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WP7: Interpreting Activism (Ethnographies)

Deliverable 7.1: Ethnographic Case Studies of Youth Activism

Student movement of Barcelona City (PUDUP)

Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona, Spain)

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1. Introduction

The research on the student movement (SM) has been partially neglected in the field of social movement studies. However, this has not always been so. Specifically, the student uprisings around 1968 were extremely important for the revitalization of the studies on collective action. Thus, the socio-political centrality developed by the SM along the protest cycle around the late 60’s is easily observable in the amount of research and studies focused on trying to understand the reasons and motivations of their activists, as well as the forms of action and characteristics of the emerging student revolts in most Western societies.

Particularly fruitful, in this sense, was the development of a specific literature on this issue in several American universities, mainly from the first wave of student disorder and riots in the American Campuses (Rootes 2007), whose epicentre can be located in Berkeley University in 1964-1965 (Lipset and Wolin 1965). It is after this that research on the student movement is aimed primarily at finding the causes of student unrest. Explanatory factors (Burgess and Hofstetter 1971; Lipset and Altbach 1969; Halleck 1967) are going to be located in a broad variety of possibilities: institutional factors due to the overcrowding of universities, socio-political causes related to the specific contexts (the war in Vietnam, the emergence of the civil rights movement and so forth), certain factors related to the young generation (for instance, the supposed tendency of the youth to be politically more radical) and finally, the technological changes associated with the emerging post-industrial society and the consequent value changes. There were also contributions from authors such as Smelser (1968) that explain the student uprising as evidence of immaturity and the excessive emotionality of young people, linked to a (supposed) unresolved Oedipal complex oriented to ‘kill’ (politically and culturally) the generation of their parents. Other studies focus on the central importance played by the media as disseminators of the main framing and practices developed by the SM in the United States (Gitlin 1980). Hence, the SM of the 1960s became a veritable laboratory for studies of collective action, social movements and youth.

This US research also had its counterpart in Europe where the events of the late 60’s had a significant impact on the societies of the day. In the European case, the interest in students and youth also motivated the proliferation of different works that attempted to explain these new movements. However, unlike what happened in the United States, where social movement studies focused on the organisational forms and the available resources for mobilization, the European approach is not as clearly derived from the parameters of the studies on collective action. Instead, the European approach sought more ideological, historical and purely sociological explanations (demographic ones, for example) that could explain the student revolt. Thus, for instance, Touraine’s sociological explanation of the SM (and other social movements of the time) focused on observing the movement as a kind of anti-technocratic reaction that would have displaced the previous central conflict between capital and labour in industrial societies to new expressions and forms of social conflict in the era of post-industrial societies (Touraine 1971).

It is true that this academic neglect of the SM has been addressed in recent times and this has led to the production, on a global basis, of an update of understandings of student mobilisations. It has been, precisely, the emergence of a new wave of student unrest in the
universities of 'Anglo-Saxon countries where a timid revival of academic studies applied to the student environment' (Guzmán-Concha 2012; Ibrahim 2011) has begun to occur. This renewed interest has materialised in increased research activity linked, in some way, to the student subject.

In fact, this attention has also been stimulated by the conflict generated during the last few years in some Western societies: on the one hand, the mobilization that occurred in French universities against the First Employment Contract in 2006 and, on the other hand, the recent UK SM against the rise in university fees in the autumn of 2010. The growing American student movement that has recently connected itself with the Occupy movement should also be mentioned as well as the issue of 'student debt' which has served as a strong stimulus for the emergence of a renewed interest in the student movement (McClanahan, 2013). And finally, the conflict in Quebec around fee increases in 2012, which was defended successfully by the SM. In the southern hemisphere, the long and rigid student conflict in Chile, especially during 2010-2011, became a media event diffused at a transnational level.

Therefore, the renewed interest in student activism has taken place in parallel with the period of increasing mobilisation. In this sense, the extension of university unrest in many different countries has generated its own literature on particular student conflicts in different contexts (Zamponi 2011; Ibrahim 2011; Guzman-Concha 2012; Crossley 2012). This suggests a second wave of studies on the student movement. In these studies, there are two main features of the SM that make it particularly interesting for (and different from) the analysis of social movements. Both have been identified by Van Dyke in two studies that deal with student protests in the United States. In the first one, published in 2001 and written with Soule and McCarthy, the authors highlight how student organisations and groups tend to make more intensive use of confrontational tactics than other types of social movements. In the second article from Van Dyke (2003), another specificity of the SM is raised: the facilities and/or opportunities presented by the SM to form coalitions and build alliances (also with other social movements), a topic which is always a key component of the case studies of the literature on social movements.

However, in the case of Catalonia and Spain there have been few studies focused on the dynamic of the student movement over recent decades. Some of these have been promoted recently by their own universities in order to comprehend why the students are organising the protests, to develop new participatory spaces for students (IGOP 2012) or to understand the characteristics of student participation more broadly (UPF 2012). But, up to now, there has been no specific research about the student movement in the context of the economic crisis and implementation of austerity measures (affecting the high education public sector) in Spain or Catalonia and the kind of activism developed.

1.1. The selection of the case-study

The research presented here is part of the WP7 related to interpreting youth activism through the use of ethnographic methodology. The student movement (SM) of the city of
Barcelona\(^1\) was selected as one of the three particular cases. In particular, the focus of the study is the SM that is part of the PUDUP (Unitary Platform for the Defence of the Public University);\(^2\) this is an active Platform (at least, at the time of the ethnography fieldwork at the end of 2012) that includes student's unions\(^3\), student's assemblies from different public universities/faculties and representatives of the teachers and administration employees of the universities. This Platform has existed since 2010 and has been the successor of previous Platforms that, for different reasons, no longer exist. The role of the PUDUP, therefore, is to coordinate the efforts of the movement in support of a public high-level education that is made up of different sorts of groups and organisations from the Catalan public universities (in Barcelona province). Thus, the Platform acts as an organisational umbrella. For this reason, both the main and the daily activities fall on the student groups of the different universities. The PUDUP, for instance, is the Platform responsible for calling strikes or central demonstrations. Its organisational dynamic consisted, in the period of the ethnography fieldwork, of general meetings (with representatives of the different assemblies, unions and collectives) every two or three weeks. In addition, there are different commissions working: those of mobilizations (to organise the protests events), those in charge of elaboration of the collective discourse and those of communication (to communicate the activities of the movement via the conventional and social media).\(^4\)

The main objectives of this ethnography were, apart from the MYPLACE ones\(^5\), to observe the dynamics of the mobilization of the movement (including claims, framing and level of success); to analyse the public image of the movement and its repertoires of action; to uncover the possible links of the movement with the democratic/dictatorial heritage of the particular context where it developed; and finally, to explain the profile of the activists (motivations, life-styles, political activism, etc.) and their political attitudes and socialisation experiences. The selection of the student movement of the PUDUP provides us with an excellent case to study one of the most active collective agents in the city, especially for young people.

\(^1\) Although this ethnography focuses on the student movement of Barcelona city, PUDUP is a platform composed of students (teaching and administrative staff) from campuses or a university (the UAB) with the premises in other locations. The core of the PUDUP is located in Barcelona city where there are three of the four public universities of Barcelona province: the University of Barcelona (UB), the Pompeu Fabra University (UPF) and the most important campus of the Barcelona Tech (UPC). The latter, the UPC, has other campuses in the cities of Castelldefels, Manresa, Sant Cugat del Vallès, Terrassa and Vilanova-i-la Geltrú. Finally, some student groups of the PUDUP are from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), which is in Bellaterra, in the metropolitan region of Barcelona.

\(^2\) Website: http://reconstruimlapublica.wordpress.com.

\(^3\) There are two main student unions in Barcelona that are members of the PUDUP. One is the SEPC (Student Union of Catalan Countries), which is the student union of the independentist radical left movement (with other groups such as ARRAN and the CUP, another case-study of the WP7 ethnography). And the other one is AEP (Progressive Student Association), which has a leftist political orientation and others more closely linked to the ecological left. Both student unions are in favour of public education and increasing the number of grants, and against raising student fees.

\(^4\) At the moment of writing the report (November-December 2013) the Platform is less active than a year ago, when the fieldwork was taking place.

\(^5\) The specific objectives are available here: http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/concept.php

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Moreover, the study of the PUDUP (and specifically, the case of student activism in Barcelona) was considered potentially extremely interesting for other reasons. Firstly, to observe the dynamic and discourses of a youth movement involved in a period of implementation of austerity measures (especially those directly affecting public universities). It is important to recall here the high level of youth unemployment (53.2 per cent, according to EUROSTAT 2012) and the precarious conditions of young people in Spain (not only in terms of labour conditions but within a whole situation of instability of youth transitions and material dependence on family networks). In this sense, the SM of Barcelona is a good example of the particular conditions for youth mobilization in an age of crisis and recession.

Finally, the SM is also a place of political socialization for young people. Thus, of particular interest was how this movement is capable of being an agent of political socialization for activism and how it interacts with other social movements or political groups. Therefore, the focus is on the kind of activism that is promoted in the SM (which is the main profile of activists in terms of interests, ideology, values, etc.) and what it has on the daily life of activists (what does it mean to be an activist, what does it offer in terms of satisfaction, how does it condition their expectations, their political ideas, their socio-political attitudes, etc.).

2. Method

2.1. Characteristics of the fieldwork and interviews

The fieldwork was undertaken very intensively between the beginning of October and the end of December 2012 (before the Christmas period). The observation of the movement dynamics was recorded in 30 fieldwork diary entries during different student assemblies, demonstrations, public events and strikes. The fieldwork and interviews were undertaken by one researcher.

The field researcher attended regularly the activities of the PUDUP (mainly assemblies and public events such as demonstrations and strikes) and, in parallel, a particular assembly belonging to the PUDUP was followed to help understand the nuances and richness of a specific student space. The selected case was the students’ assembly of History and Philosophy of the University of Barcelona (UB). This assembly (with an attendance of between 20 and 50 students every week) has been one of the most active, dynamic, diverse (especially in terms of ideology) and radical of the whole movement in Barcelona since the anti-Bologna mobilisations (2008-2009). Besides, this assembly is located in a campus with a particular meaning and peculiarity: it is in the centre of the city. This allows for regular interaction between the movement and the streets of the city centre, allowing more chances for disruptive actions. For these reasons, it was considered that keeping track of the activities of this particular activist space could provide more detailed information of the practices, interactions, discourses and dynamics of the student movement in Barcelona. Thus, through this technique, the researcher sought to capture the internal daily relations
inside the movement and recreate the social reality from the situated practices of the movement itself (Alonso 1998).

Moreover, the researchers collected, read and analysed different materials produced by the movement itself, such as manifestos, videos, flyers and meeting agreements. This has allowed them to understand the public (and private) discourse of the movement and, at the same time, to follow in detail the activities and current debates. At the same time, the social media (Facebook and Twitter, mainly) of the SM were monitored, especially during the mobilization days or when they wanted to provide information about any specific public event. In this sense, the use of social media was not very intensive. The profiles on Twitter and Facebook of the PUDUP were not especially active (except on the days of strikes or protest mobilizations when they were used to communicate what was going on). The explanation for this can be found in the difficulty of managing the communication of such a plural and diverse movement (in terms of ideology, identities and interests) that complicated the use of a centralized profile. However, the use of other channels (such as videos for YouTube, profiles in social media for every assembly and collective) is much diffused and it is an instrumental tool for the whole movement and for many of the activists.

During this research, 26 semi-structured interviews (more or less one hour of duration) were conducted with student activists of different universities of Barcelona. All of them have been selected with the approach of picking up information from ‘key informants’ (Blee y Taylor, 2002). These informants are privileged sources in the sense of being witnesses; activists actually involved in the movement and, therefore, direct subjects of diverse experiences and practices in the SM with all that that implies for learning and discourse elaboration. However, in this sample of respondents, a wide variety of different voices and backgrounds based on different activist experiences and narratives, with all being members of the student movement-PUDUP, were sought. To achieve this, activists with different profiles were interviewed, taking into account the following variables: gender, age, faculty, campus, university belonging, and type of activism (assembly, student union or both) and the personal involvement in the movement (from low experience to high level of experience within the SM). A balanced sample in terms of the different individual characteristics was sought, as can be observed in Table 1 and Table 2 (see Appendix 1).

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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Place of birth</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mother’s place of birth</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Father’s place of birth</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Employment situation</strong></td>
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<td><strong>If applicable, university background</strong></td>
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### Table

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<tr>
<th>Public university</th>
<th>5 UAB, 13 UB, 3 UPC, 5 UPF</th>
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<tr>
<td>Residential status</td>
<td>18 living with parents, 7 living in a shared flat, 1 living in a squat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family status</td>
<td>26 single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language(s) used at home (family)</td>
<td>14 Catalan, 11 Spanish, 1 other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language(s) used with friends</td>
<td>23 Catalan, 3 Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of involvement in the group</td>
<td>24 organiser, 2 occasional participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership in other groups</td>
<td>9 left political parties, 10 15-M movement or neighbourhood assemblies, 12 other social movements (such as alternative media <em>La Directa</em>), assemblies belonging to 15-M movement, movements of solidarity with Palestine, movements in defence of free software, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective perception of social class</td>
<td>1 upper, 1 middle-upper, 13 middle, 7 middle-lower, 4 lower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 2.2. Access and ethical considerations

In regard to access, no significant resistance was encountered when seeking access to student activists in two different assemblies. The first occasion was in a general meeting of the whole movement (PUDUP) and the other one in the assembly of History and Philosophy of the UB where ethnographic data had been collected more regularly. In both cases, there was a very positive understanding of MYPLACE research goals.

As is known, the research about social movements is often a source of many ethical and epistemic problems. In this field of study, there exists the very real risk of falling, precisely, into the trap of the conflicting articulation between epistemology and ethics. The particular position of ‘power’ of the researcher conferred by the ‘scientific’ knowledge can influence the discourse of the subjects of the interviews. In this ethnography, the researchers have not only tried to avoid this position of power by establishing some necessary distance from the movement but also by ensuring that the treatment of the data collected was not used for profit or the illegitimate exploitation of knowledge of the movement and their activists. On the contrary, the intention has always been to establish a dialogue with the activists in a dialectical and reciprocal process of knowledge accumulation. Ethically speaking, the confidentiality and anonymity of the activists who voluntarily took part in the research, in particular, the interviewees, was assured.
3. Key findings

The literature discussed above informs the research carried out for this case study and, in particular, its claims are used to frame explanations for why the SM is an active and dynamic movement. At the same time, the findings presented also focus on understanding the logic behind the participants’ involvement and the role they play in the contentious activism developed by the SM.

3.1. Main characteristics of the SM of Barcelona

This research explored the specific context of the SM in Barcelona to understand its current dynamic and challenges. In this sense, the SM of Barcelona has been historically one of the collective agents that has been more active and dynamic in the city and its history is summarised briefly here.

During the struggle against Franco’s dictatorship, from the end of the 60s to the mid-70s, the SM has been a relevant social space for contentious issues and for mobilisation against Francoism (Fernández Buey 2009). The student mobilisations of those times went beyond the universities and became a laboratory for social initiatives and new democratic practices. The SDEUB (Sindicato Democrático de Estudiantes de la Universidad de Barcelona, Democratic Union of Students of University of Barcelona), between 1965 and 1967, became an activist reference point that influenced a whole generation of the alternative Left in its role as a main point of opposition to the dictatorship. In fact, this experience has remained alive in the public memory (Zamponi 2012) and is very useful for the re-construction of the present SM. This experience of the Caputxinada6, from time to time, is updated as a way of re-appropriating common memory and as a necessary democratic and social legitimization for the movement in every wave of protests. Due to this foundational event, the SM of Barcelona has been able – despite the limits of a cyclic and non-continuous student movement (Laraña 1994; González Calleja 2009) – to articulate some kind of common narrative at a historical level.

Later on, the SM of Barcelona was also very lively during the constitutional period of 1978 (also called the Transition period to representative democracy). More recently, it has been particularly active in different protests, such as the global justice movement, opposition to the war in Iraq and educational reforms such as the Organic Law of Universities (2001-2002) and the Bologna Process (2007-2009) (González, 2011). In general, four main features of the SM in Barcelona have defined the dynamic of the movement since the late 1990s and especially during the last wave of student activism (from 2007 until nowadays). This latter activism has focused on the critique of the privatisation of public universities. Thus, the SM of Barcelona has four main features to be considered:

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6Caputxinada is the name given to the assembly in which the SDEUB was created. It takes the name from the Capuxins’ church in the neighbourhood of Sarrià (Barcelona) where the anti-Francoist students met in 1966 to found the SDEUB.
a) High level of political radicalization and high ideological diversity within the movement where activists have very different political (anarchist, communist, eco-socialist, feminist) and national identities (Catalan nationalist and non-nationalist). This radicalism can be observed in a repertoire of highly disruptive action. This includes non-conventional protest activities in which the practice of civil disobedience is very common. In particular, protest events (such as large demonstrations or student strikes) involving confrontation with the police is repeatedly instigated by the more radical sections of the movement.

b) Broad variety of organisational forms of the movement, including strong student unions (such as AEP or SEPC) and student assemblies (more or less stable and with more or less activists depending on the period of mobilization).

c) Low capacity of success and negotiation with the authorities (both academic and political institutions) which produces a highly contentious dynamic. This means that the conflicts expressed by the movement are not resolved in a negotiation process but tend to be managed in a confrontational way between the movement and authorities.

d) The SM constitutes a primary space and experience of political socialization for many activists who, after the militancy in the SM, have integrated themselves into other activist groups and movements (social centres, 15-M movement, alternative media youth wings of Leftist parties, NGOs, etc.).

During recent years, the financial crisis and economic recession have dramatically affected the Spanish and Catalan economy. This crisis, and its associated growing public debt, has involved the adoption of severe austerity measures by successive Spanish governments, as well as by the ruling Catalan nationalist conservative party, Convergència i Unió (CIU) at the regional level. Different measures have affected public services (health and education) through significant budget restrictions (in the public system of higher education, this has implied cuts to the tax subsidies, an increase in fees, and a reduction of the teaching and administrative staff of the universities). Moreover, the crisis in the Spanish economy is characterised by massive youth unemployment, with rates around 55 per cent among under 30 year olds. The Spanish labour market is characterised by insecurity and exclusion (and even poverty) for Spanish youth, including high levels of graduate unemployment. In this context, the SM has found the chance to create a diagnostic framework and a point of mobilization (Klandermans 1988) around public policies directly affecting universities and the young. The main demands are thus oriented towards criticizing these austerity measures including the rise of the tuition fees, the reduction in some university services (such as libraries), the massive dismissal of teachers or the new corporate management of public universities.

As Van Dyke (2012) explains, students are free from some of the restrictions faced by other full-time occupations and from family responsibilities. Thus, the student status is a key factor
in defining the participants of the movement but also in defining the framework of possibilities that this participation can develop. This allows them more time to organise protests and other activities (public debates, parties, activities for self-financing the movement, taking part in the representative university institutions, etc.) despite the obvious differences in socio-economic conditions that can be found among the student population. On the other hand, as Crossley (2008, 2012) shows, campuses are social and physical spaces where it is easier to establish relationships and linkages within a movement and to organise and develop (formal and informal) networks of activists. Thus, compared to other social spaces (especially workplaces or neighbourhoods), faculties and campuses become a relatively privileged place to organise a movement, and its corresponding daily activities and protest actions. Student activists are indeed conscious of these possibilities:

University is a space of conflict, that is, in the same way workplaces are spaces of conflict (...). University is also a place where young people are together, people with a long lifetime ahead, a lot of critical people also that can contemplate deep changes in their way of thinking. And university is a place where a lot of people are in the same place, concentrated. In this campus, for instance, I think that we are more than 7000 students in a very few square metres and that makes it easier to connect with the people. On the contrary, in my neighbourhood, for instance, it is like a bedroom, people just going and coming from work to home, sometimes to the bar, but there is a little activity not like in the universities. (David)

The SM therefore seems to be the kind of movement that confirms those theories which focus on a micro-structural approach or social network theory (Diani, 1992). These theories claim the importance of the interpersonal bonds in the recruitment processes for activating participation. Thus, for instance, it is common to find student activists engaging the movement through previous friendship relations or even being already part of other activist networks. This is the case of an activist who explains her experience as follows:

I started to be involved in 2008. When I arrived at the University I could see suddenly a group of people with a banner saying ‘Student’s Assembly’ and as I already had a close friend one year older than me that was a member of the Assembly and always had told me ‘hey, when you go the university just come to the Assembly as we are organising a lot of things, it is very good ... it is really cool’. Then I went to the Assembly from the very first day and they were talking about the Bologna Process and so on. (Montse)

### 3.2. Main issues

**Reasons and implications of student activism**

One of the main goals of this ethnography was to have a more precise idea about the
reasons and motivations of the activists of the student movement. The fieldwork suggests that their activism is not marginal or isolated. For many of the activists, being part of the movement turns into a basic priority. Moreover, for most of them (at least the ones more active in the movement) daily life cannot be understood without being involved in the movement(s). Therefore, despite the problems and dissatisfactions that activism could bring, they spent a lot of time and effort as members. As an activist reflects:

Student activism conditions my whole life and I spend many hours per day on it, but I do it for interest and because I really want to. There have been semesters which have had subjects where I had to work extra and I have done less in the movement, but now when I am coming to the end, I have got it right back on track and I’m dedicating several hours per day, but looking forward, feeling that now that I can do it. (...) Right now I’m in the Governing Council of my University, the UPC, and that takes time, you have to prepare for meetings, and I am also in the Senate ... it is a lot of time to dedicate to the movement and time that otherwise I would be using to study or to be in the bar, (...) but I try to balance the time, it’s a mess, but I can do it, but I really want to be active in the movement and this is something that everyone of us do, I am not the only one. (Guillem)

In this way, the kind of student activism found in the PUDUP, be it student unions or assemblies related, is very intense in terms of dedication. But this profile is not only focused on the student involvement. It is a multi-militancy kind of activism. It means that many of the activists are also members of other groups, movements, social initiatives or (left) political parties.

Three different motivations used by the activists in order to explain their own engagement can be identified. Firstly, there are discourses and attitudes that explain their involvement as a kind of strong ideological engagement where activists conceive it as a commitment, as a kind of (moral) duty that they feel they have to do but, as they stress, they want to do. This is a more intellectual explanation, where ideology and also the feeling of being consistent with their political ideas are very important.

Activism is a sacrifice but a sacrifice that I think I have to do. I do not know ... Yes, maybe, the illusion or motivation, as time goes on, disappears and you get more and more focused on the responsibilities demanded by your consciousness, on the idea of the need of the SM and that you really have to work on it. (Aldo)

Secondly, some activists mention the importance of the skills and knowledge acquired in the movement. Thus, a common discourse among them claims that they ‘have learnt more in
the movement than in their classrooms’. The movement also plays the role of a ‘school of democracy’ where activists learn how to interact politically with institutions and authorities, to discuss collectively, to participate in an assembly, to organise a protest, to understand the complexity of the society, etc. These elements are especially valued by the activists.

In the SM you can meet a lot of people; you also have a learning process, an experience that gives you another perspective. In my case, for instance, this allowed me to develop some skills (...) because if you want people to develop, for instance, how to be better in meetings, the best way is to go and take part in an assembly or in a commission. If you want people to learn how to speak in public, the best way is to read or speak in an assembly or in a demonstration, or if you want to write correctly the best way is to write manifestos and statements ... I have always had this approach. (David)

Activism has helped me to learn how to work with very diverse people and to have mutual respect, even we have very opposed views and ideas on some issues that we understand are the most important ones (Ayoze)

Finally, student activism in the PUDUP contributes to creating a whole social network of relations for activists. This could be how activism allows the activists to belong to a social group where they can develop and share, not only an ideology or political identity, but also social interests, friendship, the passion for politics and the possibility to live according to their political principles.

I now have a much broader view of reality. But before I trusted everything that I was told. I learned to question myself, I learned to express myself better, I learned to write better, I learned to be able to do many things: to be able to meet people and hear opinions from other people that maybe, a priori, I would not have heard, I have made friends, I'm in love, I do not know ... It has contributed a lot in my life. Very much so. (Marina C.)

Well, I think the main attraction, and which is also probably the reason I joined the movement and I have kept in it, is because of the bonds of community that are created among people who already have something in common - that is to live together in a common space that is the university for some years, and the student movement is this space in which you can share your interests with other people and to build these bonds of solidarity and friendship with those people. (César)

Altogether, these elements help to explain why student activists refuse to give up the movement or their activism. They are not able, for instance, to imagine their own lives in the future without being active in a social or political movement and many consider student activism as the beginning of a long-term trajectory of activism. Obviously, this is also related to the important period of higher education and what this implies in terms of political socialization and attitudes formation.
However, activism is not always a pleasant activity. On the contrary, sometimes it is exhausting and generates boredom, especially when conflicts explode inside the movement. The appearance of conflict is also related to the internal composition of the student movement (PUDUP) of Barcelona which is very heterogeneous: different universities and studies, and different places of daily student involvement: faculty assemblies, student unions or both. Thus, the most disliked aspects of activism are very different but there are two that are revealed to be more prominent. On the one hand, activists complain about the internal conflicts inside the movement, conflicts that are derived from the ideological plurality of the movement and the huge debates on tactics, strategies, organisational forms and repertoires of action. On the other hand, activists have regrets about the limits of the movement and the difficulties it faces in getting results.

I think that the movement, even though I do agree with the method of assemblies, has a problem of pragmatism. I believe that it is not quite pragmatic and we take too long in doing things. (Celia)

Finally, the main obstacles to their activism are reflected upon. This research analysed the causes of non- (or low) involvement in the SM from the activists’ points of view because this could be useful for identifying problems for encouraging broader student participation. Among the reasons they gave for this, three appeared frequently:

- Radicalism: Some of the activists recognise that the SM can be too radical for the rest of the student community. For instance, they admit the possibility that other students find the SM too ideological and defined by a specific political language. In the same way, as activists explain, non-participant students might not understand the usefulness of being politically organised and the value of the mobilizations.

- Closed groups: The second factor used by activists to explain its limited accessibility to the broader student movement is narrowly connected to the dynamic of the movement and the assemblies. These tend to be highly united groups despite the wide ideological variety, which often provokes what are considered as inbreeding internal dynamics. The members are used to sharing a common language, knowledge, life-styles, values, and consumerist patterns and acknowledge that this makes the inclusion of new members more difficult. And they become, especially in moments of high levels of activism, a group of close friends where the internal social relationships show a clear border between the inside and the outside of the group. However, activists are conscious of this and, from time to time, they try to be more ‘friendly’ to other non-active students. This is the impression of an activist of the Autonomous University of Barcelona:

I think that the socialization dynamic generates a quite closed environment despite the will of the activists to be open and maintain open spaces for all the students and so on, but the socialization in all those activist spaces is very complicated for many other students and it is difficult to take part in those spaces once they are consolidated and developed. (César)
The lack of time: What is fundamentally necessary to become active is time. And students normally have enough free time to take part in non-scholarly activities. However, activists do complain about the fact that university reforms are making it more complicated to have time to organise collectively, for instance, the recent changes of the higher education system implies continuous assessment. Moreover, the effect of the economic crisis and the increasing precariousness of the labour market are forcing many students (and activists) to work and study at the same time. These conditions are a big obstacle to organising assemblies with higher numbers of students.

Well, now with the implementation of the Bologna Process the lack of time is one of the major problems: it is mandatory to go to classes, you have practices throughout the academic year, exams, and you have to spend more time devoted to studies. This is not like before when you could go or not to a class and then go to the exam, you had much more freedom … and now if I have to pay the tuition fees which have increased incredibly, and my mother cannot pay all of it and then I have to look for a job and, of course, between work and studies you have to give up some things. (…) I do know of people who want to be in the movement but if in the mornings they are studying here and in the afternoons they are working because they need the money to pay the tuition fees … Some people are in this situation, people who last year were coming every week to the assembly and this year cannot. (Clara)

The public image of the movement

The public image of a social movement is a mixture between the real performances and actions it organises and the image given to it by the mass media and other political actors. Social movements do not have the capacity to control public information relating to their activities and demands and, therefore, they cannot autonomously construct a public image, which ultimately, is always a dispute between different actors. Thus, for instance, the stereotypical representation of the movement has an evident impact on the dynamic of the movement. In the case of PUDUP, of interest was observing the impact and likely influence of this public image on three groups: (1) those students who do not take part in the movement; (2) the political and academic institutions; and (3) other social movements. Regarding the rest of the students, PUDUP activists claim that the most common idea is that student activism is ‘not cool’.

But what there is and that is something recognized by most of the students is that student activists do different things that make them lead a different way of life, for instance, attending so many meetings and assemblies. This is generally perceived as a more boring life than the one taken by the average student. (César)
However, this idea might be changing in a shift that is extremely interesting. Activists have the impression that the perception of the student movement held by non-active students is changing precisely due to the effects of the current economic crisis and the implementation of austerity measures. Non-activist students are now much more receptive to the discourse, ideas and demands of the SM which are directed towards increasing support among the student community. Regardless of this, the image of activists in recent years is not as appreciated as it was, for instance, during the 60’s when they mobilised against the dictatorship. But this seems to be changing due to the twofold elements of the crisis and the cycle of protest, in particular after the Indignados protests.

Now the strikes (general or student) receive much more support, the demonstrations are bigger, the receptivity of our discourse and demands is much bigger, and students pay much more attention to our activities because now they share our concerns, because they are much more interested in the struggle than they were before. For instance, when we talk about the increasing of tuition fees I believe that at least 90 per cent of the students totally agree with us because they are radically opposed to this increase. (Clara)

Furthermore, activists have the impression that university and management’s attitudes towards the movement is mainly paternalistic, and doesn’t take into account their demands. In this sense, activists complain about university portrayals of activists (‘they are just bad students’, ‘they only want to disturb’…) and the general tendency to criminalize the protests.

I have found out how, in a first moment, the political and academic authorities had a view of us as merely dreamers and that we did not know what we wanted. After that, when we have been able to convince society, when we have discussed certain technical issues and so on, they have realized that we are not just young and naive, but then their reaction has been to treat us as a minority that only wants to fight against things that are impossible to stop. (Arnau)

Concerning the mass media’s image of the movement, some activists explain that the student movement is often presented as violent, anti-systemic and radical. Even so, they know the importance of the mass media and its capacity to disseminate their claims and discourse. On the other hand, activists admit that the effect of the crisis is provoking some changes in the image of the movement in the mass media. Now, very different social sectors are mobilizing against the effects of the crisis, and the students are just one movement more in a broader scenario of citizen mobilization. For this reason, they cannot be presented simply as violent or radicals but as part of a bigger movement against social cuts.

I think that (institutions) have always looked at us as a problem and they have not taken into consideration our efforts (…) They tend to portray us as anti-systemic. They have told us this several times but in a
contemptuous sense, not in an ideological one. They describe us as ‘hoodies’ or just as bad students. And I think it works and they have taken advantage of it to do that. (Laura)

Demands and framing of the movement

According to Benford and Snow (2000) framing is an active process of meaning construction which also implies social movement’s efforts to give order to reality and to construct a collective diagnosis of the situation they are confronting. In the case of the SM, it is common to find different kinds of framing against the privatisation process of education or the lack of democracy in university governing bodies and higher educational institutions. This framing has been used during diverse waves of student mobilizations in the last decades since the SM (around the wave of 1968) became an autonomous active political subject.

In the study of the SM of Barcelona, these classical elements are present, but it is important to ask whether the SM is building up new frames regarding the new circumstances characterized by the political and economic crisis in Spain. According to the interviewees, there seems to be a change in the concerns of the audience and in the sociological profile of the young people engaged within the student movement. Apparently, even though the predominant activist profile remains the classical one (very politicised, left-wing, high level of involvement, way of life determined by their activism), they are now incorporating new activists and becoming more inclusive. Among the profile of the interviewees, there are activists that share a well-defined ideology, especially among those activists who are student union members (SPEC and AEP) and of those that take part in the PUDUP. In these cases, activists define themselves as ‘communist’, ‘socialist’ or ‘anti-capitalist’ (or in the case of SEPC also as ‘independentist’). In the case of activists participating only in the space of assemblies, they tend to have a more open ideology which is much more eclectic where, precisely, the idea of assembly and the experience of radical/participatory democracy becomes more relevant.

With regard to the main frames and demands of the SM, two main concerns for the activists are identified. The first one refers to the critique of precariousness and difficulties in getting a proper job that young people face. This rejection of the increasingly poor material conditions of life is very present in activist discourses but also in the most visible public activities of the movement. For instance, the Twitter profile of the PUDUP is called @UniPrecaria, an obviously symbolic way to underline both the precariousness of students and job conditions of the many staff of the public universities. Thus, precariousness and unemployment (or the low expectations of getting a job in the future) seem to be a rational factor that can explain involvement in the SM. Moreover, some austerity measures might have increased this perception of the difficult situation. For instance, the rise of tuition fees (up to a 66 per cent of increase in 2012) has been the central critique of the SM and the

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8The demands of the PUDUP can be consulted here: http://reconstruimlapublica.wordpress.com/2012/04/27/reivindicacions-pudup.
issue that provoked the main protest during the fieldwork (October-December 2012). (...) and I am not thinking of big changes, but what is true is that last year we organised huge demonstrations against the rise of the tuition fees, but this year we have suffered the biggest increase. (Aldo)

Plate 1. Manifestation of the student movement in Barcelona (October 2012). Banner reads ‘Our education will not pay your debt. We don’t owe, we don’t pay’. Source: own elaboration.

The second concern is connected to the critique of privatisation in the higher education system and universities. The PUDUP is the Platform created with the goal of defending public universities and the main activities are oriented to this task. In this way, the discourse and framing of the movement and activists is explicitly focused against any kind of measure destined to privatize the management of universities.

**Political socialization**

It is known that all social movements are agents of political socialization (Fillieue, 2013). In the particular case of the SM, this feature is an even bigger determinant due to the young composition of the activists. For most of them, the involvement in the SM becomes the first experience of being involved in a political group and of doing any socio-political activity. In this sense, the SM experience is an important mechanism for an active learning citizenship, in addition to civic and political socialization. Moreover, the activists learn social skills and knowledge that can be useful for other types of participation and involvement in other groups (Vaquero, 2004:156).

Thus, from a micro or individual level approach, the SM has the capacity to influence and determine the political subjectivity of the activists through acquiring activist skills and accumulating ‘movementists’ experience. Therefore, this socialization is double (socio-
affective and political) in the sense that it works the space of social relations and political because it involves first experiences (for many) of political activism. In this way, the student activist socialization in Barcelona occurs in the interactive structures of the movement and in the complex field of relationships set in a particular organisation of the movement (Tejerina, 2010). And, frequently, it becomes a significant personal experience for the activists involved. This is, for instance, evident in the narrative of an activist who stated:

But then, you can see the impact of the movement at the level of friendships in the university because an activist tends to make friends within the movement. If you are every day in meetings, rallies, assemblies and you are not in the classrooms with the other students ... I think that you can find more complicity within the movement. And I also believe that student activism is an entrance gate towards other forms of participation. Here, for instance, there are people taking part in a student union and when they are outside university, they will become members of a political party. I am, for instance, finishing my studies and my world was the assembly of Humanities and now I need to find another activist space. I cannot just go to the workplace and then come back home and that is all.

(Joao)

Types of activism and repertoires of action

The high level of contentiousness - consisting of non conventional actions as one the main features of the movement – has been discussed already. During the fieldwork, this has been confirmed by attending different protest events organised by the PUDUP or the assembly of UB. Regular attendance of the assemblies allowed us to capture their centrality as the main space of the movement where all its ideological diversity was concentrated. In this sense, the assembly was understood also as an action - using the public space of the university. For this reason, assemblies were organised in the main entrance of the university to be as visible as possible to the rest of the students. The main dynamic of the assemblies was their informality and the different issues addressed in every assembly (from local problems in the faculty to general political issues of the country). Assemblies were also a reference (material and symbolic) for the movement in the sense that they ensured the will to build a democratic and open movement. Moreover, assemblies are understood by activists not only as a means to organise the movement, but also as a political goal in the development of the PUDUP.

On the other hand, the activism of the PUDUP is a combination of reflection and action. As regards reflection, assemblies and student unions organise several activities to collectively debate different problems, many of them focused on the cuts over education, but also about other topics linked to ecologism, feminism or international conflicts. However, reflection is also understood as a means for action, that is: the direct participation in protest events. Thus, activists participate actively in disruptive events whereby civil disobedience is the basic mechanism of mobilization. This use of civil disobedience means a real risk of being
involved in situations of repression or administrative fines. This risk is mostly accepted by activists. In this sense, even though the movement also uses conventional forms of participation (through representative elections in universities, petitions or public campaigns of complaint) the most visible activity of the movement is the one connected to disruptive and non-conventional events (actions during demonstrations such as burning a flag of the European Union, occupying banks inside universities, blockading the entrance of universities during strikes, etc.).

Finally, during the fieldwork, the movement also participated in other campaigns promoted by other social movements. This showed a clear will to cooperate under the idea of a broader social transformation. One of these cooperative actions was involvement in a demonstration called by all the ‘Citizen Waves’ in defence of public services where PUDUP took part as one of the movements defending public education. PUDUP was also very active in the General Strike on 7th November 2012, called by the main workers unions. On that day, student activists took the conflict into universities by trying to keep them closed and also participated in the different demonstrations, actions and activities around the strike. Much of these activities were highly disruptive (occupation of banks, non-authorized demonstrations and blockades of roads) showing the radicalism of many of the activists. In the same way, students were also present in demonstrations against ‘police repression’ during this general strike. This cooperation with workers was also visible in the solidarity campaign with the workers sacked from Telefonica (a Spanish telecommunication company) who were on hunger strike for some weeks during the autumn of 2012. This presents us with the idea that the activists of the PUDUP (and in general, the student movement) are part of a broader strategy to transform society. And it also shows the will of the PUDUP to build alliances and coalitions with other social movements of the city.

Values and ideologies of the SM

According to Smelser (1989), social movements can be divided between those oriented to values (i.e. social ideas and attitudes) and those oriented to norms (i.e. public policies). The first ones are a collective effort to restore, protect, modify or create values in the name of a widespread belief. Those movements oriented to norms are a collective effort oriented to restore, protect, modify or create norms in the name of a widespread belief. According to this classification, it seems difficult to locate the SM in one of these categories because the SM mobilizes around a broad variety of factors and causes. Thus, the SM tends to express values and demands for alternative norms at the same time. Therefore, it is common to discover that amongst the demands of the SM, there is the critique of laws and government measures associated with educational reforms (such as the student mobilizations against the Organic Law of Universities, the Bologna Process or, more recently, against the rise in tuition fees). Furthermore, the SM of Barcelona uses proposals, for instance, for another kind of life in modern society and develops critiques to the ‘society of spectacle’ and consumerism. Thus, in the PUDUP there is also a ‘dualist strategy’ (Cohen and Arato, 2000). On the one hand, the movement makes several demands of the political and university authorities and, on the other, it criticises the ruling cultural patterns, suggesting alternative ways of society
and life-styles. In this sense, the SM can be considered a political subject due to the political demands it incorporates. Furthermore, these demands are not just corporative but they also tend to be a universalizing will.

I believe that the SM has the capacity to turn corporate demands into political and economical demands and to unite them with public policies, to join the economical ones with the political and not just point out what is going on but point out deeper social changes. During the struggle against the Bologna Process everything was connected. When we talk about privatization we are also talking about the model, and when we talk about the lack of democracy in the university we are also referring to the outside democracy model. And now with the whole issue of governance, privatization and with the general attack over the public services we are also pointing out the political roots of the problem and that is the force of the movement. (Albert)

This wide range of demands and orientations refers to a complex movement, which constantly goes from the particular to the universal and vice-versa. However, the testimonies of student activists serve to reinforce the idea of the SM, not as a self-centred movement but as an expansive movement with a strong desire to achieve a deep social transformation. So, beyond particular campaigns and specific demands, the SM expresses the permanent aspiration of their members to place it in a broader contentious scenario linked to other social movements and where student activism is, sometimes, just a purely temporary contingency. In this particular way, an activist presents the notion and the transformative orientation of the movement:

Obviously, I have always understood the SM inside the general struggle of social movements. In that sense, I have always understood my struggle as a way to transform the University in order to transform the whole society. For me both transformations go together. But, where I am living the social contradictions are in the University and because of that where I have to develop my discourse and my political activism now is in the University. (Laura)

On the other hand, it is not possible to understand this kind of (student) activism without taking into consideration the role played by the ideological beliefs of activists. In the PUDUP (as a plural platform), a wide variety of ideological identities can be encountered, which provoke several internal debates and conflicts. Moreover in the Catalan context, the national conflict about the independence of Catalonia is also a cleavage of division for student activists, particularly between the different organisations of the movement due to the alternative view/identity on this issue of the two main student unions. Thus, one of the main goals of SEPC is to achieve the independence of the Catalan Countries. SEPC thus tends to cooperate only with independent student unions of other nations and regions of Spain whereas AEP (who can be considered mainly federalist or in favour of the right to self-
determination) tend to participate in platforms and coordination structures at a State level with other student groups. This double strategy regularly creates problems within the whole movement.

Therefore, ideologies and the political identities associated with them are not only particularly relevant in the configuration of the whole movement, but also in the worldview of activists. Hence, student activism in the PUDUP is highly ideological, especially in the student unions (SEPC and AEP, as explained above), whereas in the assemblies it is much more vague. In any case, this ideological framework has a source outside the movement. It means that the SM does not have the ability to build a student ideology/identity (as other movements do, such as feminism or ecologism) and, therefore, the ideology of activists is frequently built outside the experiences generated within the movement. An experienced activist explains this as follows:

I think that the daily student activists see their struggle beyond the SM and the student issue. At least, most of them. And they conceive this struggle as a political struggle against the system, against the capitalist system but from very diverse ideological approaches each one with their nuances, and this is even clearer in recent years due to the situation we are suffering (...). I think that the student activist does not identify just with student activism but is identified with a more political activism. In other words, the high profile activist does not build a student activist identity because they immediately have other identities that probably were previous and more determinant. (Aldo)

**Legacy and memory**

The interest in collective memory is, for some time now, a central issue in social movement studies, especially in those focused on the collective identity (Polleta and Jasper, 2001). Thus, the collective memory – understood as a memory shared by a particular community or group (Zamponi, 2013) – is a key-issue to help understand the dynamic of the movements and the contentious political processes they develop. This memory is both the ‘result and the tool’ in the construction of new mobilizations (Zamponi, 2013). In fact, this collective memory cannot be understood simply as the automatic outcome of a particular protest event but as the ‘specific outcome of a work of memory’ (Zamponi, 2013). This work of memory is always contentiously derived from the plural interpretation of the events of the past, in what has a direct impact over the public discourse of a movement and also over the public image of the movement itself. In the case of the SM, the permanent reconstruction of the movement - due to its cyclic and non-continuous dynamic - becomes an empty memory and, moreover, is a problem in constructing a high profile collective identity. Cycle after cycle of student protests gives activists the feeling of a return of the movement and a deactivation of a potential common memory. This leads activists to complain about the absence of a narrative of their own history of the movement.
For instance, very few student activists nowadays know the role of the SM during the Francoist period or know the strikes or the ‘86-‘87 or the struggle against the war or against the LOU ... or thousands of struggles ... Referring to historical political events in a more romantic way ... maybe yes, they know a little bit more. But in general we are a movement that knows very few things about itself. (Aldo)

I think that the lack of memory is due to the fact that students are not here for more than four, five or six years and, then, we make the same mistakes again, we repeat the same analysis made five years ago and I believe that is extremely negative because we should learn from the mistakes of the past. Therefore, the lack of a historical chronology about the evolution of the movement leads us to repeat the same mistakes. (Arnau)

This lack of memory also leads to several organisational problems such as the necessity to repeatedly discuss which is the most convenient organisational structure of the movement or the fear of not making the same mistakes as in previous cycles of mobilization\(^9\). For the most experienced activists interviewed, this lack of memory provokes a feeling of ‘eternal return’ and the repetition of old debates. And this is not a minor issue because, according to the activists, it is a factor that explains the slowness of the movement when taking collective decisions or deciding the tactics of the strategy the movement should follow and, finally, the low capacity to succeed in terms of achieving their political goals. However, isolated elements of a common memory can be found where the importance of the legacy is still present. For instance, as mentioned above, there are some events that still play a role in the mobilizations. Thus, the event of the ‘Caputxinada’ of March 1966, when the Student Democratic Union of the Barcelona University was created in the grip of Franco’s dictatorship, is still a symbol of democratic resistance for the movement and it is repeatedly used as a legitimizing action to claims for a ‘democratic university and society’\(^10\). On the other hand, in the student demonstrations, the references to Franco’s dictatorship are especially visible when trying to connect the old times of the dictatorship to, according to the activists, the authoritarianism of politics on education and the austerity measures.

\(^9\) This explains the short life of the Platforms oriented to coordinate the movement or the tendency to face many internal long debates and controversies.

\(^10\) In February 2013 an open assembly of students, teachers and administrative staff of the Catalan public universities (second ‘Caputxinada’) organised by the PUDUP took place in the same church of the Caputxins in a clear and symbolic attempt to use the event of the past to legitimize the current struggle for a public and democratic university. A video calling for the assembly can be seen here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YZLL7wsDAM&hd=1.

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Plate 2: Demonstration of the PUDUP (October 2012). Banner reads: ‘We are the grandchildren of the workers who you could never exterminate’. Source: Own elaboration

In this sense, despite historical memory not being a mobilizing factor for the movement, activists accept the importance of the past, especially for the configuration of their own ideas and ideology. Thus, many of them recognise the attraction of some of the classical myths of the Left (Spanish Civil War, the resistance against Franco’s dictatorship, Russian Revolution, May ‘68, etc.). However, it is difficult to find a narrative that connects the current dynamic of the movement and this activism of the past. Anyway, what can be found (particularly in those cases of activists also involved in political groups or with family stories marked by repression during the dictatorship or the Civil War) is a general discourse that claims that nowadays, activism and activists are the direct heirs of the struggles of the past. This also may be affected by a critical view of the Democratic Transition process that was unable to break with some sectors of the dictatorship.

**Attitudes towards democracy and institutions**

The last issue to highlight for this report is related to the attitudes and opinions of the activists towards democracy and political institutions. This topic has been highlighted from two different approaches: firstly, to know more about the specific ideas on democracy expressed by the activists; and, secondly, to explore how these ideas are connected to the activist’s experiences and if their activism has contributed to changing their previous ideas towards democracy and institutions.

Regarding the first point, activists show a huge disappointment with the quality of representative democracy, the governing parties and the role played by the institutions (including the ruling bodies of the universities) in Catalonia and, more broadly, in Spain. Most of them argue that it is not a real democracy due to the control of the economy (and
market) over politics. Some of them claim that there is no democracy at all and reject the idea itself of representation. This idea is more common among students that are only in the assemblies where a libertarian view is more widespread than in the student unions where the participation in the institutions is understood, by all their members, as a means to represent the interests of students.

Despite these differences, what is common for the movement and is shown in its public discourse is that the existing lack of democracy, according to them, is increasing social inequality.

The public education system is under the control of the financial system and it is not responding to social needs and it is only under the market’s desires and oriented to resolve the needs of the capitalist system. From the PUDUP we radically oppose this model and want a transformation of the educational system as a space for the common creation of knowledge and for human and social development. (…) We want an educational system oriented to create a society based on equality, freedom, democracy and social justice. (PUDUP Statement from the PUDUP calling for a strike in Universities, October 2012)

In the same way, the interviewed activists do not think that institutions (both academic and political) are really useful in order to achieve deep changes in society. Activists that take part in some of the representation bodies of the university say they do it in a sceptical way. Others, by contrast, refuse the idea of being part of any kind of representational structure and participate in elections. However, the majority of the student movement and the PUDUP in general are in favour of taking part in the university institutions (by student unions or assemblies) but as a strategy to undermine and criticise these institutions.

Finally, regarding the effect of student activism on the ideas towards democracy and institutions, a relatively common discourse among the activists was identified. Thus, student activists tend to recognize that the activist experience has been very important in changing their previous ideas on democracy. For some, the involvement in the PUDUP (more precisely, in their organisations, both assemblies and student unions) has been just a chance to confirm or reinforce their negative opinions or perceptions about the current democratic system in Catalonia and in Spain in general. However, others claim that their ideas - before they were involved in the movement - were more positive (or at least, some said, more ‘naive’) with respect to the democratic liberal system and the representative institutions. This evolution, according to them, is caused in part by the dynamic of the mobilization i.e. the intensive emotional dimension of mobilizations, the experience of suffering direct or indirect repression, the feeling of failure of not achieving political goals, the closed or restricted access to institutions and the unwillingness of the university authorities to negotiate or their rejection of proposal that come from the movement. On the other hand, the overall climate of political disaffection among the Spanish and Catalonian youth might have contributed to this shift in the evaluation of current democracy.

I think that when I started to be involved in student activism I still had a certain
confidence in being able to transform things through institutions or, at least, that institutions were agents of change. And now I have no confidence in the institutions that are or maybe actors for radical change (...) I think that the movement has helped me to understand and today's society as a society which is developed mainly through conflict, in which the interests of one part of society are not the interests and the needs of most of society and in that sense - and perhaps this is a question that I had already clear when I entered in the movement and maybe I entered in the movement for this - but over the years activism has helped me to understand better how society works, how social relations are organised ... (César)

4. Conclusions

In this research, the patterns of student youth activism in the context of the SM of Barcelona, coordinated through the PUDUP, have been analysed. Although some of the characteristics highlighted are exclusive to the SM due to its specific features, this case helps to understand the patterns of youth activism, and some general tendencies on youth socio-political engagement.

The following hypothesis regarding the PUDUP was formulated in conclusion:

a) Physical space: Universities (Campus and faculties) are social spaces where large numbers of young people congregate. This means that students have the chance to meet easily, almost daily, and organise themselves collectively. This, in turn, facilitates the necessary phase of ‘recruitment’ and makes simpler political socialization by allowing a more natural aggregation of activists to the movement and reinforcing the dynamic (internal and external) of the SM (Fernández and McAdam 1988; Bidix y Park 2008; Crossley 2008, Toscano 2011).

b) Time as a resource for action: A key factor for the organisation of protests and student activities is time. Thus, non-alienated time is a prerequisite for involvement in any kind of social participation. This has been demonstrated by several academic studies (Klandermens and Oegema, 1987; McAdam, 1986), which have concluded that available time reduces the costs of participation (Verba et al, 1995). In fact, time available is one (among other variables frequently used to explain the increased presence of young people in social movements (Funes, 2006). In the case of SM, it is clear that the availability of free time and the less time required by work or family responsibilities is a resource available to the movement. This time provides an opportunity to self-organise, make a diagnosis and a common discourse, and to agree on the repertoire of actions to deploy. This explains, for instance, the high activity of the most active nucleus of the SM and its capacity to be very easily activated.

c) Shared and common subcultures: subcultures refer to that set of values and lifestyles that allow a collective recognition that facilitates a common understanding of the world and a
predisposition towards collective action (Tejerina, 2010). These possibilities, however, can give rise to greater solidarity and unity that would give, in turn, increased organisational capacity to mobilize. Thus, the sociability of youth groups tends to be more intense thanks to the common and shared experiences at a particular life stage. Furthermore, one of the common characteristics of activists involved in the student movement (in the higher education system) is that they have or they will have both a high level of education and socialise in an atmosphere that encourages more non-material reflection on the ideals of society and citizenship. Moreover, it is known that in general, a high level of education is a good predictor of any political activity (among others, Verba et al. 1995). This sociality is reinforced by the fact that students participate under common interests, shared concerns, a similar socialization and, ultimately, a specific subcultures. A subculture that can be expressed in interests, attitudes, lifestyles, aesthetic or ideological worldviews that serve to interpret the world in a common way.

On the one hand, the type of activism developed in the student movement coordinated by the PUDUP has been highlighted. As demonstrated, the predominant kind of activism in is very intense and the relevance of the (leftist) political ideas are essential. Thus, the activism of the students who are more involved in the movement is not ‘liquid’, simply aesthetic or based on momentary emotions. On the contrary, the activist commitment can be described as intensive, absorbing and capable of influencing the life development of participants. In this sense, this activism is supported by the diversity of ideologies and ideas existing within the movement. Hence, the dynamic of the movement is narrowly connected to the ideas and the diversity of the worldviews of the activists. This also leads to a movement (internal and external) with quite contentious dynamics. For instance, very often the movement undergoes internal conflicts between the different sectors around the strategy, the organisational forms or the common public discourse. Regarding this, and according to the activists, this activism is located in the centre of an activist’s life, conditioning the present, the understanding of the past and the expectations on the future. Activism is thus not an isolated dimension in their lives but something that provides a meaning and a sense of life.

On the other hand, student activism is based on material demands. The precarious situation of the youth population together with the deterioration of public education reinforces this political commitment. Nowadays, in an era of economic recession and implementation of austerity measures in Spain and Catalonia, the concern about life conditions is increasingly important for youth, including those with high-level studies. This, for student activists, feeling of being condemned to a ‘no future’ scenario can only be reversed by radical and collective political action. However, the precarious material conditions are precisely making it even harder to get involved in an intensive process of collective action. At the same time, the achievements of the movement are, at the very least, uncertain. Consequently, most of the activists share a feeling of frustration and defeat because, despite their huge efforts, they are not successful in achieving their political goals or forcing the different (university, regional or State) governments to roll back the economic cuts. Despite this political failure of the movement, activists take into account other aspects that are provided by their activism. Thus, they give a great deal of importance to the space of socialization where they can
develop new skills, or being part of a social group where they can experience alternative ways of life according to their political ideas. Finally, democracy is a key issue in this movement. Firstly, (the lack of) democracy is one of the main complaints of the activists. The concern about how current democracy works is something shared by all activists, independently of their ideologies or their student group that they belong to. They tend to have a concept of democracy, not as a procedural mechanism to elect the representatives, but as a system where everything can be decided collectively and where social inequality is not compatible with democracy. In this sense, the dominant notion of democracy for the students of the PUDUP is the one related to a radical and participatory democracy, where the economy is under the control of politics and society. Also, concerns about the quality of democracy inside the movement during the internal conflicts and, in addition, concerns around the problems of organising it were identified. In this sense, there is an evident attempt to construct a democratic movement where assemblies are the main spaces to debate and take decisions. However, the general wish to build a radical democratic movement sometimes reflects the diversity and plurality of understandings of democracy that coexist in the movement. Thus, debates and conflicts about democracy in the movement tend to be one of the main obstacles in the dynamics of the PUDUP. This expresses, precisely, the importance of democracy for activists who consider non-negotiable the democratic character of the movement, despite the disadvantages involved by the slowness of participatory and horizontal methods of taking decisions.

5. Future analysis

In this ethnographic research, some key dimensions of social movement studies are not incorporated and, at least two of them, may be particularly interesting for future analysis of the activism of young people. On the one hand, one dimension refers to the outcomes of these movements. And, on the other hand, a second suggests the importance of observing activism trajectories in mid to long-term perspective.

a) Outcomes of the student movement

Probably, the outcomes of social movements is the least studied dimension in this field, especially because of the associated methodological problems (Ibarra 2000; Casquette 1998; Calle 2007; Giugni et al. 2013) and the fact that the outcome is a multidimensional concept (there are very different outcomes from those political to cultural and social ones). In this research, this dimension has not been a focus, although it is essential to take into account the impacts (in terms of culture, societal aspects and, particularly, public policies) of social movements. Future analysis will focus on this topic, trying to inquire about the real impacts of student activism, not only at an individual or meso (movement) level, but also at a socio-political macro level. In this way, more could be known about the outcomes of youth political participation in social movements and about its capacity to achieve the demands and goals that motivate protest actions. For instance, it might be interesting to know if the anti-austerity movements led by young people are able to modify the current austerity measures.
b) Trajectories of youth activism

The other dimension not studied here but of interest for future research, is the one related to the activist trajectories of the students involved in the movement and in an important period of personal political socialization. Even though it has been established that SM acts as a first agent for political socialization and opens the door to other activist experiences, it would be necessary to know more about the future career (in terms of political or social commitments) of its activists. For instance, more could be known about the intersection between different dimensions: the potential transformations of the ideas on democracy and politics, the possible process of demobilization (Fillieu 2013), the interaction between work and activism, etc. And finally, how precariousness and the economic crisis are affecting the possibilities of activism and the chances to be active in a movement in the long term.

Within the MYPLACE project, the following themes arise from this study that might be productively pursued across other cases and data sets:

a) Comparison of the different profiles of activism (through interviews) between the three ethnographies of WP7.

b) Comparison of the activist profile and ordinary young people (captured in WP4 and WP5). This is facilitated by the use of a schedule for interviewing in the ethnographic studies that drew on similar schedules for earlier WPs.

c) Gender comparison on activism in the student movement. Internal comparison between men and women in order to understand their type of activism and differences.

6. References


Research, University of Minnesota Press: Minnesota.


UPF (2012), La participación estudiantial en la UPF, Consell Social UPF: Barcelona.


## 7. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Table 2. Socio-demographic profile of respondents

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Appendix 2: Index of quoted organisations

- AEP: Asociación de Estudiantes Progresistas (‘Progressive Student Association’)
- CIU: Convergència i Unió (‘Convergence and Unity’, Conservative Catalan nationalist party)
- PUDUP: Plataforma Unitaria Defensa Universidad Pública (‘Unitary Platform for the Defence of the Public University’)
- SDEUB: Sindicato Democrático de Estudiantes de la Universidad de Barcelona (‘Democratic Union of the student of the University of Barcelona’)
- SEPC: Sindicat d’Estudiants dels Països Catalans (‘Student Union of Catalanian Countries’)