

## **Spanish Civic Engagement: a bridge among civil society, politics and public administration**

*Engajamento Cívico Espanhol: uma ponte entre sociedade civil, política e administração pública*

*El compromiso cívico español: un puente entre la sociedad civil, la política y la administración pública*

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**Abstract:** This paper, recognizing the many ways of civil and institutional cooperation, briefly examines the concept of civic engagement and civil society and applies this understanding to a recent case about an association encouraging participation (Principos) of the civil society in the political sphere in Madrid, Spain.

**Keywords:** Spain; civic engagement; civic Society; public administration; associations.

**Resumo:** Este artigo, reconhecendo as diversas formas de cooperação civil e institucional, examina brevemente o conceito de engajamento cívico e sociedade civil e aplica esse entendimento a um caso recente sobre uma associação (Principos) que incentiva a participação da sociedade civil na esfera política em Madri, Espanha.

**Palavras-chave:** Espanha; engajamento cívico; sociedade civil; administração pública; associações.

**Resumen:** El presente artículo, dentro del análisis más amplio de distintos modos de colaboración ciudadana e institucional con las administraciones públicas, pretende estudiar someramente el concepto de compromiso cívico y sociedad civil y poner de manifiesto un reciente caso de éxito de participación de la sociedad civil en el mundo de la política, en este caso en España (Europa): la asociación Principios.

**Palabras-llave:** España; compromiso cívico; sociedad civil; administración pública; asociaciones.

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## 1. Introduction

The civil society has been a very interesting object of study to many authors and researchers in the public sphere in the last decades until nowadays. The researches about the citizen's participation in the public area, as collaborators, for example, with public administrations or with the government (understood as the politicians), has been an important part of the studies of Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato (1994) in their book *Civil Society and Political Theory*. These authors speak about the historical hypothesis of the civil society as a civic power against the State (for example, during the last century, and in the East Europe, they quote the case of *Solidarność* and the fight of the Polish people to regain their freedom (COHEN; ARATO, 1994). Other authors, as Susan Ariel Aaronson and Jennifer Brinkerhoff (2009), use the following triad as central of building partnerships: Government, Business and Civil.

What follows is a discussion of current frameworks that assist our understanding of the meaning of civil society. This discussion is followed by an examination of the case study of Pricipios and its operations in building civil society in Madrid Spain.

## 2. Civil Society and Civic Engagement: an approach

First of all, we can begin providing the definitions from different authors or institutions about civic engagement. In the review of definitions listed below, the terms "people", "community", "political processes", "government processes", "promoting", "action", "civic identity", "array of interests" are very expressively stated. Engagement, at least, of a community to impact in the public life, using different process or projects, and looking for a specific object or goal.

- "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes" (EHRLICH, 2000, p. 6).
- "People participating together for deliberation and collective action within an array of interests, institutions and networks, developing civic identity, and involving people in governance processes" (COOPER, 2005, p. 534-5).

Last decade, a study group of professors of Public Administration from the University of South California, the University of Central Florida and the University of La Verne, made a classification and they differenced five kinds of civic engagement (COOPER; BRYER; MEEK,

2006):

One approach to civic engagement is **adversarial engagement** which refers to a class of citizen activities, both individual and collective, that seek to extract concessions from government through the use of confrontation, legal or otherwise. While many of these efforts have led to successful short-term concessions from governmental authorities, long-term reliance on these approaches are dubious due to the continuation of elite structures that are essential in the creation of long-term system-wide change (PRIVEN; COWARD 1977).

**Electoral engagement**, the most common type of civic activity, involves the practice of voting, contributing to campaigns, working with political parties and their candidates, offering opinions on policies and candidates through the media and running for office. In the United States, while there are several points of time when electoral participation has increased, the general trend is downward. Fox and Miller (1995), King and Stivers (1998), Fung (2003) and Macedo et al. (2005) have reasoned the decline to be attributed to an increasing unreachable government and a failing representative process.

**Information Exchange** refers to civic engagement activities that involve information exchange is an important tradition in American governmental practice. There are various forms of information exchanges between civilians and governmental agencies that range from passive activities (access to governmental documents and reports) to active activities (participation in city council meetings, hearings, civic consultations, citizen satisfaction surveys). While the goal of information exchange is to improve policy information dissemination and to obtain policy feedback, they are limited in terms of developing mutual understanding of policy design or impact (BAKER; ADDAMS; DAVIS, 2005).

**Civil Society** refers to a large class of social engagement that foster community, including participation in volunteer organizations, religious institutions, social clubs, city celebratory functions, school boards, and other local social functions. These activities are richly contextual and form the basis from which people gather, discuss, and share ideas about society. However, Robert Putnam (2000) has found that these types of associations are in decline in the United States leading to a decline in citizen trust in government.

**Deliberative engagement** refers to a collection of civic engagement strategies that are designed to develop a shared sense of understanding among stakeholders with regard to joint or collective action. One hallmark of this strategy is the reliance on extended engagement and dialogue among all participants in an iterative process. The idea behind deliberation is to move well beyond comments that are designed to capture mere pluralities but to deepen shared meaning of the value of mutually understood issues and consequent action. Another characteristic of deliberative engagement is inclusivity. Deliberative approaches attempt to include different kinds of stakeholders so as to develop a broader meaning of commonly held space. (MEEK, 2007).

Summarizing, the five kinds are the following:

1. **Adversarial Engagement:** seek to extract concession through confrontation.
2. **Electoral Engagement:** contributing to campaigns, practice on voting, etc.
3. **Information Exchange:** exchanges between civilians and governmental agencies.
4. **Civil Society:** large class of social engagement that foster community.
5. **Deliberative Engament:** collection of civil engagement strategies design to develop a shared sense of understanding among stakeholders.

We are going to center in the last two kinds, which are very similar (the deliberative engagement is larger than the civil society's one, because it embraces all the subjects: institutions, citizen, companies, etc.; civil society is better-known and all the theory and teaching turns around this last term). Some definitions of civil society (and they can serve to define the deliberative engagement) are the following:

- Civil society is the “aggregate of non-governmental organizations and institutions that manifest interests and will of citizens” (Dictionary.com, 2017).
- UN definition: “Civil society is the ‘third sector’ of society, along with government and business. It comprises civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations. The UN recognizes the importance of partnering with civil society, because it advances the Organization's ideals, and helps support its work. Here are some useful websites for members of civil society and also for those interested in the work of the UN” (UNITED NATIONS, 2017).

And it is also known that “Non-political organizations in civil society are vital for democracy. This is because they build social capital, trust and shared values, which are transferred into the political sphere and help to hold society together, facilitating an understanding of the interconnectedness of society and interests within it” (PUTNAM; LEONARDI; NANETTI, 1994).

With this approach, we are now able to speak about a real and current case of deliberative engagement (civil society) in Spain, emerged as a consequence of the crisis of the leadership of the politicians and governments and the preoccupation about the health of the public institutions, on a long term thought. Confirming this, Ricardo Calleja, a Lecturer of Business Ethics at IESE Business School, spoke about this recently: “We need trust-worthy elites, but even if we have that, we need more actions that will be able to regain the trust of the people” (CALLEJA, 2016).

### **3. Civic Engagement providing solutions: Principios**

The CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas) is a public institution in Spain which measures and researches the evolution and tendencies of many aspects of the Spanish population. If we analyze the evolution of the four most important preoccupations for the Spanish People, in 2015 and 2016 (CIS, 2017), we can say that the most important aspect for them was the unemployment. Next were corruption and fraud, following by the economical problems and, at

the fourth place, the politicians, the political parties and the politics.

	dic16	nov16	oct16	sep16	jul16	jun16	may16	abr16	mar16	feb16	ene16	dic15	nov15	oct15
El paro	74.7	72.9	71.3	71.6	75.6	76.4	75.3	78.4	77.1	78.0	77.9	79.8	77.5	79.1
Las drogas	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.2
La inseguridad ciudadana	3.2	3.3	2.6	1.9	2.0	3.1	2.3	2.2	2.3	2.6	2.4	1.9	2.3	3.2
El terrorismo. ETA	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1
Las infraestructuras	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.1
La sanidad	13.7	13.6	12.1	11.2	12.0	10.0	10.7	9.3	11.1	9.6	11.6	11.9	11.9	10.6
La vivienda	1.8	1.8	1.3	0.8	1.4	1.6	1.3	1.8	1.5	1.7	1.2	2.4	1.9	1.4
Los problemas de índole económica	24.7	23.9	24.2	23.7	22.8	25.1	23.6	25.1	25.6	25.1	23.2	24.4	24.0	24.7
Los problemas relacionados con la calidad del empleo	7.4	6.8	4.8	4.2	5.9	4.8	4.5	4.3	4.7	4.1	4.6	3.9	4.8	4.3
Los problemas de la agricultura, ganadería y pesca	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2
La corrupción y el fraude	36.7	36.1	37.6	36.6	43.4	44.9	46.7	47.8	44.0	47.5	39.2	38.8	40.1	39.4
Las pensiones	4.2	5.0	2.8	3.5	4.2	2.3	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.7	2.7	2.8	1.8	2.6
Los políticos en general, los partidos políticos y la política	22.1	25.7	29.5	29.3	19.4	21.1	21.3	20.8	24.4	22.2	23.4	14.8	20.4	21.5

Source: CIS (2017)

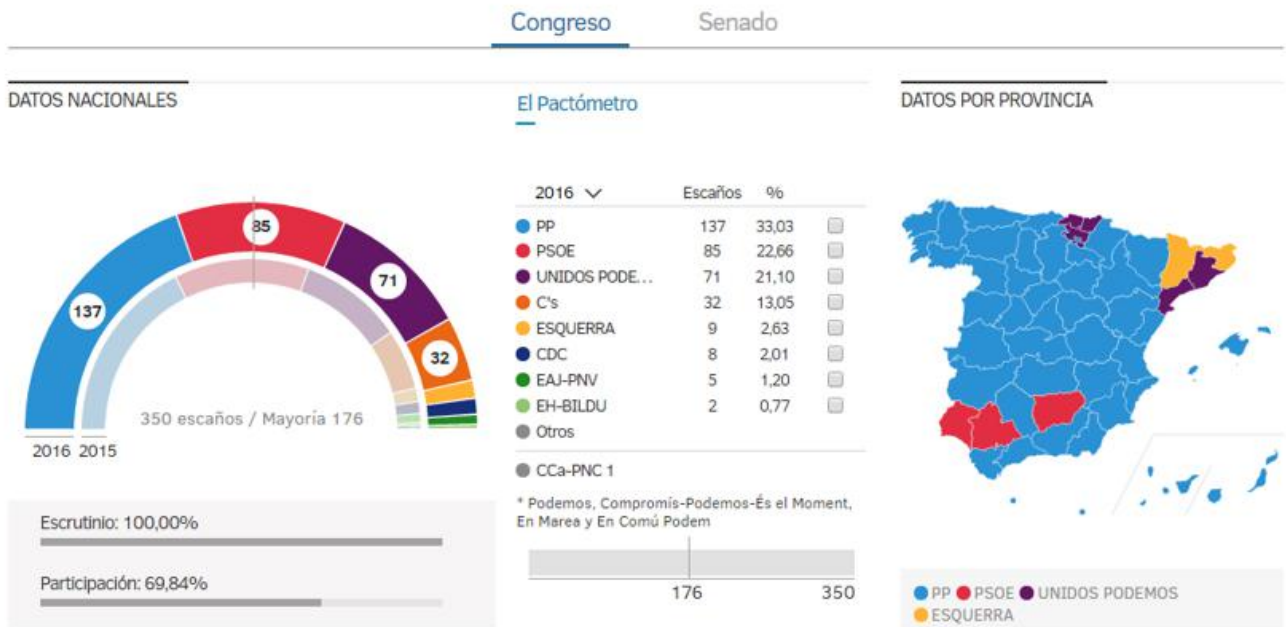
Therefore, we can see that two of the biggest preoccupation in Spain, for the citizen, are about the behavior of our governments, and of our politicians, individually.

Since 2011, in Spain, the Populism has been growing quickly. In 2013/2014, appeared a political party called Podemos, a new communism and populism party that burst in Spain, 3 months before the 2014's Elections for the European Parliament, to stay. Podemos had 5 deputies elected as the result of his first appearance in the politics' fields.

In May 2015, they reached some of the most important mayoralities of Spain, including Madrid, the capital. In spite of not being the most voted list, they reached it because of the agreements they did with other political parties (the Socialist Party –PSOE- and the independent parties, in most cases). And in 2016, the Spanish general elections, they got 71 to 350 deputies in the Spanish Parliament.



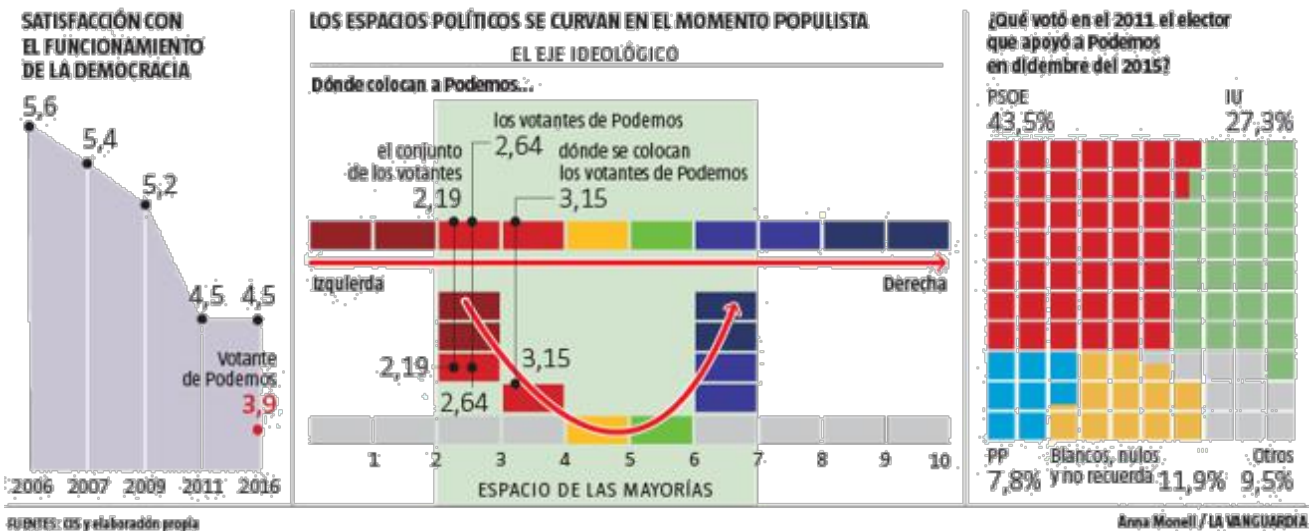
Elecciones Generales 2016



Source: El Mundo (2016)

In this graphic we can see that all the majority of the people who voted Podemos has no trust on the politicians. And also, the candidates of Podemos presented themselves as a new kind of citizen-politicians:

LA GÉNESIS DEL POPULISMO EN ESPAÑA



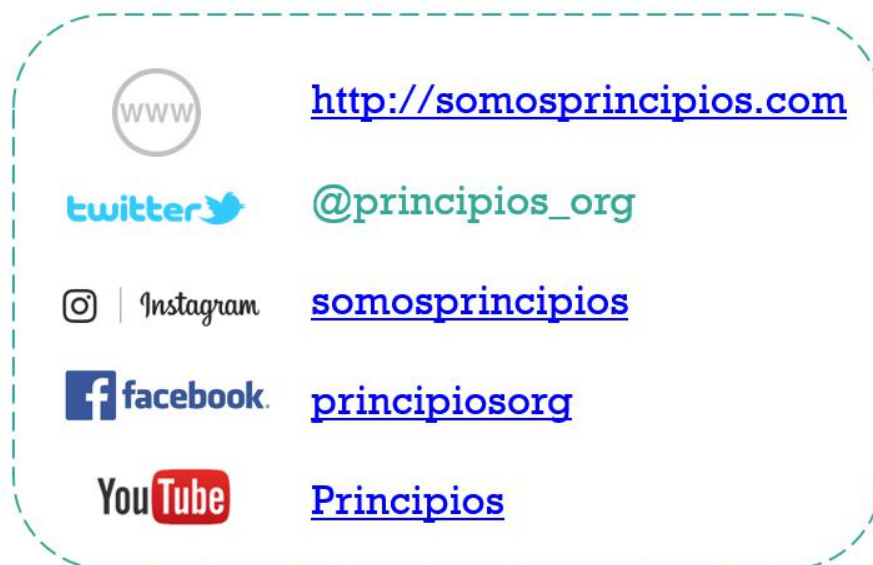
The voters of Podemos were not satisfied with the democracy running in Spain, and they found in Podemos a way to express their discontent. But there exists another way to express this discontent; and also from the civil society.

At the end of 2014, and as a response to all the problems of corruption and fraud of the governing, the short-term-working view of the politicians, the lack of interest in the more needy, a group of professionals (lawyers, engineers, professors, journalists, etc.) began a movement – with a legal form as an association- called Principios (Principles).

The diagnosis of the founder of Principios was that the problems were not only of effectiveness, but also of justice. And in particular of political justice and social justice. Also, they realized that the political debate was impoverished by the monopoly of the political parties, and it was necessary to maintain spaces in civil society that could play a critical role and renew ideas.

With this diagnosis, the founders of Principios established the objectives:

- Identify a social base –civil society- and let them know and join Principios: people discontent with the current situation of politics and the politicians.
- Build a politic shape (politic but not politician): Principios is not a political party. But Principios want to have impact in the political sphere. So Principios is going to work in the development of projects that can renew and help the politicians, making a bridge between the citizen and institutions and the public administrations, governments, etc.
- Launch the projects: be able to present this projects and ideas to the corresponding people (politicians, public institutions, etc.).



And they began to work. The founders prepared the main ideas -the challenges- of Principios and they shared among lots of people, using internet, the social networks, etc. They had the first assembly (the founding assembly) with a selection<sup>3</sup> of the people who wanted to participate.

In April 2015, Principios launched the official website ([www.somosprincipios.com](http://www.somosprincipios.com)), and his accounts in different social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube).

Afterwards, Principios developed some projects, and each initiative had its own objects:

- Forming/Educating people: Cañas Políticas (political beers; it is an informal debate between prestigious professionals –politically neutrals- in a bar, and they answer all the questions of the attendants; the topic is about political justice, and there has been “cañas políticas” all over Spain); Jornadas de Descartados (more formal workshops about discarded – social justice –, usually in Madrid); Conferences, newsletter...
- Development of projects, writing papers, organizing events, etc.: against corruption (for example, Compromiso Primarias (Primary Commitment)), meetings with political parties and other institutions, etc.
- Presentation of our proposal: political parties, foundations, public administration, companies, etc.

This are some images of the flyers and of the acts organized by Principios:



<sup>3</sup> The selection was done trying to have a large representation of the civil society: 35 to 200 candidates, male and female, with university studies and not, from 20 years to 80. Discarded –Descartado, in Spanish- means all the people without interest or voice for the politicians: the handicapped, emigrants & immigrants, mothers in risk of social exclusion, the elders, etc. Normally, neither Mass media have interest in this collectives.



Principios has also developed these projects and has been met with many persons and institutions and organizations of the civil society, in the way to improve the politics and the society with his proposals, joining the citizen and the public administration:



Meetings and workshops with:

**Political Justice**

- PSOE Madrid
- PP Madrid
- Ciudadanos Madrid
- Podemos Madrid
- Sociedad Civil y Democracia
- Foro Generación del 78
- Hay Derecho
- Politikon
- Qveremos
- Fundación Valores y Sociedad
- Funciva
- Fundación San Pablo-CEU
- EPC (Estudiantes Por el Cambio/ Estudiantes Pel Canvi/ Estudiantes Polo Cambio)
- Red Floridablanca
- Acreditra
- Mas Democracia
- Fundación BBVA

**Social Justice**

- Passim
- Fundación Carmen Prado - Valcarce de Educación Especial
- Fundación Civio
- Special Olympics
- Fundación Juan XXIII
- Fundación Madrina
- Red Madre
- Asociación de Telefónica para la Discapacidad y Dependencia
- Confederación Española de Familias de Personas Sordas (FIAPAS)
- Centro Ocupacional de la Fundación APROCOR
- Fundación Padre Lezama
- SUPER Cuidadores
- Ayuda a Mujeres Embarazadas
- Mensajeros de la Paz
- Con copia a Europa
- Foro Inserta

Meetings and workshops with:



Ministry of Justice



Socialist Party (PSOE)



The Spanish Queen and the Secretary of State (Social Security)



Lilian Tintori, wife of Leopoldo López (Venezuela)



Lawyers Association



People's Party (PP)

Currently, with thousands of followers in all Spain, with hundreds people attendant to the meetings, conferences, and other events organized by Principios, this Spanish movement originated in and by the citizen to improve the society, carries on developing initiatives and projects.

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