



POWER2YOUTH

Multi-level Factors of Youth Exclusion and Inclusion in Ireland

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Maria Mexi and Tristan Boursier¹

Abstract

This report contains a discussion of the main findings emerging from a study of the role of young people in the student mobilizations in Ireland in 2010 and 2011. After a brief discussion of how the recent economic crisis sharpened young people's social and labor market exclusion resulting in high levels of emigration, we offer a comprehensive analysis of the main domestic factors - both policy (factors related to labour market and social inclusion) and organizational (factors to pertaining social and political engagement) - that affected youth activism and provided the backdrop of the student mobilizations. In the final parts, the particular characteristics and events of the 2010/2011 student protests are elaborated. The report concludes by delving into the transformative impact of the student mobilizations and their effects on the national context.

Keywords: Youth | Political movements | Ireland | Economic crisis

INTRODUCTION

This report is developed in the context of Work Package 5, "Global Youth", which is part of the project "Power2Youth". The aim of Work Package 5 is to add a comparative perspective to the project by looking into the experiences of socio-economic transformation in two European (Greece, Ireland) and one extra-European (Brazil) country, with a view to assessing their relevance to the challenges facing the youth in the South Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) region.

The present report is the outcome of a study conducted on the case of Ireland. Ireland, like Greece, has recently undergone one of the most severe economic and social contractions in the global and European crisis. In response to the crisis a major fiscal consolidation programme was applied involving a series of austerity measures. Over the period 2008-2014, public spending in areas of social welfare, health care and housing was reduced by 18.5 billion euros and revenue taxes increased by 12 billion euros. The cumulative effects of the cuts entailed a rise in poverty and deprivation levels for families and children belonging to middle- and lower-income groups. Between 2008 and 2013, child-poverty levels increased from 18 percent to 29.1 percent, while deprivation levels rose to 63 percent for lone-parent families and from 26.9 percent in 2012 to 30.5 percent in 2013 for the general population (Hearne 2015a).

Yet, despite the harsh austerity measures, in Ireland - contrary to what we have seen in Greece - there was limited protested activity. By and large, the Irish case has been described

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as that of an “extraordinarily moderate and passive society” (O’Brien 2011). As Hearne (2015b: 4) has argued about the way the Irish have dealt with the austerity-driven crisis: “rather than expressing anger collectively in external forms of public protest they have internalized their response through passivity, self-blame, guilt, alcoholism, emigration and suicide.” Scholars and commentators have found it hard to explain what lies behind the passivity of the Irish population. For Kriesi (2012: 522) “resigned acceptance of the inevitable” has given its place to contention and radicalization, as the “discontented population [...] has lost faith in the effectiveness of protest and/or because it is forced to acknowledge the constraints imposed on the governments by the international political community”. For some others, issues of elite domination were brought into the foreground and, therefore, “there was a widespread acceptance of the elite narrative that the crisis was caused because the Irish ‘partied too hard’ in the boom and over borrowing to fuel ‘excessive’ lifestyles” (Hearne 2015b: 4). Within such a general context of passivity, the 2010/2011 student mobilizations against the proposed tuition increases caught widespread attention and surprise.

The report is structured as follows. Section 1 provides a general overview of the socio-economic and political context within which the 2010/2011 student mobilizations occurred, followed by a close examination of the impact of the economic crisis in Ireland. Section 2 offers a comprehensive presentation of the general situation of young people before and after the 2010/2011 student mobilizations, focusing also on how the crisis sharpened their social and labour market exclusion resulting in high levels of emigration. This is followed by section 3, which highlights the main domestic factors - both policy (factors related to labour market and social inclusion) and organizational (factors pertaining social and political engagement) - that affected youth engagement and inclusion and provided the backdrop of student mobilizations in 2010 and 2011. Next, in section 4, the particular characteristics and events of the 2010/2011 student mobilizations are elaborated. Finally, the report concludes by delving into the transformative impact of the student mobilizations and their effects on the national context. Data for this research were collected through a) a review of the academic literature, including the study of national policy and historical documents, articles, reports and papers published in national and international academic journals, and b) interviews with key informants.

1. COUNTRY CONTEXT

After decades of poor economic performance and relative poverty, Ireland entered a period of strong economic and employment progress, which was culminated between 1994 and 2000; Rigney (2013: 1) notes that this was “the real Celtic Tiger era, where every economic variable performed at peak, and GDP growth averaged 9.1 per cent each year”. According to Fraser et al. (2013: 41), a number of factors contributed to this success, namely: “European supports, inward investment propped up by a low rate of corporation tax, and labour market reforms (including a pact between private capital, the state, and trade unions which was designed to secure peaceful and stable conditions in the public sector that would form the basis for accumulation to occur in the private sector).” Yet, Ireland soon entered a boom-bust cycle marked by what has been called a “property bubble” involving an unparalleled - 382 percent - increase in house prices since 1991 (Fraser et al. 2013: 41). The 2008 collapse of the US bank Lehman Brothers severely affected Irish banks - which had lent large amounts of

money to households and property developers during the Celtic Tiger era - and resulted in a sharp increase in fiscal deficit (i.e. from 25 percent of GDP in 2007 to 66 percent of GDP in 2010, Department of Finance data, as cited in Donnelly-Cox et al. 2012: 2). The government's successive efforts to contain the macro-economic consequences of the economic crisis were to some extent in vain, as by late 2011 Ireland could no longer depend on private markets to borrow money and was forced into a lending programme with the "Troika" (i.e. the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund), which foresaw a 85 billion euro financial assistance package.

According to the requirements of the "Memorandum of Understanding" agreed by the Irish government and the Troika, Ireland had to increase taxes and to introduce a set of harsh austerity measures in order to decrease public spending, affecting primarily the middle and lower-income households. Ireland officially exited the Troika bail-out in December 2013 (RTÉ 2013), yet commentators have been critical of Ireland's management of the crisis and its consequences. For Kitchin et al. (2012: 1303), Ireland has displayed:

seemingly little appetite for any radical departure from orthodoxies and dogmas which have demonstrably failed. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the international pressure, Ireland's response to its crises represents little more than an anxious toeing-the-line in economic policy, kowtowing to the demands of the IMF, and nostalgically dreaming of those halcyon days of perpetual growth.

As in Greece, the economic crisis in Ireland triggered a double (political and social) crisis. In the political terrain, electoral support for Fiánna Fáil, the party that had been in power since 1997, collapsed from 41 percent in 2007 to 17.4 percent in 2011; also, a new coalition made up of right-wing Fine Gael and the Labour Party replaced the outgoing Fiánna Fáil-Green Party coalition government that had signed the bailout agreement with the Troika (Belfast Telegraph 2011). Drawing on cross-national data on party systems, Hernández and Kriesi (2016) have demonstrated that electoral realignments at the expense of the incumbent parties has been a common characteristic of all the countries most severely hit by the 2008 economic crisis. Also, discontented voters have chosen to reward populist parties and punish mainstream parties that had been involved in the management of the crisis and the implementation of austerity measures.

In the social terrain, the combined effects of the recession and austerity measures imposed can be summarized as follows: unemployment rose from 4.5 percent in 2007 to 17.3 percent in the first quarter of 2011 and GDP fell by 10.8 percent in 2009 and 2.9 percent in 2010 (Central Statistics Office/CSO data, as cited in Donnelly-Cox et al. 2012: 1-2); the deprivation rate sharply rose from 17 percent in 2009 to almost 23 percent in 2010, an increase reflecting a change in the deprivation rate of those *not* at risk of poverty from 13.6 percent in 2009 to 19.1 percent in 2010 (CSO 2013: 12). Concurrently, individual vulnerability intensified. Based on Whelan and Maître (2010: 10-11) and their analysis of economically vulnerable groups since the emergence of the crisis, in 2010 three quarters of the Irish population were neither poor nor vulnerable while the remaining one-quarter involved the following categories: 7 percent of the population were "poor and vulnerable" (i.e., people who were long-term unemployed, people who were ill and disabled, and sole parents); 7 percent were "poor but not vulnerable" (i.e., many older people and some of the self-employed); and 11 percent were "non-poor but

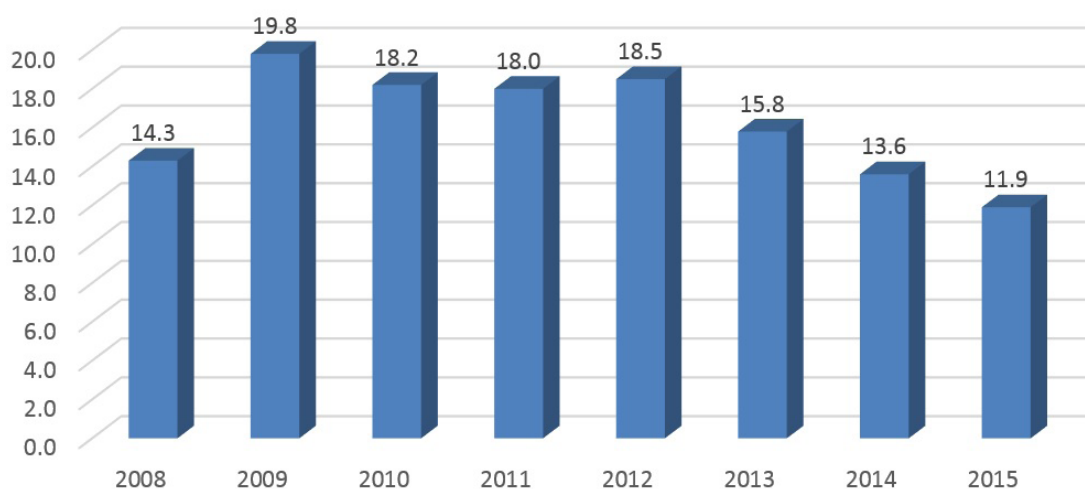
vulnerable" (i.e., people with debts whose outgoings exceeded their current income). The "non-poor, but vulnerable" constituted a new "at risk" group that emerged only after the economic crisis. Due to the suffocating conditions of the domestic economy, emigration rates in Ireland rose sharply as of 2009. According to CSO data, "A total of 40,200 Irish citizens emigrated in the year to April, up from 27,700 in 2009/10 and 18,400 in 2008/09. There was also a 43 per cent increase in the number of women emigrating to 17,100" (Carroll 2011).

Between 2008 and 2011 subjective public attitudes also worsened. Successive Eurobarometer surveys conducted over that period show that the percentage of the Irish respondents, who perceived the financial situation of their household to be "rather bad" or "very bad", rose from 34 percent to 47 percent (European Commission 2008: 10, 2011: 12). Moreover, in 2011, 96 percent of the Irish respondents said that they were unsatisfied with the national economy vis-à-vis an EU average of 71 percent (European Commission 2011: 8). As discussed below, this general feeling of discontent triggered, in turn, grievances which were most forcefully expressed through the 2010/2011 student protests and mobilizations. As Kriesi (2012: 520) has argued about the role and scope of grievances in protest mobilization: "Public protest is designed to unleash a public debate, to draw the attention of the public to the grievances of the actors in question, to create controversy where there was none, and to obtain the support of the public for the actors' concerns."

2. OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

When the 2008 economic crisis hit Ireland, Irish youth had to come to grips with rising unemployment, poverty and social exclusion which led to disappointment and triggered emigration. In particular, the unemployment rate among persons aged 15-19 rose from 14.3 percent in 2008 to more than 20 percent in 2009, falling to 18.2 percent in 2010. However, since 2012 the youth unemployment rate has been steadily reduced, going down to 15.8 percent in 2013, and further down to 11.9 percent in 2015 (Figure 1).

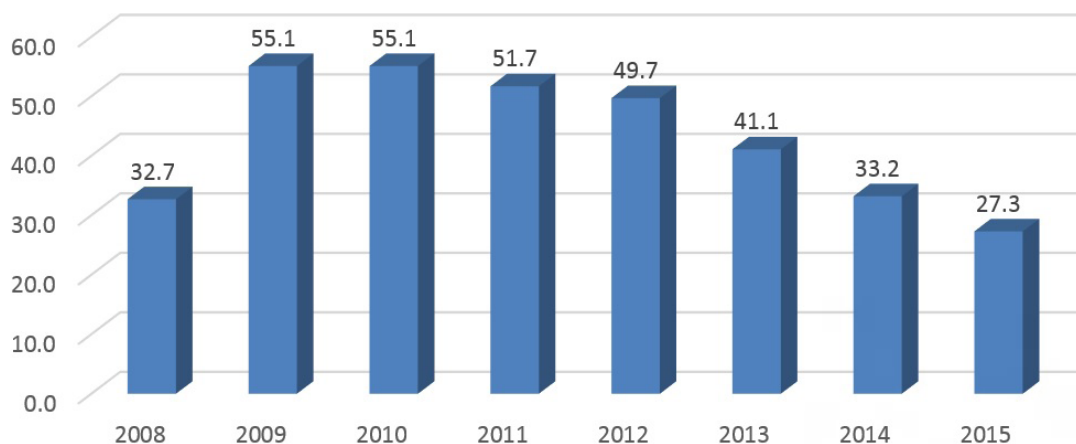
Figure 1 | Ireland: Unemployment rate of young persons (15-19 years old) - Total



Source: Eurostat (2015a).

At the same time, the unemployment rate among persons aged 20-24 rose from 32.7 percent in 2008 to 55.1 percent in 2010 that is, by 22.4 percent. As with the 15-19 age group, the unemployment rate started to decline after 2013, i.e., from 41.1 percent in 2013 to 27.2 percent in 2015 (Figure 2).

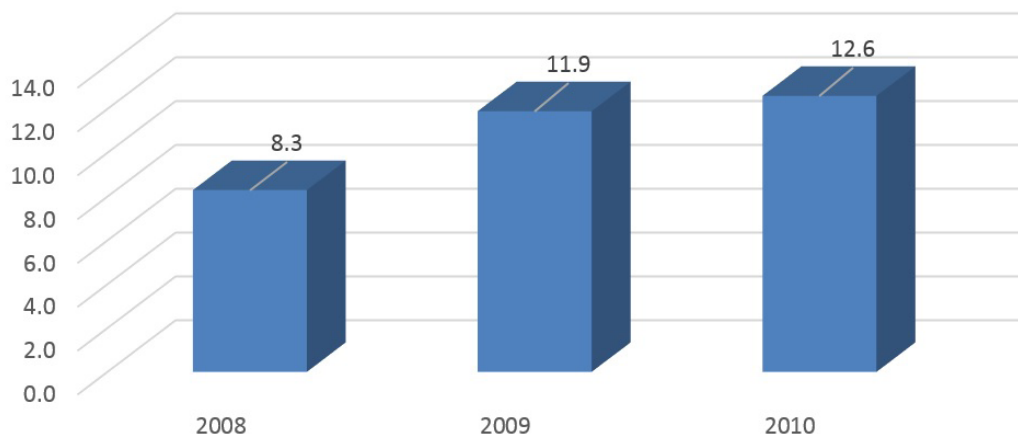
Figure 2 | Ireland: Unemployment rate of young persons (20-24 years old) - Total



Source: Eurostat (2015d).

Interestingly, among the 20-24 age group the rise in the unemployment rate is more pronounced among persons with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4) than among young persons with less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2). The unemployment rate for young persons with less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2) rose from 8.3 percent in 2008 to 12.6 percent in 2010, that is, by 4.3 percent (Figure 3).

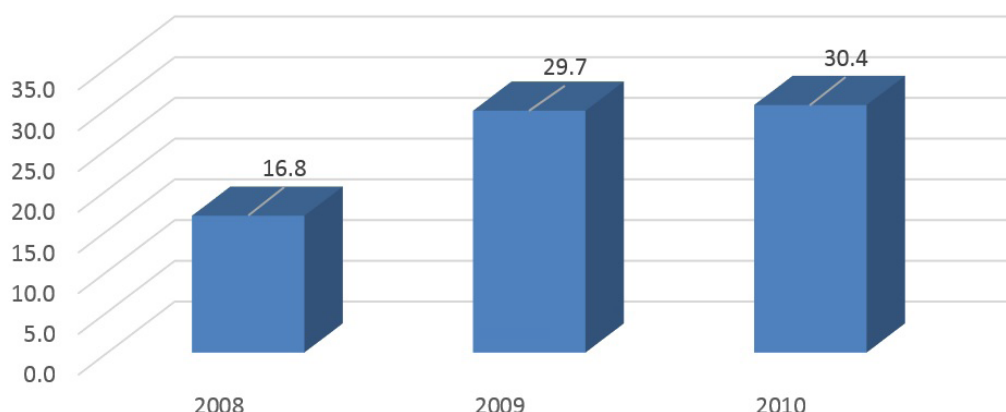
Figure 3 | Ireland: Unemployment rate of young persons (20-24 years old) with less than primary, primary and lower secondary education



Source: Eurostat (2010a).

On the other hand, the unemployment rate for young persons with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4) almost doubled, as it increased from 16.8 percent in 2008 to 30.4 percent in 2010 (Figure 4).

Figure 4 | Ireland: Unemployment rate of young persons (20-24 years old) with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)



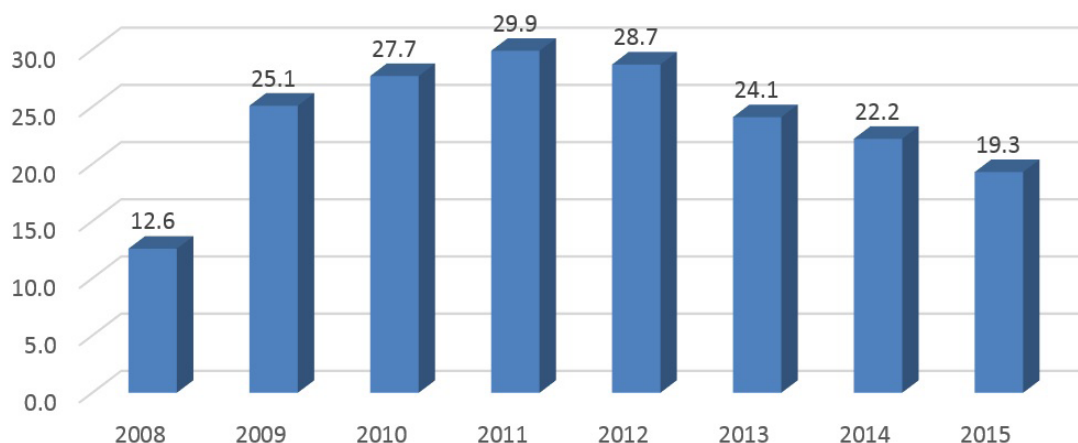
Source: Eurostat (2010d).

As Doorley et al. (2013: 10) explain, a major reason for the rising youth unemployment during periods of economic crisis is that “young people, in general, suffer disproportionately from job losses in recessions as they have occupied their positions only recently and are likely to have temporary contracts”. According to a report published by the Economic Social and Research Institute, labour market precarity affects certain groups: young people leaving school or the education system with poor or redundant skills and qualifications have - compared to those who leave school with a Leaving Certificate qualification - the lowest level of employment and the highest level of unemployment (Byrne et al. 2009).

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that young men’s employment rates decreased much more sharply than rates for young women. As the Quarterly Labour Market Commentary for spring/summer 2010 noted, “the concentration of job reductions among young people reflects the tendency for job losses to be on a LIFO (Last In First Out) basis as well as the difficulty new [labour market] entrants face in finding a first job”. In particular, the greater impact of the crisis on males was “a by-product of the sectoral distribution of job losses”, which had been dominated by the construction sector (FÁS 2010: 5-6). Yet, as a note of the Irish Ministry of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation underlines: “Not only the ‘insider-outsider’ effect and the ‘last-in-first-out’ approach, but also the flexibility of the Irish labour market, where it is easy to lay off workers, contributed to the high rate of youth unemployment” over the first crisis years (as cited in Doorley et al. 2013: 10). The strenuous situation of young people in the Irish labour market is also reflected in Live Register Data. In December 2006 (during Ireland’s economic boom) the number of persons under 25 years of age on the Live Register (claiming unemployment benefit) was 7,282; this number was skyrocketed to 112,875 persons in December 2010 (CSO 2007, 2011).

Eurostat data confirm the above trends. Hence, in terms of gender differentials, unemployment seems to have primarily hit young men more than women. As figures show, for young men 15-29 years old the unemployment rate increased from 12.6 percent in 2008 to 27.7 percent, i.e., an increase of 15.1 percent. As with the general youth population the unemployment rate for young men started to decline from 28.7 percent in 2012 to 19.3 percent in 2015 (Figure 5).

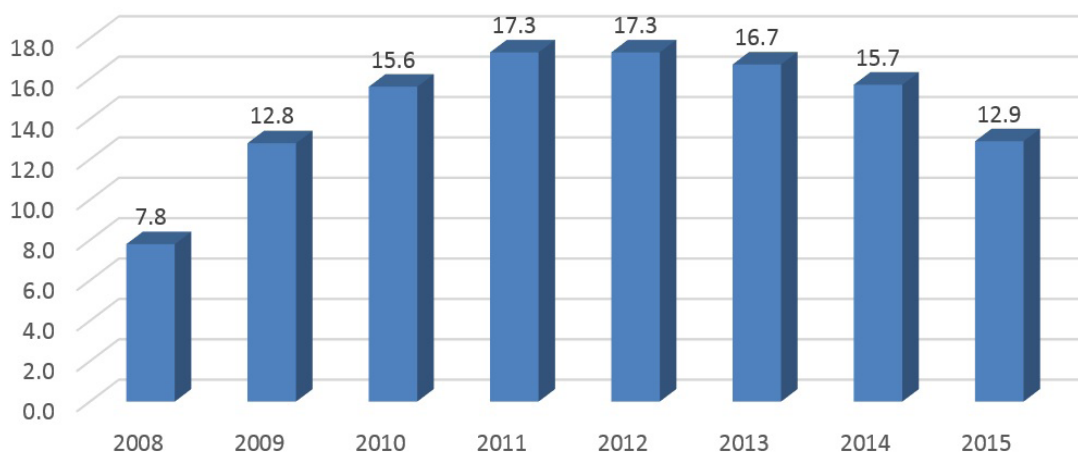
Figure 5 | Ireland: Unemployment rate of young persons (15-29 years old) - Males



Source: Eurostat (2015c).

For young women, the unemployment rate increased from 7.8 percent in 2008 to 15.6 percent in 2013 - that is, an increase of 7.8 percent - and was reduced to 12.9 percent in 2015 (Figure 6).

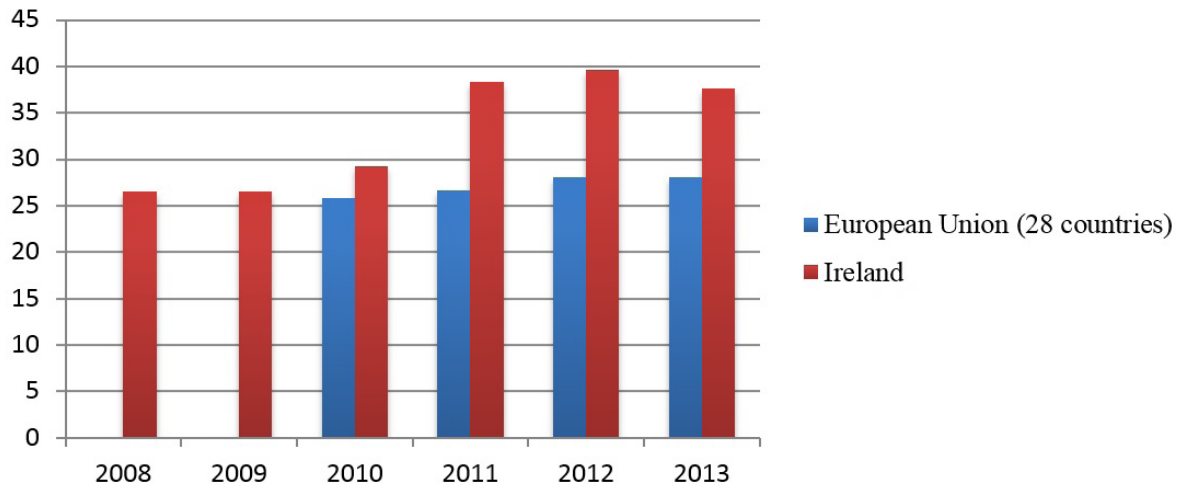
Figure 6 | Ireland: Unemployment rate of young persons (15-29 years old) - Females



Source: Eurostat (2015b).

Concurrently, the rate of risk of poverty or social exclusion among young people in Ireland climbed from 26.5 percent in 2008 to 29.3 percent in 2010 and further up to 37.6 percent in 2013, which is 19.5 percent above the EU-28 average (28.1 percent) (Figure 7).

Figure 7 | Young people at risk of poverty or social exclusion - Total



Source: Eurostat (2013).

As a result of mounting unemployment and social and labour market exclusion, many young people have left Ireland or seriously considered emigration as a way out. According to a survey conducted in 2010 on behalf of the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) on the attitudes of Irish citizens, the overwhelming majority, 70 percent, of a total of 90 young people who were interviewed stated that they are more likely to emigrate within the next 12 months because they are unemployed (O'Connor 2011: 26). Furthermore, another poll conducted in 2012 by NYCI/Red C, in which 1,003 people were interviewed, found that - between 2011 and 2012 - 51 percent of the respondents belonging to the 18-24 age group and 42 percent of the respondents belonging to the 25-34 age group were eager to consider emigration (McAleer 2013: 12). These percentages go down when one looks at the responses of other age groups, i.e. 28 percent of those belonging to the 35-44 age group, 26 percent of those belonging to the 45-54 age group, 7 percent of those belonging to the 54-65 age group, and another 7 percent of those belonging to the 65+ age group said that they were eager to emigrate. As NYCI (2015) highlights: "Failure to attract young emigrants back in the future has serious social and economic policy implications for Ireland. The social cost of emigration is reflected in terms of the impact on the family, the impact of an alteration in Ireland's age structure, and the emergence of a youth generation gap." Attracting young Irish emigrants back to Ireland is critical to sustain both social and economic recovery efforts. But it depends on taking targeted initiatives to combat intergenerational inequalities and build a supportive environment, which can provide young people with quality jobs, decent incomes and a future that is inclusive to their needs and aspirations (interview with an Irish university professor).

Parallel to exit choices such as emigration, youth grassroots activism and political mobilization were strengthened. Young people ceased to expect that change would come from above and became actively involved in protests and demonstrations. Hence, as described in more detail below, in 2010 more than 20,000 college students and other young people demonstrated on the streets of Dublin and many of them wore T-shirts saying "Education not Emigration". They struggled for better education, jobs and a better future. Student protests and demonstrations went on into 2011 with the same dynamism and rigour, but limited success in terms of outcomes (interview with an Irish academic researcher).

3. FACTORS OF YOUTH EXCLUSION IN A CONTEXT OF CRISIS

3.1 Policy Factors

Absence of well-targeted youth policy measures has been said to be one of the reasons behind young Irish's precarious employment and social conditions, which have in turn intensified feelings of hopelessness and frustration, depression, low-self-esteem and despair. According to the 2010 survey conducted on behalf of the NYCI:

Of the 150 or more young people that participated in the research *all* were very clearly frustrated with their experience of unemployment and demonstrated a real interest and desire in joining the workforce. A most significant proportion of the young people consulted as part of the research, were clearly unhappy with and far from proud to be unemployed and 'signing on.' All of the research participants stressed that they would ideally like to be in work as soon as possible" (O'Connor 2011: 22)

As one research participant (young jobseeker, 18-25 years old) stated:

If I knew it (period of unemployment) was just going to last for a year or two that would be fine. ... It's the lack of any certainty and the fear about the future that gets to me the most. ... They (Government spokespeople, analysts, media commentators) say there is going to be some pick up (growth in employment in another two or three years) but how will an employer judge me if I having been sitting on the dole for the last two years" (O'Connor 2011: 23).

There have also been feelings of anger and disappointment among young jobseekers with the state support received; as another jobseeker (early school leaver) claimed:

It's a battle to get on a course as everything is over-subscribed ... the least they (State services) should be doing for you is providing some coaching or guidance on key things like CV and interview preparation ... When you think about it its staggering that nothing like this has been offered to us (young jobseekers) (O'Connor 2011: 34).

At the same time, policy experts, who were also interviewed, stressed the inefficiency of existing policies to help young jobseekers get a foothold in the labour market and thereby, in society. As one expert stressed, "Clearly, something must be done urgently or we risk losing a generation forever. Unless there is real engagement with these young people, in the form of training and meaningful connection to the world of work, there are real grounds for fearing that many will lose their way" (O'Connor 2011: 24). Furthermore, another expert argued:

We (Irish society) are storing up huge problems for ourselves ... Apart from the damage done at the individual level ... psychological, emotional, limiting the young persons scope for future advancement ... other impacts will have to be addressed ... long term dependency on social welfare and other benefits, a rise in mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, criminal behavior ... From a purely economic perspective ... as that's all that seems to really register with Government, policy makers and media commentators at the moment ... this will have huge cost implications for the nation for years to come ... We must address this issue (of youth unemployment now) or else

the consequences will be far more significant in years to come (O'Connor 2011: 24-25).

While policy responses to promote youth employment have been weak, the welfare state and labour market measures taken since the onset of the crisis have contributed to intensifying intergenerational and a more divided society. As Murphy (2014) emphatically argues:

Various public sector wage agreements protected insiders by trading wage protection against public sector job losses and lower wages and pensions for new (young) entrants. Early crisis reductions in all working age social welfare payments from €204 to €188pw, were supplemented by additional blows in Budget 2009 decreases in job seekers payments (JSA) for those aged 22-24 by €44 (to €144) and for those aged 18-21 by €88 (to €100). [...] In contrast social welfare pensions are protected (albeit secondary payments and older people's services were reduced).

Murphy builds further on the argument of intergeneration injustice by extending her criticism in the housing field:

At end-June 2013 97,874, or 12.7 per cent of private residential mortgage accounts, were in arrears of more than 90 days, many of them young owners who bought at the top. Given only 1% of mortgages are held by under 25 year olds, the future demographic of house ownership will be increasingly skewed towards older groups. To complete the picture the younger generation is increasingly vulnerable to homelessness. (Murphy 2014)

What is more, policy experts have stressed the problems pertaining to the links between employment and training such as lack of targeted vocational education measures and of adequate apprenticeship opportunities, which could help young jobseekers to up-skill. As highlighted in the report by the Economic Social and Research Institute: "Adequate preparation in terms of educational and vocational qualifications will be more important than ever in ensuring that [young adults] are equipped to take advantage of a shrinking pool of job opportunities" (Byrne and McCoy 2009: 2).

Besides policy inefficiencies in the education and training field, some also argue that austerity cuts in conjunction with a "work fare approach" to social welfare are detrimental to young people's well-being. It is quite probable in this respect that the Irish under 30 years old may come to be worse off than their parents for the first time since World War II (interview with an Irish university lecturer). In particular, the 2011 position paper published by NYCI is highly critical to the Social Welfare Act, which was passed in 2010 prescribing certain sanctions and compliance provisions to punish those young people who refuse to take up training. As the paper points out:

The Social Welfare Act was passed in July 2010 and as a result further cuts to the benefits of young people who refuse to avail of training will be imposed. As a result young people who are already on the lower rate and who refuse to accept training/ education offers could end up on €75 a week if they are aged 18-21 or €115 if they are aged 22-24 [...] A blanket cut of benefits for young people regardless of their personal circumstances or financial situation and pursuing a work fare approach to welfare

will only serve to further marginalise young people and will have devastating long term social repercussions for society at large. (McAleer and Doorley 2011: 37-38)

Despite growing labour market and social exclusion, Irish politicians have shown limited responsiveness to the problems facing the young generation such as: limited work opportunities or tough labor market entry conditions, emigration and psychologically more stressful and more uncertain times, less security in old age followed by sweeping attack on welfare state, lower chances of inter-generational mobility and rising fear of extremism instead of tolerance (interview with an Irish university professor). In this context, as discussed below, the 2010/2011 mobilizations by Irish students seems to have been the only way (so far) for young (potential) migrants to make their voices heard. In terms of policy effectiveness, though, addressing youth problems means broadening young people's options away from labour market precarity. As Murphy (2014) perceptively writes: "The compass needs to turn to hope for young people, towards decent and relevant work and a quality focused youth guarantee to match skills strategies and new jobs."

3.2 Organizational Factors

To understand the backdrop of social and political engagement of young people in Ireland over the crisis years, we need to explore the contours of Irish civil society activism. Historically, civil society activism has been closely linked to the emergence of the Irish social partnership model, which was established in late 80s. "While often described as corporatism, Irish Social Partnership is a different animal to continental state corporatism", Murphy (2011: 180) notes. The social partnership model lays out the framework of cooperation between the Irish state, the social partners and the voluntary and community sector. The inclusion of the voluntary and community sector into the social partnership model has raised both positive and negative criticism.

On the one hand, under the social partnership model, voluntary and community organizations acquired a significant role in the provision of social welfare services, turning the Irish welfare state into a liberal "residual" model (Andersen 1990). In such a model, social welfare was evolved into a "hybrid" system where a "constellation" of civil society actors are "involved in providing services that are key to social protection", from self-employed family doctors through not-for-profit church organizations to salaried public servants (NESC 2005: 35). Hence, as Meade (2005: 349) writes, the incorporation of the voluntary and community sector into the social partnership model helped give prominence to the sector itself by institutionalizing state-civil society relations, with those voluntary and community actors included in the partnership arrangements being "given official recognition by the government as de facto representatives of the socially excluded". On the other hand, the social partnership model has been criticized for intensifying divisions within civil society, pushing some of those organizations, such as ethnic-led community and voluntary organizations, not included into the partnership model, towards marginalization and isolation (Feldman et al. 2005). At the same time, for some other scholars, the inclusion of the voluntary and community sector into the partnership model created a unique conjuncture for state actors and institutions to silence civil society (Murphy 2011) by influencing and manipulating it in accordance with the state's interests and agenda (Kirby 2010, 2012). In a similar vein, Meade (2005) stresses that social partnership has largely operated as a strategy to depoliticize civil society claims,

turning civil society actors into a “voice without influence” (Lister 2004: 170-171).

Especially throughout the Celtic Tiger era the state was able to increase its control over civil society by allocating large state funds to voluntary and community organizations that flourished financially, thereby limiting the ability of civil society to “change policy priorities” (Hardiman 1998: 142) without fear of being severely deprived of state financial support (Kirby 2010: 15). As Murphy (2011: 179) puts it, this arrangement – which relied heavily on patronage and clientelistic relationships between civil society actors and political elites – led to significantly weakening agonism and dissent- ultimately, contributing to the rise of a “politically neutralised and overly cordial civil society and a political culture that is an obstacle to dissenting political activity”. Nevertheless, the economic crisis brought about the deterioration of the social partnership model and the subsequent shrinking of community and voluntary organizations, as state funds in some cases were cut by up to 20 percent (Donnelly-Cox and Cannon 2010: 336); this forced community and voluntary organizations to reduce personnel and limit the number and spectrum of the services delivered. Such developments have had serious social repercussions especially for vulnerable groups of the population. As emphasized by Carney et al. (2012: 329), children, unemployed people, undocumented migrants, people with disabilities, pensioners and the homeless were ultimately deprived of vital, basic services provided by voluntary and community organizations.

Interestingly, during the Celtic Tiger era and as voluntary and community organizations flourished, civil society engagement was intense. A survey conducted by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF 2003) indicates that Ireland’s performance was close or above the European average on most indicators of social capital for example, volunteering, membership of voluntary or community associations, voter/political engagement, trust in various institutions, interpersonal trust (Table 1).

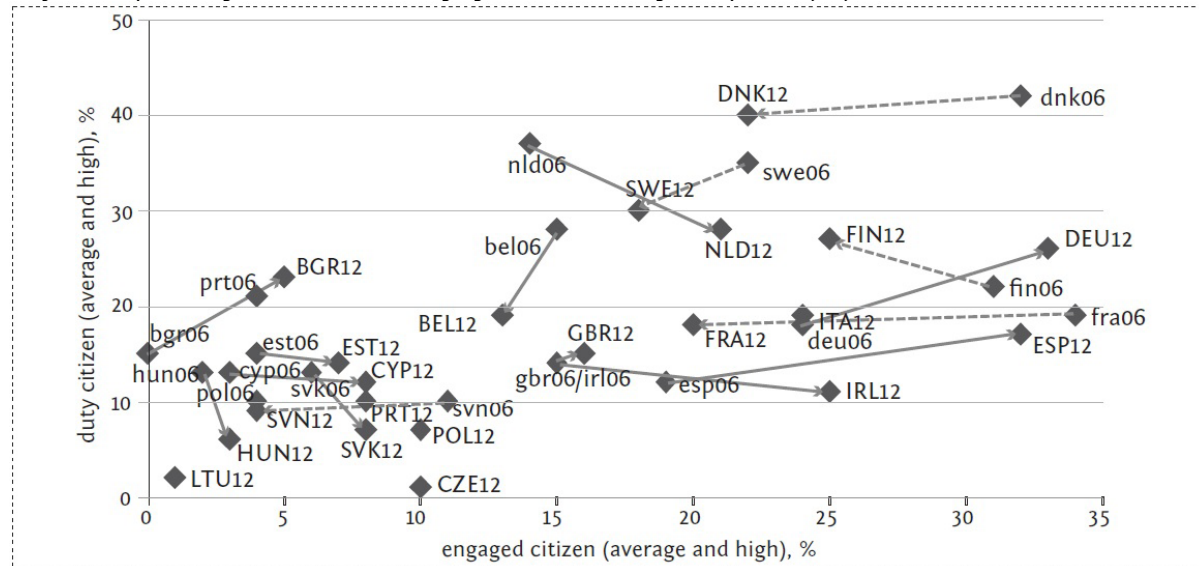
Table 1 | Summary of international comparisons (Ireland with various European countries)

Dimension	Overall comparison (Ireland compared with European average)	Detail
Membership of community and voluntary associations	Above average	65% in Ireland (1999) compared to an average of 48% across 32 European countries
Volunteering (unpaid)	Average	With above average here in sports, recreation and faith-based related activities
Interpersonal trust	Average	Large differences internationally
Trust in various institutions	Above average	Caution is needed as two different data sources give divergent results
Interest and engagement in political and civic activity	Average or above	
Voter turnout	Average	Large differences internationally
Informal social support networks/sociability	Above average	From two different data sources

Source: NESF (2003: 61).

Yet, despite high general levels of civic engagement, young people seem to have been less active and engaged compared to young people in other European countries. In 2012 (a year after the 2011 student mobilizations), in terms of young people's civic and political engagement in less formal, temporary and horizontally (self-)organized actions, Ireland along with Portugal and Slovenia scored 10 percent (Figure 8). This percentage brings Ireland far below Denmark (40 percent), Sweden (30 percent), Belgium and Italy (20 percent). Also, from 2006 to 2012 this number decreased in Ireland by 4-5 percent; yet, this decrease is much lower than the decrease observed in France (14 percent), Denmark (10 percent) and Finland (6 percent).

Figure 8 | Change in share of engagement among the youth population in 2006-2012



Source: Kiisel et al. (2015: 59).

Nevertheless, Ireland scores better in terms of young people's social engagement. According to a Eurofound (2014: 18) survey, in 2011 (the period when the second round of student protests took place) young people were: most likely to participate in a club or society's social activities in Ireland (where 39 percent do so), the Netherlands (38 percent) and Sweden (37 percent), with Finland, the UK, Croatia and Austria following closely behind (all over 33 percent). Weekly participation in sport or physical exercise was most common in Finland (83 percent), Ireland (71 percent), Sweden (69 percent) and the Czech Republic (68 percent). At the same time, young people's participation in different types of political activity in Ireland in the year 2011 reached 38 percent, which is among the highest in Europe (Table 2). Signing a petition was the most common form of participation by young people in all countries including Ireland (26 percent), except in Bulgaria and in Cyprus, where attending trade union, political party or action group meetings was more common. Yet, Ireland scored low (12 percent) in terms of young people's participation in protests or demonstrations at least once in the year prior to the survey. This percentage is considerably lower vis-a-vis other (Southern European) countries that were hit hard by the economic crisis, i.e., Greece (22 percent), Cyprus (19 percent) and Spain (18 percent).

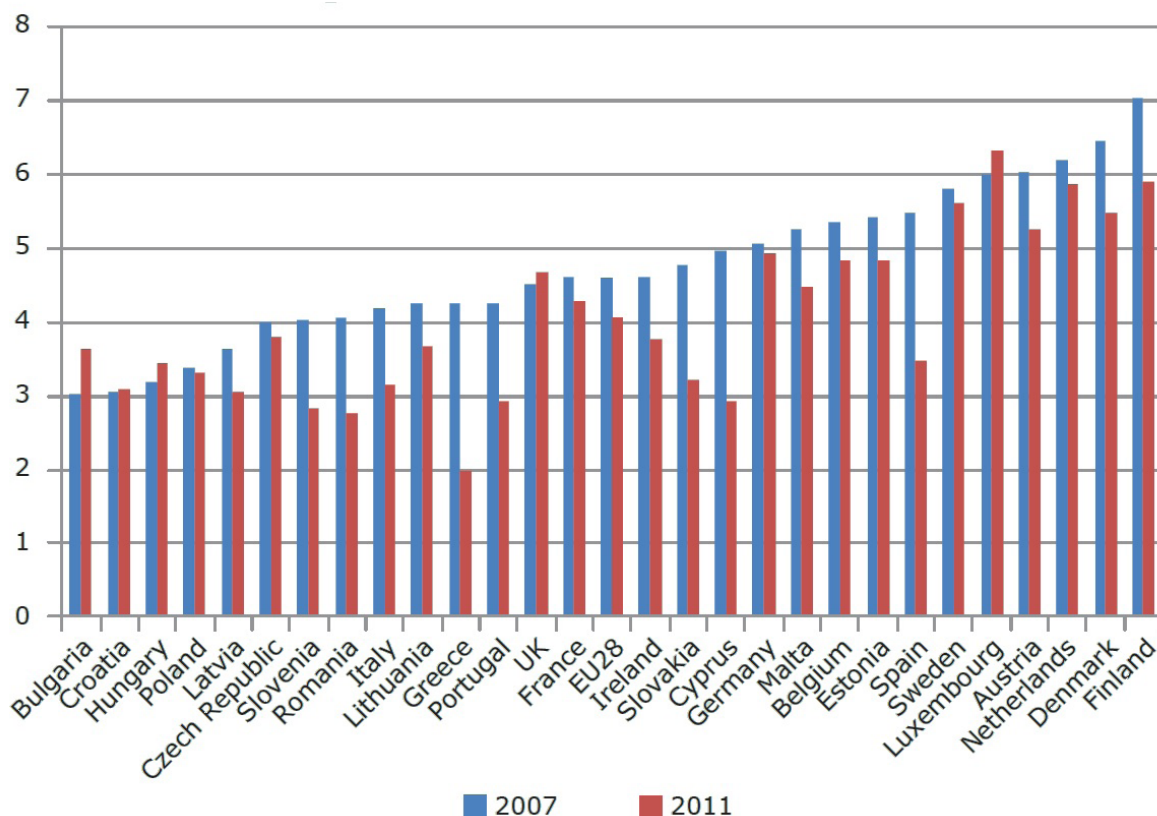
Table 2 | Participation in political activities by country, 2011 (%)

	Attended a meeting of a trade union, a political party or political action group	Attended a protest or demonstration	Signed a petition, including an email or online petition	Contacted a politician or public official	Any political activity
Hungary	1	0	10	1	11
Bulgaria	6	2	3	3	11
Malta	1	1	10	2	13
Poland	3	1	10	5	15
Portugal	2	7	10	0	15
Latvia	7	2	9	8	16
Slovenia	2	4	13	1	16
Lithuania	4	0	14	4	17
Estonia	3	3	13	6	20
Romania	6	3	13	4	20
Slovakia	0	4	20	4	22
Italy	7	11	16	2	22
Czech Republic	3	8	19	0	23
Belgium	4	8	21	3	26
Greece	2	22	12	3	27
EU28	6	9	20	6	27
UK	5	5	26	6	28
Spain	7	18	14	7	28
Cyprus	10	19	6	6	29
Germany	7	10	18	8	29
Austria	9	13	22	11	34
Luxembourg	12	12	24	11	34
Croatia	7	6	33	2	38
Netherlands	4	6	35	8	38
Ireland	11	12	26	7	38
France	10	17	30	7	39
Denmark	19	5	28	8	39
Finland	10	3	31	7	42
Sweden	15	12	48	13	54

Note: Green shading indicates higher levels of political participation; red shading, lower.
Source: Eurofound (2014: 20).

In addition, between 2007 and 2011, unlike Greece, Ireland - along with Cyprus and Spain - shows less decline in terms of young people's trust in government (Figure 9).

Figure 9 | Trust in government 2007 and 2011 (scale of 1-10)



Source: Eurofound (2014: 21).

All in all, the crisis seems to have triggered a decline in young people's civic and political activity and their trust in government; yet, this decline is much smaller than that observed in Greece - a country that has also undergone severe economic and social contraction. Concurrently, as seen above, in contrast to Greece, Irish young people have generally been less prone to attend a protest or demonstration, an attitude which may be attributable to Ireland's (alleged) passivity during the crisis years.

4. YOUTH MOBILIZATION AT CRITICAL TIMES

The story of the 2010/2011 student mobilizations is worth telling because the context within which they emerged was not a favourable one for social movement mobilization. Although citizens' well-being was seriously affected in Ireland, the imposition of the austerity measures was initially met with extraordinary passivity (O'Brien 2011). Chabanet and Royall (2015: 328-9) observe:

On the economic and social fronts, it could have been expected that the extent of the post-2008 crisis - in Ireland [...] where high levels of youth unemployment are having a devastating effect - would have led to wide-ranging protest movements perhaps even comparable to what occurred in Greece and in Spain.

Along the same lines, O'Malley (2014) observes:

Ireland, as a bailout country, didn't have much to debate; the broad parameters of its economic policy were set by the Troika of the IMF, EU and ECB. But the Irish people were at least free to react to the austerity and let the world know what it thought. [...] Well if we reacted it was with a surprising acceptance of our lot. We became model Austerians.

The scholarly literature has provided various compelling reasons why this happened. For instance, Fraser et al. (2013: 49, 50) have contended that, in implementing the austerity programme, a central priority of the government was to keep "Ireland's position as an export platform", thus it sought not to fuel "a significant upsurge in industrial action". This entailed a simultaneous process of "material rearrangements" (moving the economic burden from the elites to the citizens through the implementation of austerity measures) as well as "ideological readjustment involving the construction of new rationalities suited to the needs of a more punitive". In a similar vein, Chabanet and Royall (2015: 331) have pointed out that "the steady establishment of institutional arrangements - particularly with the trade union movement - played a key role in what can be called people's passive consent to austerity in the post-2008 period", and that when trade unions made an agreement with the government in 2011 (the so-called Croke Park Agreement which laid out the context for public sector pay bargaining) this led to widespread disappointment and feelings of betrayal among the citizenry.

From another perspective, Kriesi (2016: 3) has claimed that there was limited protest activity during the early austerity period in Ireland because, Irish citizens chose to express their discontent through the ballot box and not through protest mobilization (???). As Kriesi (2016: 68-9) writes in his study of the relationship between contention and convention underpinning mobilizations in the age of austerity: "In democracies, voters resort to the protest arena to the extent that they are unable to express themselves in the electoral or direct democratic channel, or to the extent that their vote has no impact". As Labour's Minister for Education, Ruairí Quinn has characteristically noticed: "Unlike Greece or Spain or Portugal where there were riots in the streets and all sorts of disruptions, the people held their breath and waited for the ballot box and dropped the grenade into the ballot box" (Irish Independent 2014). In this respect, the defeat of the Fiánna Fail-Green Party coalition in the 2011 general election (which was equivalent to the Greek socialist party's loss in the first elections that followed the austerity bailout package agreed in 2010) may have been Irish's preferred way of expressing discontent.

Another reason has to do with "political luddism", a term used by Pappas and O'Malley (2014) to explain what lies behind Greeks' and Irish' dissimilar disposition towards protest mobilization and social unrest. According to Pappas and O'Malley (2014: 1595, 1603) political luddism refers to a situation "whereby groups of people turn massively, and at times violently, against a state that is considered to have stopped providing public goods". As they write, although the two countries share many common characteristics in terms for instance of their economic, cultural and social conditions, party system etc., the fact that social unrest and resistance to austerity has been more intense in Greece than in Ireland is explained by the "differing ability of the respective states to attenuate the effect of the crisis on their citizens' individual lives (Pappas and O'Malley 2014: 1603). As they note:

When the economic rents could no longer be paid, those who had previously benefited had little reason to maintain loyalty to the state [of Greece]. It was different in Ireland, where the state was able to manage declining incomes by continuing to provide services, thus helping keep the Irish, to a large degree, acquiescent. (Pappas and O'Malley 2014: 1595)

Yet, there are those that are highly skeptical to the dominant claim of a “passive” and “demobilised” Irish society (Mair 2010: 7). Cox (2010) has claimed that, historically, Ireland has displayed a fervent protest activity (e.g. land reform movement, national independence movement, civil rights movement, etc.); but

The Irish movement experience [...] is *different*, but it is not *less* than the western European or the Latin American. It is ambiguous - in part because some of these movements *did* gain power, and the results (of land reform, national independence, the end of legal gender discrimination etc.) have not always been what we expected. (Cox 2010: 5)

Certainly, when one looks at the story of students' mobilizations in 2010/2011, can see some truth in this claim.

It was in a context of mounting discontent that the student protests occurred. As discussed in previous sections, when the economic crisis hit Ireland young people's labour market and social conditions started to disintegrate dramatically. Rage against political and financial elites, who were seen responsible for disastrous financial decision-making that had led the collapse of the Irish economy, escalated (interview with an Irish university professor). The student protest on 3 November 2010 was “the largest student protest for a generation” (Flynn 2010). Over 30,000 people demonstrated in Merrion Street in the centre of Dublin, with protestors coming from all over the country. The president of the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), Gary Redmond, leading the demonstration said: “The sleeping giant that is the student movement has been awoken” (as cited in Flynn 2010). Similarly, VoxEurop (2010) commented with emphasis: “Has Ireland awoken?” and that the student protests disproved commonly held assumptions that “the economically stricken nation [took] swingeing austerity measures with passive resignation”.

What preceded the protests was government's proposition for a 3,000 euro student charge and further cuts to the student maintenance grant as part of cost savings to meet the terms of the country's bail-out agreement with the Troika. This measure would entail unbearable costs for students and their families. As the USI President said in his speech to the crowd gathered on Merrion Square: “Thousands of students are already struggling to fund their college education, and any increases in fees will force many of these students to drop out of their courses. It will also prevent thousands of potential students from entering third-level education in the future” (as cited in Flynn 2010). Apart from the fees issue, claims for better employment opportunities and less emigration were on the protestors' agenda (Simpson 2010). Following the march in Merrion Street, the protestors came to occupy the Department of Finance while some protestors engaged with clashes with *gardaí* (the “guards”) (Belfast Telegraph 2010). Several students were wounded and complaints over police brutality were

reported (Lally 2010). These events led students to march in the streets of Dublin again on 10 November, holding banners “End Garda brutality” and chanting “Whose streets? Our streets” (Duncan 2010).

Following the November protests, the Education Minister Ruairi Quinn, after high public pressure, declared his intention not to increase tuition fees. As time went on, the Minister’s promise remained unmet. This fueled another round of mobilizations on 16 November 2011. An estimated crowd of 50,000 Irish students, their parents and families marched through Dublin. The 16 November mobilizations included various forms of contentious action, such as marches outside Government Buildings, a sit-down protest outside the Fine Gael office, occupation of a room at the Department of Social Protection, and occupation of the offices of a Fine Gael member of the Parliament and of a former mayor. Protestors were holding banners with the slogan “Free education nothing less” and chanting “No ifs, no buts, no education cuts” (Irish Times 2011). Student’s contentious acts escalated on 2 December 2011, when eight members of the Maynooth Students’ Union occupied the constituency office of a Fine Gael member of parliament and erected at the office’s entrance a banner with the slogan “Stop the fees, save the grant” (Burtenshaw 2011b). During the occupation, the protesting students received wide support by other students on social media (Twitter and Facebook) (RTÉ 2011). In the end, the government’s plans to enforce its bail-out commitments to the Troika and increase tuition fees were approved, despite students’ intense mobilizations (Murray 2011).

As in the case of the Greek Indignants’ mobilizations, during the 2010/2011 student protests, the social media (Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) were used extensively by the protestors in order to diffuse messages and coordinate actions. Moreover, unlike the Greek Indignant movement, which mobilized past messages, frames and slogans to support its anti-austerity cause, memory of past uprising was not directly involved in the November student protests (at least, not with the same intensity), although similar instances of youth student activism occurred in the late 1980s when students occupied the Trinity College to avert a potential increase in tuition fees (interview with an Irish university professor).

CONCLUSION

Campbell (2012: 4-5), examining the Irish Occupy movement, has perceptively stressed that a crucial challenge for any social movement is its ability to generate outcomes that are sustainable over time and bring forward a transformative vision for the societies in which they operate. As she writes: “Riots, and other flashes in the pan are not social movements. It is not a social movement unless it is sustained. The broader strategic goal of the Occupy movement should be that of developing a truly long-term movement to transform society. That is a task of sustainability”. Despite its intensity and the fact that they rose from the depths of a (commonly held) passive society, the 2010/2011 Irish student mobilizations were not able to sustain their activism and dynamism (which is always context-specific and the cumulative outcome of external and internal factors), let alone to change society.

In the Irish student mobilizations, as in the Greek Indignant protests, “a collective subject” was given rise. Young persons who felt excluded from society, and angered by political mistakes and financial wrong-doing were taken to the streets. As Simiti (2014: 17) highlights,

referring to the Greek case: "This collective subject was primarily the outcome of collective mobilization and prevailing narratives." Yet, the student uprisings in 2010/2011 cannot be said to have given rise to a youth social movement *sensu stricto*. One possible explanation for this may be that the Irish student protestors - contrary to the Greek Indignants - were not able to effectively voice the grievances and "counter-discourses" coming from "participants with different identities and interests" (Simiti 2014: 19). Greek Indignants fought for a plurality of aims: oppose austerity, clamp down on political corruption, patronage and cronyism, reclaim democracy. In the Irish case, "education" monopolized the narratives of the student protests; the claim for "free education" was quite often associated with a set of broader aims such as better jobs and better futures and with grievances against economic and political elites and the functioning of democracy (Burtenshaw 2011a), but these (broader) grievances were not voiced with the same magnitude and the same pervasiveness as we observe in the Greek Indignant movement.

Overall, Irish students were not able to put forward a vision of society which could appeal to different social groups vulnerable to economic precarity and uncertainty, and forcefully fight for it. Because of this, the 2010/2011 student mobilizations set themselves apart not only from the Greek Indignant movement but also from the anti-water-charges movement which took place in the subsequent years, and which were significantly enlarged to a wider anti-austerity confrontation (interview with an Irish academic researcher). Met with police aggressiveness and police repression, the 2010/2011 student mobilizations (as in the Greek case) gradually lost momentum. Not able to sustain their cause in society as well as in the political arena, young people in Ireland missed the opportunity to rise as the political protagonists of critical mobilizations junctures that occurred thereafter.

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Interviews

Interview with two Irish university professors, July 2016

Interview with an Irish university lecturer, July 2016

Interview with an Irish academic researcher, July 2016



POWER2YOUTH is a research project aimed at offering a critical understanding of youth in the South East Mediterranean (SEM) region through a comprehensive interdisciplinary, multi-level and gender sensitive approach. By combining the economic, political and socio-cultural spheres and a macro (policy/institutional), meso (organizational) and micro (individual) level analysis, POWER2YOUTH explores the root causes and complex dynamics of the processes of youth exclusion and inclusion in the labour market and civic/political life, while investigating the potentially transformative effect of youth collective and individual agency. The project has a cross-national comparative design with the case studies of Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territories and Turkey. POWER2YOUTH's participants are 13 research and academic institutions based in the EU member states, Norway, Switzerland and South East Mediterranean (SEM) countries. The project is mainly funded under the European Union's 7th Framework Programme.

POWER2YOUTH

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