

# Political participation of older adults: The *Iaioflautas* movement in Catalonia

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## Introduction

In the last decade there has been a growing attention on the topic of civic engagement in the later life. Particularly, research on political participation of senior citizens is in an initial stage. Scholars hold different positions regarding the effect of age on political activity [1,2]. However, there is still a lack of research on older people's participation in social movements and the meanings of their involvement [3,4].

Within the current context of protests, particularly among the 15M-Indignados movement, the *Iaioflautas* ("crusty grannies") group appeared. Their main identity regards two features: they are older people and they are *Indignados*.

To the authors' knowledge, this is the first academic research on *Iaioflautas*.

## The *Iaioflautas* movement

\* Born officially in October 2011 in Barcelona, *Iaioflautas* currently develop their activities in various cities around Catalonia and Spain and expect to increase their presence throughout the country.

\* They define themselves as the generation that fought and achieved a better life for their children, and at the same time as descendants of the 15M movement.

\* Internet and social network sites are key to spread their claims and activities.

\* In their protests, which include demonstrations and occupation of different public and private spaces, they identify themselves with vivid yellow vests and caps.

## Research goals

\* Examine patterns of political participation of older people in Catalonia through the *Iaioflautas* movement.

\* Inquire into their (a) personal political trajectory over the lifespan, (b) participatory experience in *Iaioflautas*, (c) the role of other actors in their personal political activity, and (d) their use of (mobile) Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

## Methodology and fieldwork

\* Semi-structured interviews with participants of the *Iaioflautas* movement based in Barcelona.

\* Purposive sample: 15 participants actively engaged with the *Iaioflautas* activities, of which 7 are women and 8 are men. Ages range from 54 to 84 years old.

\* Fieldwork, conducted between July and September 2013, focused on core participants of the movement. Future fieldwork will reach individuals holding lesser degrees of engagement.

\* Interviews recorded for verbatim transcription. Atlas.TI supports text analysis.

## References cited

[1] Goerres, A. (2009). *The political participation of older people in Europe: The greying of our democracy*. London, United Kingdom: Palgrave/MacMillan.

[2] O'Neill, G., Morrow-Howell, N., & Wilson, S. F. (2011). Volunteering in later life: From disengagement to civic engagement. In R. A. Settersten & J. L. Angel (Eds.), *Handbook of sociology of aging* (pp. 333–50). New York, NY: Springer.

[3] Nygård, M., & Jakobsson, G. (2013). Political participation of older adults in Scandinavia: The civic voluntarism model revisited? A multi-level analysis of three types of political participation. *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life*, 8(1), 1–32.

[4] Barnes, M., Harrison, E., & Murray, L. (2012). Ageing activists: Who gets involved in older people's forums? *Ageing and Society*, 32(02), 261–80.

## Acknowledgments

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## Further information

Web: <http://www.iaioflautas.org> | Twitter: @iaioflautas

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## Preliminary results

\* There is a frequent discourse among participants in which they acknowledge a shift in their participatory patterns since the 15M movement uprising. This holds across the experienced and non-experienced in previous organizations (political parties, trade unions, voluntary organizations):

"In the past two years I've been 'poisoned' with the urge of doing something. And I remember going alone to the 15M in 2011, and by November they [the *Iaioflautas*] started to appear in the press and in the radio. Then I contacted them and I've been a member ever since, not one of the first ones but one of the oldest." (Man, 70 years old).

\* Participants describe mid-high to very high intensity of active engagement. Their motivations coincide greatly towards societal-level interests rather than personal ones:

"I have a house, but I wouldn't be worthy if I weren't worried of helping, of supporting those other families from whom they take away their houses, right? Well, I want to help them! That's what makes me be in *Iaioflautas*, and I fight as a *Iaioflauta* because that has a meaning." (Man, 83 years old).

\* There is a common annoyance by social stereotyping of the elders, although some perceive positive social rewards due to their political involvement and their ICT uses:

"Right now is like normal, but some months ago there was a newspaper article that said '*Iaioflautas* with iPhones'... So what? That because you are older you can't have command of a mobile phone and take advantage of the new technologies? [...] It said that we, the *Iaioflautas*, are like Superman at the least, because we even have iPhones!" (Woman, 63 years old).

\* We found an extensively shared skepticism regarding the possibilities of ICT as an enhancement tool for political participation opportunities for older adults:

"If it keeps you more informed? Yes. If it makes you participate more? I don't know if this helps. [...] I think that many young people, not only older ones, think that by clicking "I like it" they have participated. [...] I don't know if this will make people show up." (Woman, 68 years old).



## Preliminary conclusions

\* The current crisis and the emergence of the 15M movement have boosted the involvement of older people in political organizations such as the *Iaioflautas*. These milestones have changed their effective involvement, intensity, breadth, and ways of participation in politics.

\* Personal motivations of participants adjust greatly to the group's goals due to its wide scope, which fundamentally aims at the attainment of changes for the benefit of the majority of society. The group seeks to avoid addressing particular issues and instead intends to pursue better life conditions for large social groups (beside their own's).

\* Part of the adherence that some participants experience with the *Iaioflautas* collectivity is due to its open, free and organic nature. Its non-institutional condition grants members no obligations or commitments to the group, and its structure and ways of functioning are ever changing based on the accumulated experiences and novel inputs.

\* The most skilled members regarding uses of ICTs are the ones who have been 'forced' to learn to serve a particular need (labour demands, associational needs -including *Iaioflautas*). Among interviewed participants age does not show to be strongly related to ICT proficiency.

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