Framing the Indignant Citizens Movement

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The current economic crisis that Europe is going through has produced a lot of social strife around the political handling of the crisis. In one of the most affected countries of the Eurozone, Greece, popular resistance to the austerity measures taken culminated in the actions of the social movement that has been referred to as the "Indignant Citizens Movement".

In a recently conducted piece of research, I examined the role of Greek and British newspapers in the framing of the Indignant Citizens movement and the interaction of these frames with political engagement and agency. The newspapers used for the research were chosen in an effort to include as many different political standpoints from Greece and the United Kingdom as possible. *Eleftherotypia*, *To Vima* and *Kathimerini* were selected from Greece, alongside *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* from the UK. Using Peter Dahlgren's civic cultures theoretical framework I tried to interpret the frames identified in the study in order to understand how the framing of the Indignant Citizens Movement impacted on civic engagement and agency in Greece, as well as in Europe. Civic culture entails cultural patterns, consists of six dimensions and it is a prerequisite for a viable democracy and a strong critical pubic sphere.

The first dimension of civic culture is knowledge. It consists of the ability of the citizens to access reports about their society. The analysis of the Greek and British newspapers revealed that the press framed the Indignant Citizens Movement mostly in terms of the problems causing people to gather in the streets, rather in the solutions that the movement could offer. That approach ended up disempowering citizens and deterring them from further participation, since the media in this case strengthened the role of political elites in the country, by portraying citizen action as unable to produce solutions. On a European level, the framing of the Indignant Citizens Movement did not include a European dimension, and thus did not contribute to the creation of a European public sphere, since readers did not empathise with the movement and treated the case as something important only on a national level. On a more positive note both Greek and British newspapers included more social and human aspects of the Indignant Citizens Movement, instead of simply analysing the economic or political dimensions of it. This more thematic way of framing the movement encourages readers to put the issues in broader contexts and provides deeper information, which is important in order to produce more public agency.

Moving on to values, which are principles of democracy based on everyday life, the frame analysis points to a grim image of Greece. More specifically the main frames that are relevant in the Greek case are those of corruption and injustice, as well as a lack of democratic deliberation. The government is portrayed as ignoring the protests or even in some cases as condoning police violence against citizens. However, at the same time the citizens themselves are viewed as corrupt or anti-democratic. On a European level, the EU is not seen as an institution that citizens can rely upon, since it is framed as having an enormous democratic deficit and ignoring the wishes of the public over the needs of the markets. Those frames point to a clear lack of recognition between citizens and institutions, as well as between the citizens themselves. This lack of recognition discourages citizens from engaging with politics and limits their civic agency.

Furthermore, on the dimension of trust between groups of people that do not know each other on a personal level, the framing of the Indignant Citizens Movement points to one of the least cultivated dimensions of the Greek and European civic culture. The frames employed by the newspapers analysed uncover an image of betrayals of trust. More specifically, the political system as well as institutions such as the media and the police are framed as being

corrupt and deceptive towards citizens. However, the government itself lacks trust towards the citizenry as the main frames depict them as corrupt or tax-evading.

Moving on to spaces, the framing of the movement pointed to it as a vibrant community that deliberated and took care of the public space, however the reactions of the official government paint a picture of the public space as something that needs to be reclaimed by the citizens. On a European level, it is noteworthy that there is an absolute lack of common European deliberating spaces and there is a need for that vacuum to be filled by the media.

Practices are a very important aspect of civic culture, as they provide an opportunity to combine the ideals of democracy with personal and social meaning. However, in the case of the Indignant Citizens Movement elections are not seen as empowering to citizens because politicians are framed as liars and the crisis is viewed as a stumbling block to democratic decision-making. However, participation in the movement is viewed as a positive civic experience, with public assemblies and speeches held during the demonstrations viewed as an empowering moment for citizens.

Finally, moving on to identities the framing of the Indignant Citizens Movement has given out both positive and negative images of the citizens participating. While in some articles the participants are viewed as awakened and passionate, at the same time they are framed as threats to democracy and prone to violence. Also it is evident that there is an absence of a European identity and this is something that needs to be addressed if the integration project is to move forward.

The case of the Indignant Citizens Movement points to the need for Greek citizens to link their affective drive with positive democratic values, such as the ones the movement stood for. The media have an important role to play in citizen empowerment and in the continuation of the European integration project and this crisis presents an opportunity for them to play their social part.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Euro Crisis in the Press blog, nor of the London School of Economics.