

## **Learning by participating in social movements: Ethnographic research in Madrid (Spain)**

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*We learn and teach democracy by making democracy (Freire, 1997, p. 99)*

*Individuals learn to participate by participating (Pateman, 2012, p. 10)*

*Learning in social movements has been studied using different approaches, such as critical pedagogy, public pedagogy and adult education (Ollis, & Hamel-Green, 2015). While in the field of formal education, the focus is usually on 'education for citizenship' or 'citizenship education' (Schugurensky, 2006, 2010; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Losito, & Agrusti, 2016; Tawil, 2013), educational studies that focus on social movements can be classified into two large unrelated groups (Niesz, Korora, Walkuski, & Foot, 2018). One explores the influence of social movements in formal education, with diverse approaches and little connection among them. The other studies learning in social movements, mostly inserted in the field of adult education and that form a corpus of interrelated and expanding knowledge. However, there are still few works that arise from an idea of complementarity or that have a double focus on citizen education that leads to activism, and activism as an*

*educational process (Davies, Evans, & Peterson, 2014). Our previous studies<sup>1</sup> arose from the idea of complementarity and an understanding that in order to formulate proposals for citizenship education, the object of study must be how citizenship and participation learning happens. That is, trying to understand the learning experiences of activists and the learning that takes place in spaces of participation, such as social movements, to formulate educational proposals (Gil-Jaurena, Ballesteros, Mata & Sánchez-Melero, 2016; Melero, 2018).*

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## Introduction

Our theoretical approach to social movements, although eclectic, emanates from our educational approach. We understand education as a critical and communicative praxis built intersubjectively between diverse actors in continuous transformation (Abdallah-Preteille, 2001; Aguado, 2009; Aguado, Mata, & Gil-Jaurena, 2017; Mata, 2013). Therefore, the study of social movements must also be made from relational and communicative positions, such as the framework proposed by Habermas (1984; 1987). According to the formulation of civil society that Cohen and Arato make from Habermas' theory (Arato, 1999; Arato & Cohen, 1999; Cohen & Arato, 1994)<sup>2</sup>, we understand civil society as differentiated from the state and the economy, but with the ability to influence both systems. The social movements we study are groups of this civil society that pursue social justice and democratic deepening through actions aimed at exerting such influence on the other two systems. For that, they use different means and strategies, such as confrontation, autonomous action and / or dispute of meanings.

However, this study is not intended to contrast the theoretical frameworks on civil society and social movements, but focusses on understanding the mechanisms of learning, always varied and diverse (Niesz *et al.*, 2018), which happen in struggle, through struggle and for struggle (Foley, 1999). In this article, we focus on praxis and on the construction of meanings, as well as the method of decision-making and the construction of agreements in social movements, as part of a process of individual and collective learning and transformation. We

aim to make visible a change in the pedagogical element within social movements that turns educational aspects of movement actions into both a strategy and a result of social struggle.

## **Defining learning in social movements**

To focus on learning in social movements implies a recognition of them as schools of participation and active citizenship (Melero *et al.*, 2018; Çakmaklı, 2015, 2017) but above all, to recognise them as educational and knowledge building spaces (Choudry, 2009, 2013, 2015; Cox, 2014; Delgado, 2011a, 2011b; Foley, 1999, 2001). Further, this recognition allows an expansion, and also a challenge, to the understanding of how, where and when knowledge, education and learning are produced (Choudry, 2009).

Social movements build new knowledge through the management of critical reflection skills and transformative action, always collectively (Cox, 2014). The first—critical reflection—generates controversies and challenges the limits of institutions and the values that sustain them (Delgado, 2011a, 2011b). The second—actions of resistance and rebellion—focus on the transformation of injustices and power relations (Hall, 2009). The new knowledge produced goes beyond the limits of social movements and extends to people and groups that do not participate directly in them (Hall, 2009; Hall & Turray, 2006). Luque (2003) calls a discursive function of social movements: the creation and dissemination of new knowledge and the capacity to transform social organisation in multiple ways: from creation of new frameworks for the analysis of social reality (Cox, 2014) to educational legislation (Levinson, 2011), through to the redefinition of concepts such as public pedagogy (Williams, 2015).

In addition to builders of new knowledge, social movements are educational spaces. Our own research (Melero, 2018) confirms the elements that have been highlighted by various authors who have worked on this issue. Learning in social movements is complex because it combines and interrelates multiple characteristics: it is incidental, informal, embedded in practice, tacit and not always recognised (Foley, 1999, 2001); it is also unforeseen, since despite being evolutionary and cumulative, it is not linear (Foley, 1999); for this reason, and in relation to learning, actions sustained in time are as important as immediate ones (Ollis, 2011).

Choudry (2013) pointed out that the study of learning in social movements should privilege the relational and collective elements. This does not imply the alienation of the individual, but the need to take learning into account from a collective rather than an individual point of view (Kilgore, 1999). Similarly, understanding the educational aspects of social movements requires understanding the values and approaches to social justice that activist groups hold (Kilgore, 1999). In addition, different forms and speeds of learning have been observed among the 'lifelong' and 'circumstantial' activists (Ollis, 2011); new activists learn from the model of the most experienced ones (Ollis, 2011; Vieta, 2014). All these elements, in addition to the space and the organisation itself (Choudry, 2015), are interrelated when referring to learning and knowledge in social movements.

## **Methodology**

The empirical research was conducted through an ethnographic approach (Del Olmo, 2008; Goetz & LeCompte, 1988; Sabirón, 2006), which aims to understand educational processes from the social reality of the people who make and build them. This approach requires observation and direct participation by the researcher in the natural contexts of the case studies over long periods of time (Del Olmo, 2008). The ethnographic approach allows different positions or roles of the researcher, which fluctuate between observation and participation. In addition, the prolonged period of time makes this role evolve throughout the fieldwork. In our case, the researcher (first author of this paper) started from an observer position with very limited participation, and evolved to a much more participatory position including involvement and collaboration in different activities of the social movements studied, such as performing small organisational tasks, providing material for activities and collaborating in their organisation. Subsequently, he took a more activist role by positioning himself in defence of the citizens' interests in the institutional process of the market. The researcher developed his own learning process (Melero, 2018).

The fieldwork was carried out by the first author of this paper within the frame of his doctoral thesis, co-supervised by the second author, from September 2015 to April 2017, including access to and exit from the field phases (a graphic of the fieldwork stages is available at <https://figshare.com/s/1250897f56253b17a0d3>). In the study process, the researcher

played the role of both researcher and participant activist in the selected social movements. The main ethnographic research tools, *participant observation* and *directed interview*, were used as data collection and construction tools (Del Olmo, 2008).

Participant observation was developed in four participation spaces in the city of Madrid (capital of Spain, with more than 3 million inhabitants). The spaces were selected in two consecutive processes: (a) an intentional selection of significant cases, and (b) a process of access derived from previous cases. We explain each of these selection processes below, and Figure 1 presents a graphic summary. It shows how these spaces (particularly three of them) are not discreet, but interrelated.

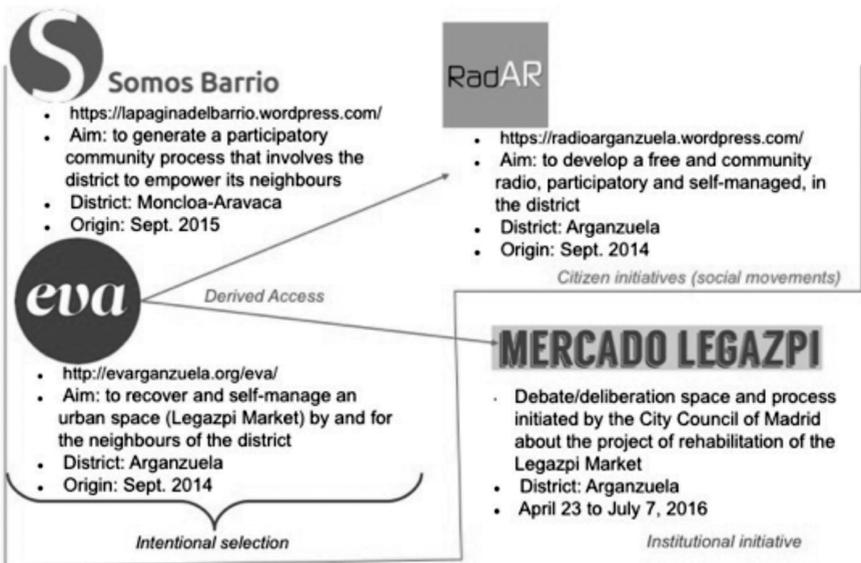


Figure 1: Case studies grouped in relation to the selection process

a) For the intentional selection of significant case studies, we searched for social movements and participation spaces promoted by the citizens themselves and with an activity focussed on the transformation of their community. The aim was to analyse diverse cases, so they were chosen from different geographical areas in the city, from different networks of activism and with different composition and trajectories. The selected cases in the intentional process were *Somos Barrio* ('We are Neighbourhood') and EVA-

*Espacio Vecinal Arganzuela* ('Arganzuela Neighbourhood Space'), which are described in the next section.

- b) Case selection derived from previous ones was based on the criteria of opportunity and interest. The qualitative approaches, in which the research phases influence each other (Rodríguez, Gil, & García, 1996), facilitate the incorporation of new case studies. From EVA, we had the opportunity to access two new cases that complemented the research in two different directions. During the fieldwork, a project to create a participatory free community radio emerged, which complemented the two previously selected cases with a 'new' social movement in the field of free and community media. Also, the City Council of Madrid responded to the demands of EVA regarding the use of the Old Market building as a space for debate and joint deliberation, to negotiate with EVA on the remodelling and rehabilitation of the building. This space, promoted by the Administration, served as a contrast between two very different types of citizen participation: by *irruption* or by *invitation* (Ibarra, 2008). As opposed to the studied social movements that take the initiative to *irrupt* into the public space to face or solve a perceived problem or need; the institutional space is promoted by the institution, which invites participation in order to legitimise the decisions made on a situation or conflict. The cases of derived access were *Radio Arganzuela* and *Espacio Institucional Mercado de Legazpi* ('Institutional Space Legazpi Market'), which are described in the next section.

To complete the participant observation, 29 interviews with 30 key informants (one was a double interview) were conducted. It was an intentional selection of informants, with diversity as the criterion. From each of the case studies, we selected activists and participants with different ways of behaving, understanding and showing participation and activism. Thus, men and women with different ages, positions and influence in the group, etc. were selected. The distribution varies according to the characteristics of each case study. In total 15 men and 15 women between the ages of 25 and 78 were interviewed (the characteristics of the interviewees are available at <https://figshare.com/s/7f5c396fb7a6ffab50de>).

### ***The cases and their context***

*Whether in Spain, in the United States, in Europe, in Brazil, in South Korea and in multiple countries, we have witnessed for some time broad popular mobilizations against the current system of political parties and parliamentary democracy under the slogan "They do not represent us!". It is not a rejection of democracy, but of liberal democracy as it exists in each country, in the name of "real democracy," as the 15-M movement proclaimed in Spain. An evocative term that invites us to dream, deliberate and act, but that goes beyond the established institutional limits*

(Castells, 2017, p. 12)

The social mobilisations that took place in Spain in May 2011, the so-called '15 de Mayo [May]' or 15M movement<sup>3</sup>, are part of the citizen mobilisations that happened in different parts of the world at the beginning of this century (Castells, 2012). As the Castells (2017) quote states, there were mobilisations that demanded more and better democracy, claiming to increase the capacity of action and decision of the population in the governments of their countries. 15M had effects throughout Spain and a change of mentality in the citizens, who seemed to realise that they could and should do things that they did not believe they could before (Taibo, 2011). 15M produced a democratic awareness that implied a transition from representation to appropriation, and led to a conception of an expanded democracy beyond its electoral and institutional conceptualisation (Subirats, 2015).

From May to September 2011, the 15M movement evolved from occupying the central squares of the main Spanish cities to creating circles of activists linked to the different neighbourhoods and municipalities. This shift is known as the decentralisation of the movement or the two waves of the movement (Alaminos-Chica & Penalva-Verdú, 2016). The whole process had different effects depending on the pre-existing neighbourhood organisations in each territory. In any case, after the decentralisation of 15M, activist spaces and social movements were created, reactivated and/or strengthened, whose struggles are centred around two related axes: a) social justice, understood as the struggle against exclusion and inequality; and b) new

forms of governance, understood as the development of methods of direct and participatory democracy (Pradel, & García, 2018). 15M also gave rise to the appearance of new partisan organisations of very diverse natures (Rodríguez López, 2016) that try to occupy the electoral and institutional space, recovering the feeling of a lack of representativeness that citizens have in regards to the old political parties.

In the context of the city of Madrid, as well as in other municipalities, these organisations reaped considerable success in the local elections in May 2015. This success did not transfer in the same way at the national level, perhaps because the municipal models were closer to the mobilisation of 15M in terms of horizontality, decentralisation and collaboration (Rodríguez López, 2016). These local successes brought about the emergence of the so-called ‘governments of change’, which in turn created access to municipal institutions of many activists from the social movements. In the city of Madrid, the ‘government of change’ broke the tradition of the previous right-wing governments that had maintained a relationship of ignorance, if not confrontation, with these types of movements for social justice (Díaz, & Lourés, 2018). This change of position filled many of the activists and social movements—both those that emerged from 15M and those that existed previously—with hope and dreams. However, the dreams were gradually lost in the transformative capacity of the ‘governments of change’<sup>4</sup>.

In this context of the Madrid social movements after 15M, and in this moment of hope that was gradually lost due to an institutional conquest that was not having the expected effects, is when we developed the fieldwork for our research in the social movements and spaces we describe below (see also figure 1):

—*Somos Barrio* (<https://lapaginadelbarrio.wordpress.com>): social movement linked to the northern district of Madrid—Moncloa-Casa de Campo—and specifically to three neighbourhoods in this district: Argüelles, Casa de Campo and Ciudad Universitaria. *Somos Barrio* aimed to improve the quality of life in these neighbourhoods by promoting the empowerment and participation of their neighbours. At the time of the first contact with them, *Somos Barrio* had been working as a group for a few months, although most of the participants came from previous groups originated after the neighbourhood decentralisation of the 15M movement in Madrid. During the

observation, they were an active group of 10–12 people, mostly women aged 40 and older.

—*EVA-Espacio Vecinal Arganzuela* (<https://www.evarganzuela.org>): neighbourhood platform integrated by different social movements, neighbourhood associations and individual activists, organised around getting the Madrid City Council to yield the Old Fruit and Vegetables Market<sup>5</sup>, also called Mercado de Legazpi, for local use and self-management. Through this community self-management, EVA pursues social and cultural development of the Arganzuela district, southern district of Madrid, through citizen participation. When they were contacted for this study, they had been active for one year. They are a very broad and diverse group, as well as fluid and with a large presence in networks, so it is difficult to specify the groups limits since the number and composition change from meeting to meeting (we were in meetings with more than 30 people and others with only 6 or 7). Also, EVA combines face-to-face participation with participation through digital media. The groups' diversity is one of its most interesting features: it has veteran activists together with others for whom EVA is their first experience in social movements; it is mixed in terms of gender and, although the average age is around 35 years, it ranges from 25 to 78 years old participants.

—*Radio Arganzuela (RadAr)* (<https://radioarganzuela.wordpress.com>): arising from a presentation in an assembly of EVA and an appeal by e-mail, this project aims to create a free radio in the district of Arganzuela. It is therefore an incipient project during the research, with different people who are incorporated or leaving as the project progresses. Its composition was not consolidated during the study.

—*Espacio Institucional Mercado Legazpi* (web currently closed): developed by the City Council of Madrid through a group of architects who served as facilitators. Six sessions were held during the months of April to July 2016 with the declared objective of 'co-creation and co-management' on the future of the Legazpi Market. Actually, it was a process of consultation and non-binding deliberation on the rehabilitation project of the building that the City Council planned to carry out. The number of participants decreased during the sessions.

## **Interpretation of results**

The qualitative analysis of the field notes and interviews has led to

interesting findings with regards to learning, knowledge construction and transformation in social movements and participation spaces. We present the results in three sections and illustrate the interpretation with quotations from the informants and from the observation diary.

### ***Learning in social movements: praxis and construction of meaning***

Learning is an element that is present in the observed social movements. On the one hand, the citizens involved in these spaces change and learn; that is, they get transformed. They also try to change the world they live in; that is, they try to transform it. Many of the interviewees made direct reference to learning when asked about the social movements in which they participate:

*It is learning, that's what I see; I see EVA as an apprenticeship of something big. (62♀ )*

These two aspects of learning—self-transformation and transformation of the world—are related to two tools that social movements use in a pedagogical way: 1) praxis and 2) the creation and dispute of meanings.

- 1) We use the term *praxis* in its Freirean sense, which refers to the union of reflection and action on the world to transform it (Freire, 1980 [1970]). That learning is produced by praxis is evident in the observation of new activists. When people begin their participation in social movements, they learn through a combination of observation, action and reflection:

*At the beginning, despite all that I talk (laughs), (I) was to listen, listen and see a bit, to learn from the people who had been in the neighbourhood for a long time [...] at the beginning I was also confused because I did not know if I would be able to contribute to something. But I come here and see, and if there is something to do, I do not know, if there is anything or any activity to be prepared, then I prepare it; then for that part the action for me was easier, easier to participate. (42♀ )*

It is therefore learning embedded in practice (Foley, 1999) as much as it is the result of observation and reflection. Learning is produced by experimentation that involves putting actions into practice and reflecting on the successes and mistakes:

*For me there have been many mistakes that we have made, but that is what I tell you, we have to fail many times in order to get experience and to be able to know. "Hey look, the other time this happened to us, so now we have to do this because we do not want it to happen again", we learn from everything. (38♀ )*

This means placing importance on direct experimentation, that in social movements also has a clear collective component that facilitates learning. Along with the observation of the actions of other more experienced activists who serve as models (Ollis, 2011), we must also add the confidence that comes from knowing that we have the support of others. Mutual support allows new roles and tasks to be put into practice and therefore develops and improves useful skills for activists:

*I try to make the activities open and make the people participate because I think it's a huge learning opportunity for everyone, you know? To be leaders, not to be, to support [...] you have to change roles too, so if now you have done it, now I do this, but do not tell me how I have to do it, but help me and guide me. You can give me some advice, but let me handle it because I think the beauty of EVA is that many people are losing their fear of even facing to organise things; that's what's good, that's empowerment, that's where I see the empowerment and the power of EVA: learning. (44♀ )*

- 2) Therefore, learning in these observed social movements occurs in *praxis*, that produces transformations of both the participants themselves and the world around them. And this is where the second tool orientated to the transformation of reality comes into play: *the creation and dispute of meanings*. During the fieldwork, we observed how social movements are aware of the importance of transmitting ideas and questioning existing meanings. There is an awareness that the struggle for social change is played on both the material and discursive levels:

*What do we intend in Somos Barrio? Man, exactly the same that we intended with the assembly of the 15M: to mobilize people and for people to have knowledge of where they live, and for citizens to know what is happening and the problems that exist in society [...] to seed your concerns and what you want to do*

*and what you think about citizenship and life, transmit it a little to others. (78Q )*

The social awareness processes carried out by social movements collectively constitute the attempt to transmit knowledge and their own point of view in the struggle for what they consider beneficial for the common good. During the fieldwork, we observed these processes of awareness on several occasions. An illustrative example occurred in the confrontation around the Institutional Space of the Legazpi Market. On the one hand, the Madrid City Council wanted to legitimise its project of remodelling the Legazpi Market building to use it as administrative offices, whilst EVA wanted to transform the Market building for community use (and self-management), and also were trying to avoid what they considered an attack on the industrial heritage of the city. EVA put different strategies into play which combined training and dissemination actions about the Legazpi Market as industrial heritage, together with the active resistance in the sessions of the Institutional Space. This way, EVA managed to position the meaning of industrial heritage at the centre of the debate and thereby eliminate one of the most aggressive interventions the institutional project had planned for the building: the elevation of the central square, that was essential to be able to turn the Market building into offices. In other words, by positioning the architectural importance of the building as a heritage site of the city on the discursive level, EVA delegitimised the possibility of making certain structural modifications to the building. This made it impossible to carry out the remodelling project as planned by the City Council.

However, praxis and construction of meaning, as well as self-transformation and transformation of the world, are not independent elements, but are intimately related. This is clearly evidenced by observing the learning of experienced activists. Although the new activists learn through a collective praxis that facilitates observing and copying activist models; develop direct actions with the support of others and reflect on the successes and mistakes— we have argued—the experienced activists add to this the construction of meanings and knowledge around their own collective praxis. Continuous learning in social movements goes through a knowledge that is built on the critical reflection of their own transformative practice. This allows them to question, modify and create behaviours, attitudes and values consistent with the search for social justice, and all of this is done collectively through the creation of consensus.

*Well, it's all based on consensus, you know it, based on consensus and agreements [...] we agree on everything, put it through consensus, everything is planned, everything is discussed and that's it, and we reach a consensus and an agreement is reached on all the things that have to be done. (77♂)*

### ***Consensus as a process***

The observation of how agreements are built in social movements in contrast to the agreements built in the Institutional Space of the Legazpi Market has allowed us to discover two divergent ways of reaching consensus. And this, in turn, has allowed us to associate consensus in social movements with the construction of knowledge and learning. The differences between one type of consensus and the other are related to its purpose; the type of communication established; the place given to different ideas and the result of it. We use 'consensus' from an *emic* perspective; in the four spaces this term was used when referring to 'agreement', despite the fact that they describe different views. We have called them *consensus as an objective* vs. *consensus as a process*.

Consensus as Objective, prevalent in the Institutional Space, equates consensus and agreement. It is understood that the consensus is produced by the agreement between the parties; however, the way in which this agreement is reached remains in the background. Since the important thing is the achievement of an agreement, the way to accomplish it can be very varied and can include situations of total or partial exclusion of the different opinions in conflict. This implies that the communication established has a high vertical and strategic component (Habermas, 1984, 1987); it seeks to convince, to impose ideas, to minimise the modifications of a point of view and to increase modification of others, so that the agreement resembles, as much as possible, the initial position. The consequence of this type of consensus is what an interviewee called the '*desert of consensus, that moment where an agreement has been reached but nobody is satisfied*' (38♂). And nobody is happy because nobody identifies with the decision, which generates frustration, disaffection and resistance to the decision. This is expressed by these activists after their experience in the Institutional Space:

*Sometimes a pretty good discussion took place, such as a discussion about the methodology as a reflection on the process;*

*there was this discussion in some sessions and they [the facilitators of the institutional process] said: “we stop, we stop and we continue with the activity” [...] they cut the discussion, there were really some dissatisfactions. (25♂ )*

*I came out super frustrated [...]. I have not felt heard at all. (36♀ )*

However, in the observed social movements, Consensus as Process dominated. The focus in this case is on the way in which agreement is reached. Thus, deliberation is more important than agreement itself (Jeziarska, 2019). Communication in this case has a clear dialogical component, as it searches for reasoned dialogue and horizontality (Habermas, 1984, 1987). Active listening and creativity are used, trying to include different points of view to enrich one another and transform them into new and shared ideas. The diversity of points of view is not a problem but a value, since it increases the possibility of enrichment of the generated consensus. In the Consensus as a Process, the important thing is that during the debate collective meanings are constructed among all the people involved in the dialogue. Some in the form of agreements, others as ideas, but also as doubts and questions to be answered in the future; hence the importance and enrichment of the debate itself. All the participants identify with the agreements that emerge during a Consensus as a Process, because they have participated in its creation. This, in turn, generates acceptance and commitment. And of course, during this process, individual and collective learning takes place.

This differentiation between the types of consensus coincides with Jeziarska's proposal (2019). Consensus is no longer understood as the *telos* of deliberation. However, social movements do not carry out this differentiation by leaving consensus out, but rather by integrating consensus into deliberation as another step towards understanding different points of view. Consensus is simultaneously the support of deliberation and the utopian horizon that directs it.

From an educational perspective for democracy, the skills and competencies that are developed in the exercise of each type of consensus are divergent. In the Consensus as an Objective, participants learn skills for strategic action orientated to success; while with

consensus as a process, they learn skills for communicative action oriented to understanding.

***From learning as transformation to transformation as learning***

The previous examples respond to an idea of learning as a transformation, both individually and as a group. In social movements learning is complex, diverse, inserted in action and in the relationships, and often unforeseen, both in methods and forms and results (Choudry, 2015; Foley, 1999, 2001; Hall & Turray, 2006; Kilgore, 1999; Ollis, 2011; Ollis & Hamel-Green, 2015). The analysis of the previous elements tries to bring some light to the fact that social movements generate learning through processes of collective transformation that affect people and society as a whole.

*For example, I do not come from an assembly environment, and it has helped me learn a lot, because you learn another way of relating to others, another way of arguing, discussing, respecting, etc, etc., right? And that is very important (46♂)*

But social movements are also realising about this educational component of their praxis, which makes them understand and value their 'pedagogical power'. In other words, social movements are becoming aware of their potential as 'schools of democracy and social justice'. They are realising that, in addition to awareness processes to transform reality, they can become places to practice other types of relationships and other forms of social organisation and, therefore, places to learn and generate knowledge about their own democratic practices, places of experimentation of new and better ways of practicing democracy.

Social movements are becoming aware of the strength of learning for social transformation. They add the idea of transformation as a learning tool to the idea of learning as a transformation tool, which they already handled. The method and the objective can be exchanged, increasing their possibilities of action. As one activist told us in a conversation during the fieldwork: he tells me that the topic of education and learning is a great subject and that for him it means "*to change the paradigm, the city council can not deny you the help to learn, to get organised to learn together*" (Diary, January 28, 2016, EVA).

## **Conclusion**

The study we have undertaken in four sites—social movements and participation spaces—in the city of Madrid has allowed us to highlight some relevant ideas with regards to the role of engagement in social movements in the empowerment of citizens and the potential for learning and transformation—either individual, collective and/or social, beyond the limits of the social movement itself.

From a Freirean approach, the analysed spaces show popular education in action, and reflect what Freire (1980, 1997) expected from popular education: a liberating pedagogy that builds upon the knowledge, experience and diversity of the people, who learn from one another. Although these spaces were not pre-defined as educational, they have shown to be so, and the agents involved have considered learning at the core of their activist experiences.

The context of the study, a post-15M Madrid, where this movement was initiated in 2011, explains the increased awareness of the citizens' power and the demand of a 'more democratic democracy', that made different citizen initiatives flourish and increased the presence of citizen participation also in institutional initiatives. These are the cases we have analysed in the study. The confrontation of social and institutional processes shows the differences in the ways communication, learning and transformation occur. Through exploration of the different experiences of decision making, we have shown how some processes lead to empowerment while others lead to disempowerment.

From an educational perspective, we have justified the importance of praxis in the learning process. The action–reflection cycle, along with the collective construction of meaning, can be highlighted as pedagogical tools to be promoted in social spaces if they aim to exploit their potential for learning and transformation. Another powerful idea explored here refers to the role given to consensus: if presented as a goal (as in the institutional space in our study), the deliberative element gets diluted. On the contrary, when consensus is valued as a process, the potential of popular education reaches its maximum. Diversity, respect and support within the group contribute to the enrichment of the agreement and decision-making processes, thus these are contextual features that social movements should care about when aiming to empower citizens for democracy and social justice.

The study opens some stimulating future directions for research, we highlight the following:

- The analysis of how social movements use deliberation and consensus and how they manage the tension between inclusion and pluralism in decision-making can provide clues in the theoretical debates on deliberative and participatory democracy.
- On the other hand, it is necessary to continue consolidating a field of study on social movements and education: based on the accumulated knowledge from adult education about learning in struggle, and in relation to other fields such as citizenship education, further research can shed light on better ways to produce learning for a ‘democratization of democracy’.
- Likewise, breaking the separation between formal learning and learning in social movements can produce synergies that improve the quality of democratic education on the one hand, and the pedagogical capacity of social movements on the other.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>The INTER Group of Research in Intercultural Education ([https://www2.uned.es/grupointer/index\\_en.html](https://www2.uned.es/grupointer/index_en.html)) has addressed learning of citizenship in two consecutive research projects: Learning active citizenship. Discourses, experiences and educational strategies 2009-2012 ([https://www2.uned.es/grupointer/aprendiz\\_ciudadania\\_activa\\_en.html](https://www2.uned.es/grupointer/aprendiz_ciudadania_activa_en.html)) and Citizen participation scenarios: analysis and proposals from an educational perspective 2012-2014 ([https://www2.uned.es/grupointer/espacios\\_participacion\\_en.html](https://www2.uned.es/grupointer/espacios_participacion_en.html)).

<sup>2</sup>A deepening of different theoretical approaches to civil society and the state as a way of studying the action of social movements is far from the purpose of this work. Our position is eclectic, as can be deduced from the terminology used, although we suggest consulting Kritsch (2014) for an evolution of theoretical approaches that we consider interesting.

<sup>3</sup>In addition to ‘May 15 movement’ and ‘15M’, it is also known as the ‘movement of the outraged’. However, the most commonly used name is ‘15M’, so we preferred to keep this designation. See Aguado and Abril (2015), Manguijón and Pac (2012), Rodríguez López (2016) and Taibo (2011).

<sup>4</sup>This disillusionment has been reflected in the last Spanish elections in 2019, both national (April) and local elections (May), where the results have been worse for these new political organisations emerged after the 15M, than in previous elections. At the national level, there has been a mobilisation of left voters to stop the emergence of a new right-wing party that has increased the progressive vote, but this has gone to the traditional social democratic party and not to the one formed after the 15M. But, at the municipal level, the results have shown the disillusionment with these new formations much more clearly. The Mayor of Madrid in the last four years, from the ‘government of change’, has lost votes, especially in the working class districts where abstention has increased in relation to the previous elections in 2015. The new Mayor belongs to a right-wing party.

<sup>5</sup>The Legazpi Market building, considered as industrial heritage of the twentieth century, has gone through different moments of partial use and abandonment, according to the interests of the different governments, until generating a process of defence of it by the citizens (see the web <http://mercadolegazpi.org/>). Located in the district of Arganzuela (Southern area of the city of Madrid), it is a large building with wide spaces, which makes it an unusual building in this type of claims, which tend to focus on smaller spaces.

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