



POWER2YOUTH

Lessons to be Learned from Other Experiences of Socio-economic Transformation for Youth in the SEM Region

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Abstract

This report contains a discussion of the main findings emerging from a comparative study conducted in the context of Work Package 5, "Global Youth". The aim of the report is to draw key conclusions from the experiences of youth mobilization and socio-economic transformation in Greece, Ireland, Brazil and to assess their relevance to the challenges facing the youth in the South East Mediterranean (SEM) region. After a general presentation of the selection of the three country cases and the methodology applied, we offer a synthetic presentation of the three case studies, looking at key critical junctures of youth discontent and their mobilization's transformative impact. We conclude by highlighting the main lessons learned from the three country cases and their implications for, and relevance to, the challenges facing the youth in the SEM region.

Keywords: Youth | Political movements | Economic crisis | Greece | Ireland | Brazil | Middle East | North Africa | Arab spring

INTRODUCTION

This report is developed in the context of Work Package 5 (WP5), "Global Youth", which is part of the project Power2Youth. The aim of WP5 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 youth in the South Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) region.

The present report builds on the findings of the three country cases. Over the last five years and soon after the Arab Spring revolts, youth² played a role in sparking protest movements in Europe and beyond. The extraordinary mobilizations in which young people participated in 2010, 2011 and 2013 in Greece, Ireland and Brazil characterized the way in which middle- and lower-income groups were able to articulate their escalating discontent resulting from either the (dramatic) deterioration of domestic economic and social conditions and/or the absence or failure of appropriate political responses in their respective countries. Even if the Greek, Irish and Brazilian mobilizations could be generally interpreted as a reaction by a generation of angry young people who were hit by labour market and social precarity, the central claims put forward articulated both conspicuous youth-specific problems and broader societal and

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² The definition of "youth" utilized in this report is not restricted to basic biology, but builds on a critical understanding that treats youth as agents (rather than objects) of social and political change (Paciello and Pioppi 2014: 6).

political concerns.

Combined with anti-austerity (Greece and Ireland) and anti-neoliberal demands (Brazil), key claims raised by the young protestors were: inclusive labour markets, better education systems, equality and justice as well as better political systems (vis-à-vis old and existing systems characterized by corruption and patronage) and new forms of democracy. These have been key concerns not only for the Greek, Irish and Brazilian protestors of the previous years but also for protestors around the globe - see, for example, the Arab Spring protestors, the Indignants' in Spain, the US and elsewhere in the world. It remains to be seen whether this wave of global unrest will help improve the situation of young people and the responsiveness of institutions and policies to their needs.

The present comparative report puts a spotlight on the key aim of the research in WP5, namely to draw key conclusions and lessons learned from the experiences of youth mobilization and socio-economic transformation in Greece, Ireland, Brazil and, further, to assess their relevance to the challenges facing youth in the SEM region. The report is structured as follows. Section two provides a general presentation of the selection of the three country cases and the methodology applied. Section three offers a summary presentation of the three case studies, looking at key critical junctures of youth protest mobilization or what we may describe as the "voice" responses (Hirschman 1970) of youth and their transformative impact. This is followed by a concluding section highlighting the main lessons learned from the three country cases and their implications for, and relevance to, the challenges facing youth in the SEM region and more broadly across the globe.

1. SELECTION OF CASE STUDIES AND METHODOLOGY

The research under WP5 was based on a historical examination of the experiences of socio-economic transformation and youth mobilization in three countries, namely Greece, Ireland and Brazil, which were treated as case studies. A crucial aspect of the selection of the two European cases was the importance of the recent economic crisis in triggering socio-economic transformation and its impact on young peoples' lives and potential to act as agents of social change. That youth face serious economic problems, marginalization and exclusion (as a result of cuts to welfare and social supports) is evident in many European countries today, most obviously in Greece, Spain, Italy and Ireland; but, what of the impact being made by the crisis upon the ability of youth to challenge and transform power relations and existing institutionalized practices through mobilization and activism? This was a central question guiding our research on Greece and Ireland, two countries which present a number of similarities as well as differences.

More particularly, both countries have been severely hit by the economic crisis and their respective governments drastically cut spending and implemented harsh austerity-driven bailout packages, resulting in deteriorating social and labour market conditions for their youth. Both countries too display similarities in their historical development and cultural patterning of protest mobilization, as Table 1 illustrates. Yet, despite both being severely hit by the economic crisis, the cases of Greece and Ireland are situated at either end of the mobilization spectrum. In particular, as Pappas and O'Malley (2014: 1597) write, "Greece

emerges as a clear case of civil disobedience (i.e., it displays widespread social protest) and Ireland as a case of civil compliance (i.e., it displays almost no protest)."³

Table 1 | Dimensions of comparison of case studies: Greece, Ireland, Brazil

<i>Socio-economic context</i>	The 2013 mobilizations in Brazil occurred after a period of strong economic growth and social progress reflected in the rise in living standards, while the 2011 and 2010/2011 mobilizations in Greece and Ireland respectively occurred when both countries were undergoing deep socio-economic crisis reflected in the deterioration of living standards, affecting mainly middle- and lower-income groups.
<i>Youth conditions</i>	During 2010-2013, youth unemployment, labour market precarity, poverty and social exclusion increased for both young Greeks and Irish as a result - inter alia - of a set of austerity packages agreed upon by their respective national governments with the "Troika" of European and international creditors. In Brazil, young people experienced precarity too as they were excluded from good quality jobs despite past progress in youth employment levels and in access to education and training programmes.
<i>Protest trajectory</i>	Greece displayed widespread social protests during the early crisis years; it thus emerges as case of civil disobedience vis-à-vis Ireland which is characterized by a general state of passivity and limited protest activity, emerging thereby as a case of civil compliance.
<i>Cultural patterning of protest mobilization</i>	In all three countries, protest mobilization is common and acceptable; they often derive legitimacy from their histories of resistance against foreigners (the Ottomans in Greece, the British in Ireland, and the Portuguese in Brazil).

For reasons of comparison and to maximize geographical and cultural variation, we also utilized data from a Latin American country, Brazil. In our research Brazil represents an extra-European case study which has not been affected dramatically by the 2008 economic crisis, but which has recently undergone massive social disorder and youth unrest. Thus, in 2013 Brazilians experienced a major protest wave which the country had not witnessed for decades as it was the case with the Greek Indignants in 2011 and the Irish students in 2010/2011. The mobilizations took place not long after the Arab Spring protests, which led some commentators to nickname the Brazilian protests "Tropical Spring", in reference to the Arab Spring.

What is striking about the Brazilian case is that Brazil can't be compared with Ireland or Greece, where the economic crisis led to a steep decline in people's living standards triggering huge and widespread discontent. Brazil's Tropical Spring protests also can't be even compared with the Arab Spring protests which were essentially mobilizations against authoritarian regimes that suppressed individual rights and controlled the media and economic activity. As

³ With the exception of smaller demonstrations at local levels, and the protests led by college students at national level in November 2010 (Pappas and O'Malley 2014: 1598).

Rodrigues and Brancoli (2013) stress, the demonstrations in the Arab world were “the result of demands that had been building up for years in a context of strong political repression”. Yet, the demonstrations in Brazil occurred under democratic conditions and “in a context in which the country has been growing at an expressive rate for the last decade, with strong investments in social programs that help the poorest segments of the population”. Hence, the Brazilian mobilizations have a distinctive aspect vis-à-vis mobilizations that occurred in our two European country cases as well as in the Arab world.

All in all, for the selection of case studies we opted to include a set of countries that mirrors the diversity of contextual (socio-economic and political) conditions, the labour market and social situation of young people, and the shape and contours of protest mobilization, while allowing for systematic comparison. In this sense, our choice was guided by selecting a combination of the “most dissimilar” case studies as a way of grasping the complexity of youth engagement with protests.

In such a context, analysis of the case studies was conducted along the following steps:

(a) Identification and analysis of critical junctures of youth protest mobilization - that is, mobilizations where young people have asserted their presence and played an active role seeking to change the course of their countries. For each case country we identified instances of mobilization that were generally associated with periods of major socio-economic crisis and transformation. In this respect, we selected the May/July 2011 protests of the Indignants movement in Greece, the 2010/2011 protests of the college students in Ireland and the June/July 2013 “Tropical Spring” protests in Brazil. The first two mobilizations occurred - as stressed above - under conditions of severe socio-economic crisis and austerity-driven policy responses, leading many young people to unemployment, poverty, insecurity, fear, anger and pessimism regarding the future. On the other hand, the 2013 protests took place when Brazil had come out of a period of strong economic growth and social progress, although the young were the least benefited by it.

(b) Use of a multidimensional analysis by looking at how domestic factors have impeded or hindered the potential of youth as agents of social change. In particular, under each case study we analyzed: (i) the main domestic factors - both policy (factors related to labour market and social inclusion) and organizational (factors pertaining to social and political engagement) - that affected youth engagement and inclusion and provided the backdrop of youth participation in the mobilizations under study, and; (ii) the transformative impact of youth mobilizations and their effects on the national context.

(c) Study of the link between memory and youth mobilization in the context of the recent economic crisis. Emphasis was placed on: (i) the role of young people’s memory of historical events (such as past protest events during major periods of transformation) in triggering contemporary youth unrest and mobilization, and (ii) lessons learned from past generations acting as change makers.

(d) Comparison of the three case studies and assessment of the relevance of the findings to the challenges facing the youth in the SEM region.

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 (academics, policy-makers, journalists and young activists). The research findings on the country cases are presented in three reports (Mexi and Boursier 2017a, 2017b and 2017c).

2. THE THREE COUNTRY CASES: KEY REMARKS

As stressed in the previous section, a central aspect of the mobilizations in Greece and in Ireland was the importance of the 2008 economic crisis in triggering socio-economic transformation and its impact on young peoples' situation and potential to mobilize and act as agents of social change. The protests that took place over the previous years in both countries may be said to form a reaction of those most affected by the socio-economic effects of the crisis, expressing their discontent with deteriorating material conditions, rising unemployment levels and expansion of precarious employment (Chung et al. 2012, Dietrich 2012). At the same time, as Campos Lima and Artiles (2013: 347) observe by drawing on the scholarship on the new social movements of the 2000s, youth protests in all three country cases might not only be understood as being connected to economic grievances, but also as an expression of meta-political motivation, conveying claims for new democratic models (e.g. calls for a new (and radical) form of (direct) democracy) as existing institutions and policies had failed to address rising economic inequality and adversity. In this respect, mobilizations launched by the discontented youth in Greece, Ireland and Brazil may be said to have embodied a genuine opportunity for change (Benford and Snow 2000).

The following sections provide a summary presentation of young people's mobilizations and their transformative impact in each country case as these are fully presented and analyzed in Mexi and Boursier (2017a, 2017b and 2017c).

2.1 The Greek Case

Since 2010 Greece has been experiencing a profound economic and social crisis that has provided spur for protest activity amongst young people. The May-July 2011 protests of the Greek Indignants seems to constitute the most important wave of mass mobilizations in Greece since the collapse of the military junta and the restoration of democracy in 1974. The protests began soon after the bailout agreement between the socialist government and the "Troika" (the International Monetary Fund, the European Union and the European Central Bank) was signed. Young Greeks participated actively in these protests, together with people of all ages coming from middle and lower classes (Koronaïou et al. 2011, Simiti 2014), expressing their discontent against political elites and ruling parties that had failed to ensure their social and, particularly, labour market inclusion.

Aslanidis and Marantzidis shed light on the Greek Indignants' grievances and how they combined around a populist discourse. As they explain (2016: 138), "The populist discourse of the Indignados was crucial in unleashing and legitimizing a torrent of feelings of injustice, pointing to the political caste as betraying the people, relinquishing national and popular sovereignty to foreign centres of power." Hence, increasingly, for the young Greeks especially as well as for public opinion as a whole, the economic crisis was transformed into a political

one. It was not just an issue of revoking the “Memorandum” austerity packages imposed by the Troika, but an issue of punishing the corrupt political elites who had led the country to the brink of economic catastrophe. As Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou (2015) stress:

As the crisis progressed, Greek citizens increasingly lost their trust in the system. [...] As the state became increasingly perceived as unable to limit the socioeconomic impact of the crisis on individual citizens, the legitimacy of the system was called into question. What was discredited was not only the ability of the government to formulate sound economic policy, but the very foundation of Greece’s post-dictatorship era.

Such frames led to radicalizing young protestors not only toward the far-left (those who demanded social justice and equality) but also toward the far-right (those who demanded that Greece reclaim its lost national sovereignty) of the political spectrum, thereby pointing to a “two-way radicalization” of youth in Greece (Koronaïou et al. 2011).

One of the biggest impacts of the 2011 Indignant movement was as Aslanidis and Marantzidis write (2016: 153) that it contributed to “consolidating new cleavages and restructuring the party system away from the domination of a two-party configuration”. Yet, “the movement’s inherent limitations (lack of a specific political agenda, organization and representation) as well as its harsh suppression by the police lead to its weakening and finally to its disappearance”. (Koronaïou et al. 2011). As Malkoutzis (2011: 4) writes:

While the Indignants movement was able to find a synergy with young Greeks in terms of what they do not like (corrupt, unaccountable politicians and lower pay, more taxes and greater insecurity), it was less successful in reflecting what they would like instead. In this sense, the Indignants failed to move from protest to politics.

2.2 The Irish Case

Ireland, like Greece, has recently undergone one of the most severe economic and social contractions in the global and European crisis. A series of austerity budgets implemented from 2008 to 2014, along with conditions imposed as part of the international bailout from 2010 to 2013, involved cumulative cuts to public spending and social welfare along with raising of taxes, predominantly on middle- and low-income groups. Yet, despite the harsh austerity measures, in Ireland - contrary to what we have seen in Greece - there were no large-scale protests. As Hearne (2015: 4) points out: “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.” Within such a general context of passivity, the 2010/2011 student mobilizations against the proposed tuition increases caught widespread attention and surprise. VoxEurop (2010) said the student protests disproved commonly held assumptions that “the economically stricken nation [took] swingeing austerity measures with passive resignation”.

In the Irish student mobilizations, as in the Greek Indignant protests, a “collective subject” was given rise. 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). “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 2011), but these (broader) grievances were not voiced with the same magnitude and the same pervasiveness as we observe in the Greek Indignant movement. Thus, 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 Irish anti-water-charges movement which took place in the subsequent years, and which was significantly enlarged to a wider anti-austerity confrontation. Met with police aggressiveness and police repression, as in the Greek case, the 2010/2011 student mobilizations gradually lost momentum. Thus, young people in Ireland missed the opportunity to rise as the political protagonists of critical mobilizations junctures that occurred thereafter.

2.3 The Brazilian Case

In June-July 2013 more than half a million protestors were taken to the streets of major cities in Brazil, forcefully engaging in a series of protests that became known worldwide as Brazil's Tropical Spring. Tropical Spring mobilizations were sparked by popular discontent with increases in the bus, subways, and train fares, but - as protests escalated - mobilizing grievances came to include a number of diverse and sometimes conflicting claims. These claims expressed - as Rodrigues and Brancoli (2013) describe - “anger due to corruption and excessive spending for the 2014 World Cup, discontent with the lack of public investment in education and health, demands for a reform in the judiciary and the political system and cries against inflation”. The most visible protagonists of this moment were students and young people. They built a movement that was immediately and universally recognized as a political gesture and “rapidly broadened to include hundreds of thousands of (mainly) middle-class protestors, overtly with little in common” (Saad-Filho 2013b: 658). These groups were widely mobilized through the Internet and the social media, while similar images and symbols between Tropical and Arab Spring protestors became widespread. According to Rodrigues and Brancoli (2013), “[t]he ubiquitous Guy Fawkes masks, from the comics ‘V for Vendetta’ are also present in the Brazilian capitals, making the demonstrators’ faces more similar, whether in Cairo or Brasilia”. Yet, the mobilizations in the streets of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo were very different from those in Tunis and Cairo, or from the mobilizations in crisis-hit Greece and Ireland. Despite producing similar images and symbols, the protests in Brazil had the key difference of taking place within “a democracy closer to the liberal-democratic model established in the post-Cold War world” (Rodrigues and Brancoli 2013) and amid a thriving economy with relatively low rates of (youth) unemployment.

By the early 2010s, Brazil had experienced substantial economic growth and middle-class expansion. The “new middle class”, Rodrigues and Brancoli (2013) explain, had “gained original consumption patterns and a generation of young people born after the 1990s” had been increasingly “establishing new relations with politics and government representatives”.

Yet, as expectations about better futures were rising, young people were becoming more and more angry about the poor quality of existing jobs, lack of political accountability and, most of all, the growing levels of social inequality and their exclusion from decision making that affected the labour market and society as a whole. This explains why the demonstrations that began protesting against inefficiency in the provision of public goods intensified large-scale grievances which, combined with a significant increase in connectivity to the Internet, spread quickly and gave rise to one of the largest waves of social mobilization Brazil has ever witnessed in its recent history. As Roman (2013: 2) characteristically stresses: "And so, as the protests escalated virtually everyone declared surprise, from politicians to political analysts and to the protestors themselves."

Despite the magnitude of Tropical Spring mobilizations, as in Ireland and Greece, the June-July 2013 protests were not sustained long enough to bring about radical or, to put it differently, all-embracing change. Even if - as described in Mexi and Boursier (2017a) - the 2013 protests have had a substantial impact on the attitudes of young people towards politics and social change, "the Brazilian political system" - as Maia Guimarães da Silva stresses (2016: 3) - "did not properly process the new information brought to it by the mass demonstrations in 2013; none of the big political parties was really open to dialogue with the demonstrators or to incorporate their claims in their political programs". Moreover, as it has been commented:

The protest movements in Brazil express deep frustrations and even despair, because it has become impossible to channel discontent through the traditional forms of social representation, which are either tightly controlled by the elite or have been disempowered by the neoliberal reforms. Yet, dissatisfaction without organization tends to be fruitless, and spontaneous mass movements with a mixed class base and fuelled by unfocused anger can be destabilizing without being constructive" (Saad-Filho 2013a).

Admittedly, the 2013 demonstrations "were a sign that the golden age of Brazilian development was coming to an end and social dissatisfaction was rising" (Maia Guimarães da Silva 2016: 3). Nevertheless, the work of protestors in Brazil did not end in July 2013. Many demonstrations followed over the next two years, with a new peak in March 2015, and with protestors expressing deep frustrations across several layers of society. With major grievances unmet, the story of the Tropical Spring might still be evolving.

2.4 The Arab Spring Connection

Like the 2011 Arab revolts, youth mobilizations in Greece, Ireland and in Brazil "could not have been predicted by any political forecaster" as Halaseh (2012: 257) notes. External factors such as the economic crisis and the austerity policies of the Troika Memoranda (see Greece and Ireland) and (left) neoliberalism (see Brazil, Saad-Filho 2013a) combined with internal issues such as corrupted and unaccountable political elites "turned the state and national resources into private property for people in power [and] reached levels that could not be ignored or unfelt by the citizen" (Abdel Samad and Mohamadieh 2011: 112). These combined structural problems provided spur for protest activity amongst young people in Greece, Ireland and in Brazil, who - like their Arab counterparts - came to see that traditional modes of civic and political expression through political parties or non-governmental organizations

are ineffective (Halaseh 2012: 258).

Youth protest mobilizations in all three country cases were inspired by the demonstrations, marches and campaigns that took place particularly in Tunisia and Egypt. They were inspired by unconventional tactics of mobilization such as occupying a central square or emblematic public buildings (such as the Parliament in Athens or the building of the Department of Finance in Dublin, or the National Congress in Brasilia). As Della Porta (2015a: 23) notes, occupation of central public space was much more than just a tactic, it also involved creating a new agora which extended beyond the actual physical site (on this point, see also Douzinas 2013: 135). What is more, mobilizations in Greece, Ireland and Brazil shared with mobilizations in the Arab world the effective use of social media. Since the Arab Spring, forms of aggregation on social media have received much attention in social movement studies (Khamis and Vaughn 2012, Postill 2014). Bennett and Segerberg (2012) have distinguished between young people's "connective" and "collective action". The concept of "collective action" refers to traditional recruiting methods of party politics or social movements, while "connective action" refers to digitally personalized communication in which mutual trust does not necessarily imply face-to-face relationships, but rather shared cultural orientations and patterns of consumption. The authors' starting assumption is that prior to the Internet, face-to-face interaction was characterized by group or ideological identification which is now more and more being replaced by digitally personalized communication as part of young people's networking activities. As the authors state, while the familiar logic of "collective action" is associated with a high degree of organization and with collective identities, "the less familiar logic of connective action [is] based on personalized content sharing across media networks. In the former, introducing digital media do not change the core dynamics of the action. In the case of the latter, they do" (Bennett and Segerberg 2012: 739).

Apart from the occupation of public spaces and the use of social media, youth mobilizations in Greece, Ireland, Brazil and in the Arab world shared a number of similarities manifested in the slogans used and in the narratives mobilized. In particular, the main slogan of the Arab Spring protestors in Egypt "Bread, freedom, human dignity" was used (in varied forms) by the Greek Indignants who, like their Egyptian counterparts, were calling for an end to povertization and lack of access to meaningful democratic expression (Giovanopoulos and Mitropoulos 2011: 280) and also by the Irish, Greek and Brazilian young people who raised demands for deepening transparency and accountability of existing dysfunctional (democratic) institutions (Burtenshaw 2011, Saad-Filho 2013b: 658). Therefore, what binds Greek, Brazilian, Irish and Arab youth protestors is - as Murphy (2012) writes with reference to the Arab Spring - the narrative(s) of "systemic failure". Interestingly, moreover, in all country cases the mobilizations were led by non-institutional actors as opposed to established political parties and trade unions, which were largely seen as part of a "failed system". By and large, it could be argued that the Greek, Brazilian, Irish and Arab youth have all played, to different degrees, an important role in raising and channelling public pressure to hold elites accountable for their deeds, while transforming youth mobilizations into a crucial mechanism of oversight against flaws in any fraudulent or non-accountable political system.

CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNED

The young Greek, Irish and Brazilian activists may be seen to share ideas, tactics and (online) aggregation modes and to face increasing risks of vulnerability and precarity, but they have been operating in different “political opportunity structures” (McAdam 1982). What they share in common is that, in all three country cases, youth protest mobilizations occurred at a point when a lifetime of old power structures - political, social and ideological - had started to dissolve and the certainties of older generations had come to be questioned by the grievances of the younger. Crucially, our analysis shows that youth mobilizations - more notably in Greece and Brazil, and to a lesser extent in Ireland - were not only about jobs and bread; as in the case of Arab uprisings, the theme of restoring a sound democratic order responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people was key. Overall youth mobilizations in Greece, Ireland and Brazil seem to share many characteristics in common, amongst which we may highlight the following ten:

1. Protests occurred because groups of young people (young activists, students) along with the older generation coming from middle- and lower- income households started to perceive changing socio-economic contexts as potential or real threats, or even as opportunities to highlight structural weaknesses (non-accountable political systems, corruption, patronage, partitocracy).
2. Protests were arranged horizontally through the Internet and social networks (blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and the like). Among the advantages of connective action is that it entails lower organizational and communication costs even while delivering great power of diffusion and community mobilizing.⁴
3. Greek, Irish and Brazilian activists did not come *en masse* from a given ideological group (or a single socio-economic group) as did the young activists of social movements in previous decades.
4. Mobilizations voiced intense grievances or discontent, which could not be redressed through mainstream politics.
5. The organization of mobilizations relied on flexible, horizontal, non-hierarchical relationships and in this sense, they differed from the mobilizations of identity-based movements (women, indigenous, LGBTQ, etc.) of the past.
6. Protests generally occurred outside formal political structures, although opposition parties may in some cases have been present.
7. Mobilizations were confronted with fierce police repression, which impacted mobilization levels and outcomes.
8. Youth mobilizations in all three country cases dispelled the myth of their political indifference. A widespread feeling among the young activists was that protests were the

⁴ There is growing scholarly interest in the ways social media and political activism come together (e.g., Howard and Parks 2012, Khamis et al. 2012, Wolfsfeld et al. 2013). While in the wake of the Arab Spring scholars emphasized the tight connection between social media and the promotion of democracy, this connection has been questioned by the recent emergence of the Islamic State, a movement that also draws strongly on digital technology to recruit and communicate with its followers (Blacker 2015). Totalitarian regimes and criminal social movements also quickly adapt to new technologies, using them for recruitment, control and repression. This has prompted scholars to develop new concepts and theoretical approaches in order to include right-wing radicalism and religious fundamentalisms (Beck 2008). Thus, the question of whether the potential of the Internet to stimulate political activism is improving the democratic quality of young people’s political action remains an open one.

- only realistic venue to bringing about change.
9. Despite conflicting aspirations in some cases (e.g. Greece, Brazil), there was a set of mobilizing themes that united activists coming from different political backgrounds and social and age groups, e.g., “another world is possible”, mixed with anti-neoliberal (anti-austerity) (Greece and Ireland) and anti-globalization/anti-neoliberalism rhetoric (Brazil).
 10. Democracy (as concept and practice) was another important mobilizing theme of the protests in all three country cases; the common tactic of occupation of public spaces and the claims for more participatory, deliberative, direct or real democracy symbolized an assertion that traditional modes of participating in democratic life are inadequate.

Within these caveats, youth participation in protest mobilizations in Greece, Ireland and Brazil may offer important lessons for the SEM countries and for countries of other regions, which are currently facing a number of challenges such as: precarious labour market outcomes for young people, youth social exclusion and emigration, ineffective public policy-making, corrupt political structures and patronage networks, intergenerational inequalities, and non-accountable democratic political institutions that defy youth demands and voices.

Summarizing our research findings, we are able to sketch out five key lessons learned:

Lesson 1. What we learn from the Greek, Irish and Brazilian cases is that youth who are confronted with conditions of marginalization and exclusion opt for protest mobilization as the only way out, while structural pathologies are important in mobilizing individual grievances.

In all three country cases young people have been facing difficulties in their transition into the labour market. At the time of youth mobilizations, youth unemployment rates were generally more than twice than the rate for the population at large while young workers had to come to grips with increasing precarity in the labour market. Over the past years, more and more young people in the three countries examined - as elsewhere in Europe and Latin America - have experienced frequent and repeated movements back and forth between fixed-term contracts and unemployment (“yo-yo” transitions) and status zero situations (being neither in work, education nor registered unemployed). Based on the ILO report (2011: 5), flexible,

[t]emporary contracts often also provide a lower wage, and do not always confer the same benefits, which often accrue with time and are directly linked to the length and status of the employment relationship. The result is a condition in which workers cannot plan for their future, and lack the security of certain forms of social protection.

At the same time, intergenerational inequalities exacerbated by austerity have been giving rise to a “lost generation” of young people (Leach et al. 2016: 24, Lowe 2016). When linked to the recent economic crisis that hit Greece and Ireland particularly and the (left) neoliberalism applied in Brazil (Saad-Filho 2013a) throughout the previous years, it is clear that “young people in the 16 to 24 age group are amongst the hardest hit and face more social and economic inequalities than any other group in society” (Citispyce 2015: 1).

Youth exclusion in all three country cases, as in the SEM countries, has had dramatic consequences on young people’s ability to experience youthfulness, not only by depriving them of access to leisure activities, education, etc. (UNDESA 2007, 2011), but also by

impinging on their transition to adulthood and to new roles in family and working life (Assaad 2007, UNDESA 2007, Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon 2008, Melhim Abu-Hamdan 2008, World Bank 2010, Khoury and Lopez 2011); ultimately, youth exclusion has been depriving societies of their energy, innovative drive and dynamism (UNDESA 2005). Therefore, addressing youth exclusion, its causes and consequences, means that we look at the structural factors underpinning this complex process (Silver 2007).

Furthermore, our analysis shows that the existence of old power structures such as patronage networks depriving youth of opportunities for social mobilization and labour market inclusion in Greece, Ireland and Brazil may be very similar to those identified in the SEM region. For example, having "*wasta*" in Egypt (Harrigan and El-Said 2009: 43, Khoury and Lopez 2011: 14) or "*meson*" (e.g. networking or connection power to get things done) in Greece is a major precondition for getting a foothold in the labour market or even for achieving educational excellence. Concurrently, as the case studies show, in all three countries the lack of effective policies to address young people's needs in a context of increasingly de-standardized transitions into employment have played a role in politicizing young people's lived experience of precarity, resulting in outward political action. As recent empirical research suggests (see, e.g., Grasso and Giugni 2016), the interplay of micro-level grievances and contextual institutional and policy macro-level factors is instrumental in mobilizing individuals. Thus, confronted with exclusion, policy inefficiency, nepotism and patronage, Greek, Irish and Brazilian youth reacted in ways similar to Arab youth; they expressed their discontent not through conventional channels, but through engagement in social movements. And as with the Arab uprisings, not only do recent uprisings in Greece, Ireland and Brazil confirm the potential of youth as an agent of change, they also showcase the fact that "young people do not constitute a passive group waiting for resources and opportunities to be handed to them" (UNDESA 2007: 246).

Lesson 2. What the Greek, Irish and Brazilian cases teach us is that the extent to which institutions and policies help young people realize an empowered role in democratic life is a critical factor for fostering the potential for youth agency. In this respect, it may be argued that youth-driven uprisings occur when democracies and political institutions are not inclusive enough of young people's needs and aspirations.

Youth protest mobilizations in Greece, Ireland and Brazil show that political systems were (and still are) facing a profound youth representation crisis. More and more, studies of young people's voting behaviour suggest that an increasing number of young people are becoming disillusioned and disengaged from mainstream politics (Cammaerts et al. 2016, Maggini 2016). Crucially, youth participation is not just a question of voter turnout rates but it is also a question that goes to the very heart of the meaning of politics and the "hollowing out" of the representative democratic political systems (Maier 2006). As Cammaerts et al. write (2016: 3):

It concerns how young people will express assent, affirmation or discontent if they feel that traditional modes of expression of both affirmation and discontent are ineffective and inadequate. Ultimately, this is a question about whether as societies - as political communities - it is acceptable to exclude a generation or part of a generation of citizens from democratic life.

Involving the new generations in decision-making is the key to this process of renewal and democratization at both national and global levels.

Lesson 3. Public policies that do not work for the benefit of a country's young generation may trigger mobilizations and discontent. Political parties and policy-makers across the world, who in the past might have disregarded youth forms of engagement in policy design, should now look to develop youth-sensitive policies and thus leverage public policy-making as an effective tool for youth engagement.

An important conclusion relating to the rise of youth activism in all three country cases is that public policies have not been effectively geared towards the present reality of many young people. The economic crisis, austerity and neoliberal policies, in conjunction with long-term structural problems that are specific to each country studied, have seriously undermined the conditions required for the effective exercise of rights by young people, whose welfare, well-being and future prospects have also been seriously affected by intergenerational injustice. As the SEM experience shows, institutional and policy failures may have unforeseen effects for youth political mobilization and forms of aggregation. For instance, Cavatorta and Haugbølle (2012: 187) describe the story of how patronage and corruption in Tunisia are some of the reasons for alienating many working-class young people from the political system who, instead, chose to participate in "'below-the-radar' social activism based around loosely structured social networks and developed a particular dislike for state authorities". What comes out, thus, as a significant lesson learned is that institutions and policies everywhere across the world need to be more proactive in encompassing young people's needs, experiences and aspirations. The necessary preconditions must be created for young people in the SEM region, as in Europe and in Latin America, to ensure that young people participate fully in policy-making and the shaping of more inclusive democratic models.

Public policies, to be efficient and fit the bill, must ensure that firstly young people are able to assert their rights throughout policy design and implementation; second, young people need to be endowed with negotiation rights towards institutions, an aspect that is not covered in most countries' interpretation of "policies of activation". Overall, youth interests must be central to all policy decisions. Youth needs will have to be explicitly addressed and mainstreamed in national policies, while public policies will have to be systematically monitored and evaluated through a "youth lens" (see, e.g., OECD 2016).

Lesson 4. Even though recent youth mobilizations have been fuelled by discontent and distrust of political systems, institutions, and social elites, most protestors still do believe in democracy. But they have been envisioning a different model of democracy, where inclusion, accountability, representativeness, and transparency are guaranteed.

As seen, apart from clear-cut economic demands, recent protests in Greece, Ireland and Brazil were motivated by an expression of discontent with conventional politics and mainstream modes of democratic participation and expression. This discontent has been expressed by both older and younger generations. As public opinion surveys confirm, by the time of the protest mobilizations in Greece, Ireland and Brazil, satisfaction with the way national democracy worked had fallen to (only) 11 percent in Greece, (a decent) 50 percent in Ireland

(European Commission 2012) and (a low) 26 percent in Brazil (Latinobarómetro 2013: 35). Concurrently, in 2012 an unprecedented reversal of the ratio of opinions on the indicator “satisfaction with the way European democracy works” occurred. For the first time in the history of the Eurobarometer surveys, levels of dissatisfaction with European democracy surpassed satisfaction levels. In particular, 44 percent of Europeans expressed satisfaction with the way democracy worked in the EU, while 45 percent said they were not satisfied, and 11 percent expressed no opinion (European Commission 2012: 54). For some scholars and commentators, this is due to a “democratic deficit” (Norris 2011) in the European Union and a widespread sense of powerlessness on the part of the citizens in Latin America fragile democracies in relation to the issues that are affecting their own economic and social prospects (The Economist 2015). Although public opinion surveys are time-specific, they enable us to look at problems or phenomena with an eye to the context in which they arise and to the form that they take. Young protestors in Greece, Ireland and Brazil challenged the existing modes of democratic representation, as they did not believe representatives were acting on behalf of their constituents or of some vision of a public good (Mainwaring et al. 2006: 15). In such a context, protests were seen not only as vehicles of discomfort but also as instruments which actually could enable to invent new ways to strengthen the quality of democracy.

More generally, the need to change how democracy works has become evident not only through the event of protests itself but also through the changing nature of mobilization. As Della Porta (2015a: 30) has argued, in light of the legitimacy crisis of representative democracy and altered political opportunity structures, the dynamics of collective action also changed while “conceptions of direct democracy (re)emerged as more apt to organize highly critical citizens”. The case of the 2011 Greek Indignants provides a good example for this observation: the use of public space (as a form of ancient Greek agora) to debate, identify problems and think about solutions, and the horizontal, non-hierarchical mediation through social media are all signs of a desire for combining collective with connective action in pursuit of a new type of democracy which goes beyond the way democracy was practiced till that point.

Lesson 5. A crucial lesson that comes out of all three country cases is that, despite their contribution to spurring mass mobilizations, youth activists need to make a bigger effort to consolidate their achievements and secure a place in the political landscape.

What the three country cases teach us is that when, as Lynch (2011) writes “[a] fiercely independent and articulate rising generation would no longer tolerate brazen corruption, abusive police, indifferent bureaucracy, a stagnant economy, and stage-managed politics”, it resorts to protests. Put in another way, when their needs and demands go unheard, young people may rise as key actors in powerful social movements that aim to transform the course of their country’s democratic history.

The way in which youth mobilizations emerged in Greece, Ireland, and in Brazil was through widespread, decentralized grassroots participation. We may assume that these mobilizations were the outcome of a single “youth movement” representing one homogeneous group; but this is far from the reality. As in the youth mobilizations of the Arab Spring, young people in the three country cases were not all the same, and the youth groups participating in the

various mobilizations represented many different - sometimes conflicting and fragmented - voices and aspirations. This has put the youth movements at a major disadvantage, as they had to compete against well-established institutions and political parties for control over their countries' future.

So, learning from the Greek, Irish and Brazilian experiences does not imply, as Della Porta (2015b: 778) points out, "just adopting their forms by imitation, but more reflecting upon their mistakes". Reflecting on the outcomes of youth mobilizations in all three countries a few years later, we may argue that they do not seem to have brought about an overwhelming change for societies, let alone for young people themselves. As a consequence, today, in the aftermath of mobilizations, youth in all three countries examined still hold - as Schwartz (2011) writes in relation to Arab Spring youth in Tunisia and Egypt - "less power in any political system than adults or elders". It is true that, even if the immediate outcomes of the Greek, Irish and Brazilian mobilizations or the Arab youth uprisings seem self-evident, the deeper political and socio-cultural processes fueled by these events cannot be assessed until more time has passed. Overall, it may be argued that youth activists are agents of real change when they are able to voice concerns and be heard. Linked to this is the existence of youth movements that are able to move from protest to politics (Malkoutzis 2011), by putting together a *transformatory* agenda without losing sight of the issues of intersectionality, domination, inequalities and exclusion that the "youth" category encompasses (see Destremau and Catusse 2014), and by pushing this agenda into the policies and institutions of their own countries.

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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.

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