against the privatisation of the health services and public education, respectively (Gil de Biedma, 2014). These originated in Madrid, where they were especially strong, and were to some extent the result of the 15M movement in the sense that they appeared and developed in a context that was already mobilised by the *indignados* movement. Furthermore, they adopted several organisational and strategic features of the latter: “tides” were organised around assemblies and resisted co-optation by trade unions, which were rejected as (allegedly) part of the inefficient-cum-corrupt Spanish political system. Their repertoire of contention ranged from demonstrations, strikes and legal actions to “flashmobs” and the organisation of marathons (Gil de Biedma, 2014). Moreover, similar to the *indignados* movement, “tides” lacked a clear political ideology, seeking to be as inclusive as possible – they tried to attract, or at least they pretended to include, most categories of workers of both the health and education sectors, as well as users of these services. In January 2014, after a series of legal actions, the “white tide” succeeded in suspending the privatisation of (“the management of”) six hospitals by the regional government of Madrid.

A further case also worth mentioning is the association *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (PAH; “platform of those affected by mortgages”; Romanos, 2014: 297). In 2006, the group *V de Vivienda* (“H for Housing”, which in the Spanish version clearly alludes to *V for Vendetta*) was created to promote access to decent housing. After the Spanish housing market burst in 2008 they initiated a new campaign to try to prevent people being evicted from their homes. This became the seed for the PAH, which was created in February 2009 in Barcelona (Adell et al., 2014). It adopted an assembly-style organisation and, unlike *V de Vivienda*, which was mainly composed of young people struggling to get access to the housing market, PAH was primarily composed of families undergoing an eviction process. Members of

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22 The regional government of Madrid kept insisting that they were not privatising these hospitals *tout court*, only their management.
PAH were supposed to provide each other with mutual support and free advice on legal matters and other issues. This association – in fact composed of over 195 “platforms” all over Spain\(^{23}\) – was partly the result of the perception that the Spanish mortgage law was profoundly unjust, promoting the interests of banks to the detriment of debtors. Eventually, this perception was partly confirmed by a sentence passed by the Court of Justice of the European Union in March 2013, which ruled that evictions carried out under Spanish law violated EU consumer protection laws.

PAH managed to attract so much public attention for a number of reasons. First, it has stopped over a thousand\(^{24}\) evictions in the last few years (Adell et al., 2014), usually attracting considerable media coverage. To this end, negotiations with relevant stakeholders were normally conducted on a case-by-case basis. However, if unsuccessful, activists also sought recourse to “active and peaceful resistance”, summoning the media to cover any possible case of police brutality (Romanos, 2014: 298).

Moreover, in 2012 they launched a citizens’ initiative with the aim of promoting the legal recognition of non-recourse debt, which is a type of loan secured by property whereby if the borrower defaults the issuer can seize the property but cannot demand further payment if the sale of the property does not cover the full value of the defaulted amount. (It is not uncommon in Spain that borrowers who default and lose their homes are still required to pay the shortfall on the sale of the properties that they have just lost). In April 2012, PAH began to collect signatures in support of their citizens’ initiative, and in January 2013 they presented 1,400,000 signatures in support of this initiative, which was sufficient for its inclusion in the parliamentary agenda.

In order to put pressure on members of parliament, a campaign of escraches was launched. Escraches have their origin in Argentina, where they were intended to single out people involved in the crimes of the Argentinian dictatorship. In Spain, the first escraches took place in March 2013, and they consisted essentially of visiting a politician’s home while chanting and making a noise. According to PAH, by targeting public representatives in their private environments they were seeking to appeal to their moral consciousness and individual responsibility, thus counteracting party discipline (Adell et al., 2014). This form of protest enjoyed a high level of public support – up to 89 per cent in some polls (Romanos, 2014: 299) – but was condemned by public authorities and a number of public commentators, who saw these protests as illegitimate harassment. Some went as far as to

\(^{23}\)This figure has been taken from Adell et al. (2014). In contrast, Romanos (2014: 297) states that “this network … has chapters in 145 cities.” Although he does not explicitly mention the number of platforms, this seems to imply that the number of platforms is lower, at 145.

\(^{24}\)Again, Romanos (2014: 297) reduces this number to 700 approximately.
equate *escraches* with “pure Nazism” or with the former street violence of supporters of the terrorist group ETA (Romanos, 2014: 299).

Eventually, PAH’s citizens’ initiative was rejected. The conservative ruling party modified the mortgage law, partly as the result of the aforementioned judgement of the Court of Justice of the European Union, although it did not go as far as to accept non-recourse debt (Adell et al., 2014).

In September 2012 and then in April 2013, two major protest events took place: *Rodea el Congreso* (“Surround the Parliament”) and *Asedia el Congreso* (“Besiege the Parliament”), respectively. Described by some politicians as an attempt at a coup d’état (Sampedro & Lobera, 2014: 18), these two protest events, together with the aforementioned episode of the *escraches*, significantly increased the level of conflict between some sectors of civil society and public institutions, ending in clashes between police forces and demonstrators. In fact, these two events refer to a wider series of demonstrations, some of which were called in response to what was perceived as unwarranted police brutality. What is interesting to note is that, apart from this heightened tension, these events revealed the heterogeneity and differences within the 15M movement, as some sectors of this movement refused to participate in these calls.25

In this regard, political discontent in Spain seems to have created a window of opportunity for a number of political and social actors to develop and advance their respective political agendas. This applies to the varied actors subsumed under the heading “15M movement”, as well as those not identified with or closely related to this movement. In this respect, it is interesting to widen the scope of this analysis and pay attention to the conflicting narratives put forward in the Spanish public sphere. Sánchez-Cuenca (2014) identifies several of the said narratives, which have been particularly salient in recent years and have been used by a number of social and political actors, as well as by intellectuals and commentators to make sense of Spain’s economic and political situation. Paraphrasing Eder’s and Strydom’s discourse analysis methodology (Strydom, 2000), the following chunks of narrative can be conceived of as “narrative devices”, which are the recurrent pieces of narrative that actors have either used in isolation or have combined differently to construct their own specific story.

To begin with, one can find what Sánchez-Cuenca (2014) calls a *regeneracionista* (“regenerationist”) or *noventayochista* (“98-ist”) narrative.

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The name is a clear allusion to the Spanish intellectual and political movement of the late 19th and early 20th century, for which Spain’s loss of Cuba in 1898 was the catalyst. According to this narrative device, economic growth and prosperity before 2008 were but an illusion. The economic and political crises revealed the “true” essence of Spain’s national character: its deficiency of enlightenment, its historical “Cainism”, the primacy of its regional particularisms, its catholic legacy, its contempt for legality and so on (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2014: 10). According to this view, Spain’s problems are specific and have inner causes.

The end-of-cycle narrative has gained popularity over the last year, especially due to the rise of a new political actor, Podemos (see below). According to this narrative device, Spain’s constitutional organisation after 1978 contributed to consolidating two big parties, which gradually “colonised” new areas of the political, administrative, legal and economic systems, and politicised these areas. This, together with insufficient transparency and inadequate instances of control, favoured corruption. The conclusion to be drawn from this narrative is that the political cycle initiated by the constitution of 1978 is exhausted. Although Podemos has greatly contributed to popularising this narrative, the narrative is shared by a number of actors who have developed slightly different versions of it. Some people put the blame on political elites, whereas others (e.g. Royo, 2014) speak of “institutional degeneration”, meaning that most parts of the political system (including the citizenry) have failed to live up to the standards of the system.

The excessive decentralisation narrative, in turn, seems to have had an influence on public opinion’s attitudes towards decentralisation.\(^\text{26}\) Essentially, it claims that similar developments to those described by the end-of-cycle narrative at the national level have happened at the regional level; in other words, that political decentralisation has favoured the development of corrupt political elites which have “colonised” Spain’s seventeen autonomous communities. The economic crisis has simply shed light on this reality.

Spain’s political situation has also been traced back to the economic crisis. Again, there are different versions of this narrative (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2014: 15-17). The first one claims that the poor economic situation has led citizens to translate what is primarily economic discontent into political discontent – rightly or wrongly, political elites are blamed for the poor economic results. A second version argues that the management of the economic crisis has been profoundly unjust. Not only have the most vulnerable social sectors been hit hard by the economic crisis, but those who have some responsibility for the economic situation have been less badly hit, especially by the political decisions taken in response to the crisis. As a result of this injustice, political discontent has soared. According to a third version, the economic crisis has

\(^{26}\) See the time series ‘A.2.01.01.001’ and ‘A.2.01.02.001’ by CIS (www.cis.es).
revealed the increasing impotence of democratic institutions, which are subordinate to financial markets and, particularly in the case of EU member states, to technocratic and non-representative institutions. This has provoked an increase in political discontent.

As argued, it seems that the economic and political situation has opened a window of opportunity for political and social actors to confront these different narratives about Spain’s current situation. In this respect, a qualitative study carried out by CIS between October and November 2011 illustrates that the aforementioned narrative devices have resonated to varying degrees with individuals’ own ideas and beliefs about Spanish politics and the economic crisis (CIS, 2012).

In this context, the manifesto *Mover ficha: convertir la indignación en cambio político* (“Make a move: turn indignation into political change”) was published in January 2014, arguing that it is the citizenry who can and should solve the economic and political crisis by regaining popular sovereignty from “speculative” and “looting” markets and “impotent” or “conniving” political elites. A new political movement-cum-party, namely *Podemos* (“We Can”), presented itself as capable of representing this citizenry.

Interestingly, the aforementioned qualitative study by CIS (2012) also reflected the two “souls” of the 15M movement mentioned by Taibo (2013) (see above). In this regard, one can speak of two conflicting stances within the 15M movement: a reformist one and a more radical position. The creation and subsequent rise of *Podemos* can be interpreted as the triumph of the reformist attitude. It constitutes a response to some criticisms levelled against the 15M movement, namely, that it was too utopian and lacked any specific objectives and policies, and thus it did very little to improve the actual situation of Spanish citizens.

In a surprisingly straightforward article in the Spanish edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Errejón (2014), one of Podemos’ founding members and the director of its electoral campaign for the 2014 European elections presented this party-cum-movement as a deliberate attempt to use the window of opportunity opened up by the 15M movement and associated mobilisations to alter the “inner equilibrium” of the Spanish political system. This system is presented as controlled by a “dominant power block” or “oligarchy”, which building on the 1978 consensus, has been able to secure its position by promoting a “post-political governability” that limits discussion to those issues and positions that do not really threaten the system as such, in other words, that do not jeopardise the “looting” of the Spanish people.

*Podemos* can be traced back to the political and intellectual activities of a number of researchers and students at the Complutense University of Madrid (Elorza, 2014; Errejón, 2014), which are strongly influenced by poststructuralist and post-Marxist political approaches, in particular by Laclau’s work, from whom they take their jargon. Their starting hypothesis
is that Spain is undergoing a “regime crisis” (Errejón, 2014), aggravated by the 15M mobilisations, which have opened up a window of opportunity for rearranging political identities, reframing Spanish politics and articulating a new “left-wing populist discourse” (Errejón, 2014). So, firstly, Podemos is partly a deliberate attempt at reframing Spanish politics, continuing what they see as the new “epochal common sense” created by the 15M movement – going beyond the left-right opposition, Spanish politics is to be reframed and articulated around the opposition between “the people” and their political elites, namely, democracy versus oligarchy, citizenry versus “the caste” (or the establishment) and new versus old. Secondly, Podemos rests on the experience and knowledge that some of its members have gained through their participation in a number of local and national TV shows. According to Errejón (2014), this has taught them how to “translate complex diagnoses into direct narratives and discursive frames”. Their underlying premise, as explicitly stated by Errejón, is that politics is the struggle for the creation of shared meanings. Thirdly, Podemos rests on its members’ knowledge and experience of countries such as Venezuela and Ecuador.

Considering that the number of voters in the 2009 and 2014 European elections in Spain was very similar (15,935,147 and 15,920,815, respectively), it is reasonable to compare both these results. In 2014, the ruling conservative PP party lost approximately 2,600,000 voters, and the social-democratic PSOE party lost 2,500,000 votes. While in 2009 they gained the support of 80% of the voters (PP: 42.12%; PSOE: 38.78%), in 2014 they did not reach the 50% threshold (PP: 26.06%; PSOE: 23%). For some commentators, this was a clear sign of the decline of the Spanish two-party system. Podemos, in turn, won approximately 1,250,000 votes (7.97%) and five seats, which constituted an astonishing electoral success at that moment. It became the fourth political force in terms of its electoral support, behind PP, PSOE and La Izquierda Plural (The Plural Left), which obtained around 1,550,000 votes (9.99% of the votes cast).

Since then, the electoral support of Podemos has increased considerably according to survey data. In October 2014, 17.6 per cent of the electorate expressed their support for this party (against 14.3 per cent for PSOE and 11.7 per cent for PP). Estimating electoral outcomes by considering not only explicit political preferences but also further variables such as previous voting behaviour should be treated with caution. Still, the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (CIS) estimates that in October 2014, 22.5 per cent of the electorate would have voted for Podemos, while 27.5 per cent would have voted for PP and 23.9 per cent for PSOE. Whether or not Podemos will be as successful as survey data suggests, or whether it will become a flash in the pan political party that experiences considerable success but is short-lived (Montero, 2014) is an open question. Yet there is plenty of evidence that it has become a crucial actor in the current political arena.
How to make sense of political discontent in Spain is still an open debate. On the basis of some traits of the Spanish political culture – the correlation between economic and political discontent – and increase in political discontent in most European states with serious economic problems (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2014: 73-77), one can speculate that the political discontentment will fade with economic recovery. This is the position that Sampedro and Lobera (2014: 15) attribute to the “governing elites.”

For Sánchez-Cuenca (2014), the problems of the legitimacy of the Spanish political system are related, first, to the incapacity of the main political parties (i.e. PP and PSOE) to deal with the economic crisis, and secondly, to the injustices stemming from this crisis and its management in terms of the increasing social inequality and the asymmetric distribution of the burdens of the crisis.

Most authors, however, while not denying the importance of economic factors, add further elements which they regard as indispensable to an understanding of political discontent. Oñate (2013), for instance, concentrates on the mobilisations that took place on 15 May 2011 and thereafter, and argues that they should be seen as mobilisations for democracy. They are the result, so he argues, of the structural transformations undergone by liberal democracies during the last decades, which have led to the reopening of past debates, albeit addressed from new perspectives and with new forms of political action.

Sampedro and Lobera (2014: 16-17) see the 15M movement “and its derivations” (i.e. Podemos) as the “return of the Spanish civil society”, which expresses two things: a rejection of the recent economic policies and a widespread and radical critique of the “degradation” of the political order that resulted from the Spanish transition to democracy (Sampedro & Lobera, 2014: 15). According to them, one of the main political changes that has occurred in the last few years is possibly that this radical critique has ceased to be the argument only of minority groups.

Other authors have tried to trace political discontent back to more specific aspects of the Spanish political system. Torcal (2014), for example, concentrates on political distrust rather than political discontent, yet his argument is relevant in this context. Based on data from the European Social Survey, he contends that distrust of political institutions in Spain is due to the negative perception of the political responsiveness of representative institutions, which has been aggravated by several corruption scandals. Regarding the first factor, it is hard to determine whether or not representative institutions are actually unresponsive to Spanish citizens, but it is safe to argue that this is at least a widespread belief among the citizenry (Chaqués Bonafont & Palau, 2011). Furthermore, this perspective has also extended among social scientists, and it has also been put forward to explain the high levels of participation in demonstrations in Spain (Jiménez Sánchez, 2011).
Regarding corruption scandals, *El Mapa de la Corrupción en España* ("Spain’s Corruption Map"), elaborated by *El Mundo*, calculates that currently (i.e. December 2014) there are 466 individuals (80 per cent of whom are politicians or high-level civil servants) involved in any one of the corruption scandals detected since 2000, 82 of these individuals have been convicted thus far, and 28 are in prison.\(^27\) Incidentally, it seems that the way the highly partisan Spanish media system covers these scandals, as well as additional news related to political parties, contributes to the further deterioration of the public image of these parties, as the Spanish press tends to highlight the faults of the opposing political parties rather than the achievements of those with which a newspaper identifies (Baumgartner & Chaqués Bonafont, forthcoming; Palau & Davesa, 2013).

\(^{27}\) This *Mapa de la Corrupción en España* can be found at: [http://www.elmundo.es/grafo/espana/2014/11/03/5453d2e6268e3e8d7f8b456c.html](http://www.elmundo.es/grafo/espana/2014/11/03/5453d2e6268e3e8d7f8b456c.html) [last accessed: 11 December 2014].
Ideational Change through Collective Learning?

One of the hypotheses of the LearningDemoi project is that the three cases reviewed thus far – abolition of military service in Spain and Germany, and political discontent in Spain – are cases of ideational change that are partly the result of collective learning processes. However, this deliverable was not intended to provide an answer to whether or not this is actually the case. Subsequent phases of this research, in particular the detailed analysis of parliamentary and public discourses, will be decisive in confirming or rejecting this hypothesis. In any case, the aforementioned cases raise some questions that are relevant to this research project. In this section, these questions will be asked simply and some suggestions will be put forward.

Let us begin with some conceptual clarification. The notion of “ideational change” is used to refer simply to a change in the network of publicly available ideas. This concept does not presuppose whether this change is incremental or abrupt, substantial and far-reaching, or marginal; nor does it say anything about the mechanisms triggering this change or the actors responsible for it. It simply refers to a change, without further qualification, in the network of publicly available ideas.

As such, collective learning can be considered one possible mechanism, among others, of ideational change. This notion has acquired popularity, especially in the fields of public policy studies and organisational studies, where the concept is usually understood as being in line with the conventional definition of “learning” as “the activity of obtaining knowledge”.\(^{28}\) The only caveat is that to be able to speak of collective learning it must be the outcome of a collective process (for recent reviews of the literature, see Freeman, 2008; Gilardi & Radaelli, 2012; Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013).

Certainly, this concept of collective learning, as used in public policy and organisational analysis, poses a number of challenges – not least how to link an observable change in ideas to a supposedly prior learning process. However, one crucial problem, namely, determining whether something is actually “knowledge”, is usually solved by limiting the scope of the cases considered. Public policy and organisational scholars tend to concentrate on problems that fall into the category of instrumental or means-ends rationality, that is, how social and political actors learn to achieve certain ends or how they learn to achieve their goals more efficiently.\(^{29}\) In these cases, determining whether something “works” (i.e. is “knowledge”) is at least less difficult than in cases where it comes to deciding which ends and which norms are appropriate beyond this means-ends rationality. The LearningDemoi

\(^{28}\) This definition has been taken from the *Cambridge Online Dictionary*, available at: http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/learning [accessed: 12 December 2014].

\(^{29}\) One renowned exception is Hall (1993), who goes beyond instrumental rationality with his notion of “third order change”.

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project, however, uses the concept of collective learning to deal precisely with these kinds of questions that fall into the category of practical reasoning.

Practical problems, that is, problems related to the question of what we ought to do, take us beyond the fields of public policy analysis and organisational research. If one is to avoid any aprioristic ethical and moral commitments, assessing the outcomes of learning processes should not play a part in determining whether the process leading to this outcome can or cannot be conceived of as a case of collective learning. This is partly because of the controversial nature of many of the answers to the question of what we ought to do, which means that there are no substantive agreed upon criteria with which to determine whether a group has made “progress” or gained “knowledge” in the domain of practical reasoning.

One possible alternative is to concentrate solely on procedural criteria. This is essentially the idea followed by Habermas and to a great extent by Habermasian cognitive sociologists who use the concept of collective learning (e.g. Eder, 1991; Strydom, 2006), as well as by deliberative theorists holding epistemic accounts of deliberative democracy (e.g. Bohman, 2007; Estlund, 2009; Talisse, 2005). The main tenet of such a procedural conception of collective learning is that only through the give and take of reasoning is it possible to redeem the (controversial) claims about validity raised by practical judgements, that is, by providing answers to the question of what we ought to do (Habermas, 1999). Thus, public deliberation which manages to “mobilize relevant topics and claims, promote the critical evaluation of contributions, and lead to rationally motivated yes or no reactions,” can trigger collective learning processes and ground the presumption that the said learning processes lead to “reasonable outcomes” (Habermas, 2006: 413). For reasons that cannot be developed in this paper, the LearningDemoi project embraces this concept of collective learning, as well as the associated epistemic account of public deliberation and thus of collective learning.

Such a concept of collective learning raises, however, a difficult question when used in empirical research. Empirical researchers are not likely to encounter cases where public communication lives up to the standards of the Habermasian concept of “discourse”, but are probably going to deal with situations where the exchange of arguments and counterarguments is inextricably intertwined with power relations, strategic behaviours and other kinds of non-discursive forms of behaviour and interaction. In these situations, one crucial question is – to put it metaphorically – whether a chain is as strong as its weakest link. In other words, if collective learning is the upshot of different actors communicating and interacting with each other, is

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30 This does not mean, however, that public policy and organisational scholars reduce the problem of identifying collective learning processes to assessing the outcomes of the said processes, but they usually take the outcomes into consideration when it comes to identifying learning processes.
this process as communicatively rational as its most communicatively irrational actor? Surely not, but this still does not clarify to what extent such a process is communicatively rational and is led by the unforced force of the better argument when non-discursive elements come into play. This is an important question to ask in finding out whether it is justified to speak of “collective learning” instead of “ideational change”.

There is a second challenge for the LearningDemoi project, namely, how to link together collective learning and deliberative democracy. One of the goals of this project is to find an answer to whether the concept of collective learning can be of any help in developing a more realistic image of deliberative democracy, which means that it has to pay attention to democratic decisions and decision making. After all, “deliberative democracy” is about legitimate decision making – as argued by Thompson (2008: 502), “[a]lthough even political deliberation can have various purposes, its essential aim is to reach a binding decision”.

In summary, collective learning can be understood as the joint construction of a symbolic common world through the medium of public discourses. These public discourses may seek to clarify the right or appropriate thing to do in a given situation, or they might aim to clarify how to interpret a given situation in the first place. In other words, this idea of “constructing a common world” should be understood in a broad sense as encompassing the discursive processing of both minor and larger issues. As such, this concept of collective learning poses two challenges to the LearningDemoi project: first, how to assess the communicative rationality of a learning process when non-discursive elements come into play, with a view to determining whether we are justified in speaking of it as a learning process in the first place; second, how to link together collective learning and democratic decisions and decision making.

Let us first expand on the first challenge. As argued, this deliverable (D.1.) is not intended to provide an answer to the question of whether the three cases described above are cases of collective learning or simply of ideational change. However, it can be argued that if they are cases of collective learning, they represent different types of collective learning.

In the case of the suspension of military service in Germany, we encountered an apparent paradox. In the 1990s, while a number of European countries decided to abolish conscription, Germany resisted this trend. Over a decade later, however, military service was suspended without much public controversy. According to most scholars, military service was a central element of Germany’s self-image in the field of security policy during the second half of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first – it was related to both Germany’s militarist and anti-democratic past and its later success in overcoming it. Neither of the major political parties – CDU/CSU
or SPD – nor public opinion seriously challenged conscription. Moreover, social service, closely linked to military service, was a well-established institution that greatly contributed to Germany’s welfare system. These two factors, among others, prevented conscription from being abolished in the 1990s. After that, a gradual shift of paradigm took place: from a conception of the Bundeswehr as an army intended for the defence of the national territory to an understanding of it as an army for out-of-area interventions. In this context, the suspension of conscription was seen as a rationalisation of the military system, which was particularly pressing under the financial constraints brought about by the 2008 economic crisis. Although there were elements which could have delegitimised military service altogether (e.g. declining Wehrgerechtigkeit or “conscription equity”), the timing and context of its abolition suggest that it was not primarily conscription’s lack of legitimacy that brought it to an end, but its collision with other, more pressing considerations. Thus, borrowing an expression from Klaus Günther (1989; Günther & Farrell, 1988; Peterson, 2014), we can say that Germany suspended military service after an “application discourse” (in contradistinction to a “justification” discourse), that is, a discourse in which participants try to select the appropriate norm in a given situation by ranking conflicting, but prima facie valid, norms in a coherent order. Essentially, the German government judged that austerity requirements had to prevail over conscription (Mutz, 2011; Nachtwei, 2011), but the prima facie legitimacy of conscription was not seriously contested.

The issue of conscription was debated in Germany before this decision to suspend military service was taken. What poses a problem, however, is the fact that military service was abolished rather quickly and unexpectedly. Besides, there is no sign that public debate on this issue intensified the weeks or months before this decision was taken, which suggests that public discourses (and thus collective learning) did not play a major role in this decision. On the other hand, however, new considerations came into play, namely austerity requirements. Although they might not have reinvigorated public debate on military service, they might well have tipped the balance against conscription within specialised publics – hence, this might be a case of collective learning restricted to certain milieus, which led eventually to policy changes. Nevertheless, subsequent phases of this research are needed to confirm this idea.

In the Spanish case, in contrast, the anti-militarist social movement challenged the legitimacy of conscription, that is, it began a “justification discourse”. The most widespread and more consistent narrative about the abolition of military service in this country tells the story of a success.
Namely, the success of Spanish civil society, which managed to create a debate on this topic and succeeded in blocking the government’s attempts to close the debate and regain control of the situation. As an unintended consequence of this struggle, a situation was created which enabled Spanish citizens, particularly draftees, to express their opposition to military service in a more consequential way. The situation was becoming untenable because of the soaring number of conscientious objectors, shortage of social service positions (partly because civil society supported the anti-militarist movement and refused to offer social service positions), serious flaws in the control mechanisms of conscientious objection and a campaign of civil disobedience consisting of a refusal to do military and social service. This campaign was to a considerable extent supported by public opinion and exposed the conflicting opinions about conscription that existed in the judiciary and parliament. Eventually, partly for electoral reasons, the Spanish government decided to abolish conscription and to professionalise the armed forces.

The process which led to the abolition of military service can be represented in the following way.

**Schematic Diagram of Process for Abolition of Military Service**

As can be seen from this figure, public opinion played an important role in this process. The interesting point, however, is that most of the features which have given rise to debates over political ignorance and the epistemic value of public opinion can be found in this case (Engelken-Jorge, 2014). In this respect, it should be noted that debates over conscription took place in the 1980s in the mass mediated public sphere, but they were not particularly intense. A study by Sampedro (1996, 1997b) found that between 1985 and 1989, two of the most important Spanish newspapers, *El País* and *ABC,*
published together around three articles per month on conscientious objection. These debates became more intense after 1989, but already by this date Spanish public opinion favoured the professionalisation of the army over conscription. So, it is doubtful if the activities of the anti-militarist movement and especially the debates it sparked played a decisive role in changing or forming people’s policy preferences. Besides, according to survey data (e.g. CIS studies 1518 and 2234), most people did not show much interest in topics related to the armed forces and national defence: they rarely or only occasionally followed a piece of news on these issues in the media and rarely spoke about these topics at home.

On the other hand, public opinion held relatively coherent attitudes on these topics (Alvira, 1992), which some scholars have labelled “popular pacifism” (Sampedro, 1997: 168) and which might explain why most citizens were content with Spain having a “low military profile” (Ajangiz, 2003: 99); hence, that they saw it as unnecessary to have such a large army as the one produced by conscription. Besides, Spanish citizens’ opposition to military service can be plausibly traced back to the sometimes deplorable conditions under which drafted soldiers had to fulfil their military obligations (Werkner, 2006: 234).

For many people, then, there were good reasons to abolish military service and to professionalise the army. Nevertheless, public debate was not intense and decisive, although it was prolonged, and it played a role in changing the positions of key actors (e.g. the editorial lines of major Spanish newspapers), but it seemed to be of secondary importance in forming citizens’ preferences about whether or not to professionalise the army. This leads again to the (metaphorical) question of whether a chain is as strong as its weakest link, that is, whether a collective learning process is as rational as its most communicatively irrational actor. From a discourse theory perspective, Spanish public opinion was not particularly deliberative, in the sense that it did not show much interest in debates about conscription.

There is a further challenge – namely, in this deliverable I have chosen to frame the abolition of military service in Spain and Germany as cases of justification and application discourses, respectively. The rationale for this decision is that it allows at the theoretical level to account for the timing of the abolition of conscription in Germany. That is, this conceptualisation takes into account the fact that military service was suspended in this country when austerity constraints were in place, and it permits, furthermore, to link these two aspects by arguing that the latter prevailed over conscription – hence, conscription was abolished. Nevertheless, one can also contend that the German case was more efficiency-based, while the Spanish one was more
morally-based, and that this is essentially the main difference between both cases. Actually, both interpretations are not mutually exclusive. Be it as it may, in this deliverable I will stick to the understanding of the German and Spanish cases as cases of application and justification discourses, acknowledging, however, that there are also alternative ways of apprehending these cases theoretically that are equally plausible, at least at this stage of the LearningDemoi project.

With regard to political discontent in Spain, it is still unclear what is happening in this country. The most plausible explanation is that the economic crisis and the way it has been managed by Spanish political elites, perceived by the citizenry as profoundly unjust, have created a window of opportunity for a number of social and political actors to advance and develop their own specific agendas. They have been successful to varying degrees in attracting public support. The most salient example is the 15M movement, widely supported by the Spanish population: according to survey data, 70 per cent of the population value these mobilisations positively and around 10 per cent have participated in at least one event associated with this movement. What was initially seen as an “expressive” movement, which has put forward a rather heterogeneous set of demands and grievances, has gradually given rise to an anti-establishment narrative. Particularly since the creation of Podemos, a new, more articulated narrative on the (alleged) decay of the Spanish political system, seized by a “caste” of politicians primarily interested in their own welfare, is emerging and gaining electoral support. Obviously, traditional political elites are resisting this new narrative, so what we are witnessing is a heated discourse over the appropriate definition of the situation: the end of the 1978 consensus and its caste versus the rise of a populist and perilous party-cum-movement.

This can be conceived of as a collective learning process revolving around the correct definition of the current political situation in Spain. If one accepts this interpretation, it should be seen as a learning process under conditions of triple contingency (Strydom, 1999), where the public (i.e. the Spanish citizenry) acts as a kind of judge who assesses the soundness of the different narratives and arguments put forward, and interprets the different performances of the social and political actors actively participating in the public sphere. On the other hand, the features of the Spanish political culture (e.g. the correlation between economic and political discontent) and the fact that new social and political actors have emerged in a number of European...
countries displaying anti-establishment attitudes might provide a hint that this is primarily an irrational revolt sparked by economic discontent, rather than a learning process that has its roots in the alleged decay of Spanish public institutions. Thus, according to this interpretation, criticism of public institutions and political elites would be but a mere rationalisation of what is originally a form of economic discontent. (Then again, even in this latter case one might look through a learning theory lens and ask why the citizenry failed to learn, for a pessimistic view of the citizenry, which denies citizens’ rational and learning capacities, is not necessarily more plausible than a more rationalistic approach.)

So, what we have are three questionable cases of collective learning: one which, if it is a collective learning process at all, resulted from an “application discourse”; another that can be conceived of as the outcome of a “justification discourse”; and a third, which is taking place through what, in the absence of a better expression, can be called a “definition discourse”.

This leads us to the second question mentioned above about how to link together collective learning and democratic decisions and decision making. Interestingly, the answer to this second question might have implications for the first one; that is, whether cases of ideational change are collective learning processes when certain non-discursive elements come into play. At least two models of what this link between collective learning and democratic decisions looks like have been put forward: the agora model and the cultural learning model.

The **agora model** is the most straightforward and intuitive one. It simply conceives of the public sphere as a kind of forum where different actors communicate with each other and try to persuade each other by the give and take of arguments. According to this model, political decisions are the outcome of these public debates and collective learning processes. Such an image of the public sphere has been fiercely criticised and rejected as too simplistic. However, different more complicated and elaborate versions of the agora model still subsist. Many approaches to mini-publics and even some perspectives on sequential and systemic models of deliberation tend towards the agora model in the sense that they tend to regard deliberation as oriented towards decision making, irrespective of the complexity with which they imagine the deliberative process. Furthermore, such more or less complex deliberative processes are usually conceived as ending with the collective decisions to which they (purportedly) led.

According to this agora model, the quality of public discourses can be assessed directly by “measuring” different aspects of deliberative processes, for example, their civility, argumentative sophistication and so on. The **Discourse Quality Index** or similar tools illustrate how this can be done (see
for instance Steenbergen et al., 2003; Wessler, 2008). The quality of such discourses determines, in turn, whether it is justified to speak of collective learning or not.

The cultural learning model is that proposed by Peters (2007), which explicitly rejects the agora model’s focus on specific political decisions, and argues instead that one should concentrate on more diffuse and long-term processes of cultural change if one is to observe the functions of public discourses:

“Regarding the benefits and functions of public discourses, one should not bring to the fore their ability to resolve conflicts, arriving at explicit consensuses, or to justify specific political decisions. (...) Instead, one should focus on the possible effects of public debates on diffuse and longer-term processes of cultural change, innovation and learning” (Peters, 2007: 202).

Obviously, this does not mean that the possibility that that public discourses might influence political decisions should be completely ruled out. However, more often than not these decisions are the outcome of other factors such as vested interests or power relations, or it is these decisions that trigger public debates in the first place. So, it is more interesting, according to this model, to concentrate on the diffuse processes of cultural change that happen through the medium of discourse. Thus, public discourses do not lead to explicit consensuses or narrow the range of available perspectives, but shift them, generating new ideas and proposals, identifying and thematising new problems, and creating “something like a shared horizon, a common and shared field of dispute” which is in a constant flux (Peters, 2007: 354).

A further development of this cultural learning model is what can be called the self-correcting public sphere model. Essentially, this (sub-)model is similar to the cultural learning model, but tries to pay greater attention to the interaction between specific political decisions and public discourses. It assumes that public discourses might influence specific political decisions and, inversely, that political decisions might trigger public debates. It also assumes that one of the functions of public discourses is to identify and thematise new problems, as well as old ones which have not been resolved. The interesting question is, then, what happens when public discourses are halted or are simply not sparked by certain political decisions. The first scenario is exemplified by debates over the legitimacy of conscription in Spain, which ceased (or became marginal) after military service was abolished. The second is illustrated by the decision to suspend military service in Germany, which did not spark much public controversy. The main argument of this self-correcting public sphere model is that the halting of
public discourses, or the fact that an issue is not thematised in the first place, can be taken as an indicator that most actors recognise, with the wisdom of hindsight or based on the insights gained through public debate, that a previous decision (in this case, the abolition of military service) was reasonable (i.e. acceptable from a practical perspective). Thus, more generally, the halting of the self-correcting dynamic of the public sphere constitutes an indicator that a collective learning process has taken place. (Obviously, this argument applies only under specific circumstances which have to be spelled out; however, this shall be done in subsequent papers.)

However, this does not say much about the case of political discontent in Spain, where a specific policy decision is not at stake but wider questions. Notwithstanding its differences with the agora model, it seems that the cultural learning model also has to “measure” in some way the discursive quality of public communication if it wants to avoid false positives in identifying collective learning processes. Thus, when it comes to specific political decisions, the halting of the self-correcting dynamic of the public sphere might constitute an indicator of collective learning. But it seems that when it comes to what were earlier called “definition discourses”, there is no alternative to “measuring” in one way or another the intensity and quality of public discourses if it is to be determined whether a collective learning process is taking place.

These, however, are just some initial thoughts that shall be further developed in the subsequent papers of the LearningDemoi project.
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