



Extended Abstract

The role of Social Movements in the governance of ICT Commons in Times of Crisis

Wolfgang Hofkirchner^{1,2}, **Asimina Koukou**^{1,3}, **Katharine Sarikakis**³

¹ Bertalanffy Center for the Study of Systems Science (BCSSS) / Paulanergasse 13, 1040 Vienna

² Vienna University of Technology (TUW) / Favoritenstraße 9-11, 1040 Vienna

³ Media Governance and Industries Research Group, Department of Communication, University of Vienna / Währinger Straße 29, 1090 Vienna

E-Mails: wolfgang.hofkirchner@tuwien.ac.at (W. H.); asimina.koukou@bcsss.org (A. K.); katharine.sarikakis@univie.ac.at (K. S.)

Accepted:

Introduction

During the past decade, social media platforms, such as blogs, microblogs, content communities, social networking sites became core communication tools for public debate. The global financial crisis plagued several European countries such as Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy and UK whose governments, and in the case of Greece under the rule of international organizations, implemented austerity policies as a measure of crisis management. The impact of these policies gave rise to widespread public discontent and rage against public authorities and institutions on national as well as European levels. Moreover, the economic crisis increased antagonisms between EU members and limited the power of nation-states. In this context, the mainstream media have received ample critique for promoting the elites and not producing rich public spheres to debate the crisis. However, new media and social movements play today a particularly important role in shifting dominants' narratives and representations of the crisis in Europe, hence helping construct a variety of public spheres.

ICTs (particularly social media) transform the ways in which citizens demonstrate, protest and collaborate. With the use of digital technologies, publics increase their autonomy, join local or global networks and develop robust social bonds. Even though these networks consist of people with different

aims and incentives, they are based on a sense of belonging and promote solidarity and cooperation among their members. Under these circumstances, individuals prepare the background and create the conditions towards direct democracy for both themselves and the next generations.

Methods

In this paper, we focus on social movements that have emerged in Europe since the outbreak of the crisis. In particular, we examine their political claims and ideological dispositions through the filters of continuity and change. We look at both the diachronous and the synchronous evolution of the movements. The diachronous perspective concerns the historical evolution of social movements by focusing on the common core that the movements share over time and across borders, as well as the social conditions that alter their dynamics. The synchronous perspective concentrates on the structural evolution of particular social movements, their interconnections with other movements of the same period, their influences and aspirations. Our aim is to explore the ways in which social movements in Europe build, promote and reinforce transnational dialogue, as a form of governance of the Commons towards their realization. The Commons is a kind of social good that is based on mutual agreement and social reciprocity, forming in the social ICT environment. To frame this discussion, the following research question will guide the paper: “how do the citizens govern their political communicative spaces”?

We apply Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), in order to understand the political contexts within which the texts of social movements are produced, distributed and received. In doing so, we follow Norman Fairclough’s systematic method of analysis (1992, 1995, 2004). Fairclough aims to reveal the ideological and power patterns that exist in discourses and displays the ways in which the discourses are involved in systems of power. Adopting this method in our paper, we observe how the texts construct reality, social identity and social relations, as well as how they are produced, distributed and consumed, and finally what are the social, political, institutional conditions that affect them. For us, discourses have power to raise awareness and develop consciousness on an issue contributing in this way both in social change and social emancipation.

The data comprises six social movements that arose in Greece, Spain and the UK during the economic crisis. The “Indignant Citizens movement” started in 2011 both in Greece (“Aganaktismenoi movement”) and Spain (“Indignados movement”), protesting against austerity politics and for a democratic rebirth, equality, justice and dignity. Both movements paved the way for the emergence of a range of social, self-organized solidarity movements-initiatives across Europe that still have an impact on peoples’ lives. In particular, we discuss the Greek “We don’t pay movement” (initially against the highway tolls), “Without middlemen movement” (against the market intermediaries) and the “Anti-gold mining movement-Skouries movement” (against ore mining for the protection of the environment) in

parallel with the Spanish “Stop Desahucios Platform” (against eviction), the British “NHS social movement” (against the privatization of health system) and the Romanian “Save Rosia Montana movement” (against the Rosia Montana mining project). Our investigation explores the commonalities, correlations and interconnections between these movements, by analysing the official statements of the movements found in their blogs or websites and the comments (included videos) stated by their participants in their Facebook and/or Twitter accounts. In this way, we shed light on how people communicate particular meanings on specific social issues which under certain circumstances become large and universal.

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