

# Democracy and participation in times of change

Goberna, Madrid June 28-30.

## Background considerations and challenges:

The grip: *systemic* democratic politics seems to be pressed by two different and polarized movements: Neopopulism of the right & “Unidentified Youth-Movements” of radical socio-political and economic change.

*Neopopulisms*: nationalistic & xenophobic attitudes; anti-elites & anti-European; simplified messages. Back to our borders and our people!

*Youth-movements*: claims to the “unfulfilled promises of democracy” (against the political class); “rebellion against low life expectations” (“*Nous voulons vivre comme notre parents*”) that turns against the new faces of financial capitalism. Bankers and politicians as the main target of criticism.

A new questioning of our way of life and of our deep-rooted institutions and values. As if we were in need of a new social contract for these times of uncertainty.

Overall syndrome of *Democratic Fatigue*  
"Something is not working". But what?

- 1.- The divorce between politicians ("The Political Class") and citizens
- 2.- The distortion of the mediating channels between society and the political system (electoral system; need for new ways of political participation; who's interests are in fact being represented; new social media)
- 3.- The transformation of political action into mere "system management" (who decides, the people or "systemic imperatives"?; technocrats vs. politicians)
4. The need for a re-politization of inequality (whither the welfare state?)
- 5.- Scale and democracy. Who decides what? A new democratic architecture for Europe.

A driver is stuck in a traffic jam in the street that leads to parliament.

There's no way to get forward. Suddenly, someone knocks at his car window. The driver opens the window and asks: "What's going on?"

The other replies: "Some terrorists have entered into parliament and are taking the deputies as hostages. They say that If we don't pay 10 million Euros they will sprinkle them with gasoline and burn them. We are collecting."

The driver takes his hand to his wallet and asks: "How much are people giving?"

The other one replies: "Some half a liter...others a liter"  
(Spanish joke spreading through the internet)

Organization of the political class and parties seen as closed systems. No culture of openness

**Carl Schmitt's syndrome:** The essence of politics is a permanent conflict with the foe. Attack and discredit your opponent. Politics as a constant confrontation and conflict.

**Machiavelli's Syndrome:** To reach power no matter how and keep it at any price! The only thing that matters is to continue holding power, or try to reach it at any price.

**Robert Michels's Syndrome:** Prevent internal dissidence! In organizations such as political parties or trade unions always prevails the will of a minority (*iron-law of oligarchy*). Internal dissent is prohibited.

“Facebook (or Twitter), it seems, produces a sharp, blinding flash in the pan, but it does not generate enough heat over an extended period to warm the house.”

Francis Fukuyama

The New York *Indignados* are closer to the Spanish 15-M than the Arab revolts. The Spanish have had influence on *Occupy Wall Street*.

The Zuccotti park functioned like the *Puerta del Sol*. Both movements organized themselves through daily assemblies and decisions were taken through debates and consensus.

Social Networks had a key role. They both used them to communicate and the Americans even created their own (The Global Square).

The "*Indignados*" and "Occupants" search for an evolution of their strategies with specific actions: they denounce real estate repossessions and they demand for the rich to pay more taxes.

The legitimacy crisis of political institutions is the same in most democratic countries. *Occupy Wall Street*, like the Spanish, does not recognise individual leaders or spokesmen.

The Sol Camp was born out of a plural explosion of outraged citizens that were fed up with the political corruption and injustice of the electoral system, which is what triggered it off. They ask for an amendment to the totality.

In New York, they focused on banks and Wall Street. Their main targets were large corporations and financial institutions.

Spanish camps included a transversal message against the political class. In the USA the discontent message was addressed to Obama's management.

In contrast to the *Indignados*, those in New York accepted support from Trade Unions and famous people.