PROJECT ON EUROPE AND THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP

Strengthening Civil Society in Spain: A Post-COVID-19 Agenda

Marta Rey-García
Sebastián Royo

HARVARD Kennedy School
BELFER CENTER
for Science and International Affairs

REPORT
JUNE 2022

Project on Europe and Transatlantic Relationship
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About the Partnership

The **Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship** aims to strengthen Harvard University's capacities for teaching, research, and policy on the relationship between the United States and Europe. The program is designed to deepen a relationship which has—for over 70 years—served as an anchor of global order, driven the expansion of the world economy, provided peace and stability and reunited peoples once divided by war. The Project convenes academics and practitioners to campus as fellows for teaching and training, conferences and workshops for degree students and policymakers. From 2018–2021, the Project was chaired by Ambassador Nicholas Burns.

The Rafael del Pino Foundation

Rafael del Pino y Moreno was one of the most outstanding Spanish entrepreneurs of the 20th Century. After 50 years of hard work, with effort and determination, he grew *Ferrovial*, a Spanish infrastructure, construction and engineering company into what is now one of the world's leading firms in this sector. In 1999, at the age of 80, he decided to set up the *Rafael del Pino Foundation* to train leaders and entrepreneurs, to foster personal initiative, to encourage freedom, and to promote the transmission and dissemination of knowledge.

Guided by his ideas the Foundation provides a forum where Spanish leaders and entrepreneurs are able to expand their knowledge, and to hone skills and capabilities to better society in general. Its activities are organized around these mission and objectives, because, perhaps, the best way to encourage leadership and innovation and to nurture entrepreneurship is to have a forum where ideas and perspectives can be shared. To fulfil its Mission, the Foundation organizes training programs, awards excellence scholarships, hosts master lectures and meetings, contributes to the preservation of Hispanic heritage and the improvement of people's health and living conditions, and promotes research.

The Global Civil Society Seminar (GCSS), launched in 2016 by the Rafael del Pino Foundation in collaboration with the Harvard Kennedy School, aims to convene practitioners and academics from Spain to share a deep reflection on the latest global developments affecting civil societies. The GCSS has explored every year since, thanks to the insights of top Harvard faculty, focal topics such as the challenges faced by civil societies around the world; the governance of civil society organizations; the interface between the business sector and civil society; and social innovation in response to global challenges. Participants are selected for their track record of civil society leadership and their accomplishments in the business, public or nonprofit sectors or in nurturing social movements.

About the Authors

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Sebastián Royo is Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Professor of Political Science in the Department of Political Science at Clark University in Worcester, MA. Prior to that he served as Vice President of International Affairs and Professor in the Department of Political Science & Legal Studies at Suffolk University in Boston, USA, where he also served as Acting Provost and Senior VP for Academic Affairs between August 2016 and August 2019. He was a Visiting Scholar at Harvard University's Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies in 2019–20. Royo's articles and reviews on comparative politics have appeared in *Comparative Political Studies, European Journal of Industrial Relations, PS: Political Science and Politics, West European Politics, South European Society and Politics, Democratization, Mediterranean Quarterly, SELA, FP, Perspectives on Politics*, and other journals. He has published several books, including *Varieties of Capitalism in Spain* (2008); *Lessons from the Economic Crisis in Spain* (2013), and *Why Banks Fails: The Political Roots of Banking Crises in Spain* (2020). Royo is a Senior Research Associate at the Elcano Royal Institute in Madrid, and a local affiliate at the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard University, where he is the co-chair of the Europe in the World Seminar. He is the founder and co-chair of the American Political Science Association's Iberian Studies Group, and serves in the editorial boards of South European Society & Politics and esglobal.org.

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Foreword

The profound changes that have taken place and continue to happen in the world today have significantly shifted the global geopolitical balance and have shaken the pillars of society. These changes challenge the durability of the multilateral consensus reached after World War II, those ideas and ideals developed into what is now referred to as the liberal order.

For decades, this order has been a contributing factor in the promotion of human progress. It, over time, has had the support of a wide range of civil society organizations that have helped establish and consolidate the ideas and principles of freedom, democracy, and human rights.

At the dawn of the 21st century, citizens were enthusiastic and optimistic about the future. Nonetheless, there have been challenges and resistances to the liberal order, beginning with an erosion of these very values within the West. This deterioration or regression has been accentuated by exogenous forces and by the resurgence of authoritarianism in the world.

These facts, together with the changes induced by disruptive technological progress, accelerated by the economic and social impact brought about by the pandemic, have modified the systemic behavior of the current civil society, which includes the emergence of new forms of articulation that surpass the previous models of civic participation.

In order to understand the dynamics of civil society today and the role of organizations that promote civic behavior among citizens, it is necessary to analyze the significance of the aforementioned transformations and to establish a road-map that will strengthen civic participation in the years ahead. Doing so will rejuvenate the spirit of building a shared project in society based on liberal values.

With this objective, the Rafael del Pino Foundation and the Belfer Center's Project on Europe have been working to strengthen the capacities of Spanish civil society leaders with the Global Civil Society Seminar (GCSS) since 2016. Over 180 seminar participants are part of the GCSS leadership network.

This document summarizes the results of an analytic study, led by the academic directors of the GCSS, Marta Rey-García and Sebastián Royo, with the participation of the members of its alumni network. Through the perception of a significant number of Spanish leaders of preeminent organizations in this field, the conceptual contours of civil society, its current sources of legitimacy, expectations about its evolution, and the main instruments to promote it are outlined. The objective of this study was to shed light on the current dynamics of civil society and to help promote civil society in a vibrant context full of uncertainties such as the ones described in this paper.

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Executive Summary

Vibrant civil societies have proved a necessary ingredient for freedom, prosperity, and justice to thrive in Europe and the United States. Their potential contribution to constructive debate and collective action for the common good is even more relevant today, as time has come to rethink social contracts on both sides of the Atlantic. In this hour of need, Spanish leaders from all walks of life are no exception in placing a high value on civil society for its potential to re-imagine the relationships between citizens and the state in Western liberal democracies. Not by chance, influential scholars have attributed Spanish civil society a key role in making possible the successful democratic transition of the country.

Since then, and parallel to its own strengthening as part of the young liberal democracy, Spanish civil society has been re-shaped by long range trends like globalization or digital transformation, awakened by shocks like the 2008 economic crisis, and enabled or constrained by domestic institutional conditions, including political and legal frameworks. The full impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the resilience of the civic fabric is yet to be systematically assessed. Against this volatile background, what role is civil society expected to play in the post-COVID recovery period? Would it remain as valued an asset and why? Even more important, how can its full potential for the common good be unleashed in times of disruption?

This research ultimately aims at identifying the institutional and operational levers that should be actioned so that civil society turns into fertile ground for a new social contract to start taking root in the post-pandemic scenario. However, laying the foundations for a reflective agenda to enhance civil society requires a prior conversation on its current conceptualization (how do concept users conceive it?), fluid boundaries (who belongs to civil society and who does not?), and sources of legitimacy (why does/should civil society matter?). Nowadays, Spanish civil society is no longer narrowed down by the terms of its mutating relationship vis-à-vis the state. It has become more visible, plural, influential, and global. While its interface with politics remains contentious, the rich connections of civil society organizations with the business sector and with informal actors

(citizens, communities, social movements, social media networks) are enlarging its capacity to innovate and make an impact while, at the same time, challenging its more traditional undertakings.

To explore these questions, this report, anchored in the Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship, builds on the acumen of a diverse set of Spanish leaders from nonprofit, business, public and hybrid organizations. They all have participated in past editions of the Global Civil Society Seminar (GCSS), organized by the Rafael del Pino Foundation and the Belfer Center at the Harvard Kennedy School with the involvement of internationally renowned Harvard scholars. This informal network of GCSS practitioners provides a unique subsoil for an engaged scholarship approach. The fruits of this dialogue between academic research on civil society, on the one hand, and alumni insights—collected through brainstorming sessions, one survey and several focus groups—on the other, aim at paving the way for a future agenda of civil society enhancement in the country for the aftermath of COVID-19.

10 Key Takeaways

1. **Civil society is both a key antecedent and a valued outcome of Spanish democracy.**

   A strong civil society, that actively participates in the design and implementation of public policies, endorses civil values, and checks and balances state power, is both a key driver and an impact of democratic quality. As civil society is about collective action by the people and for the people, its effectiveness is inextricably linked to policy-making. Not surprisingly, its main risk lies in being appropriated by institutionalized politics.

2. **The appropriation of political parties and labor unions by institutionalized political powers has resulted in their estrangement from civil society.**

   While the "what" question about civil society elicits consensus, the "who" question remains controversial. Any non-state actor may belong

to civil society as far as it contributes to social change for the common good. However, the cooptation of political parties and labor unions by institutionalized political power in Spain currently precludes their consideration as civil society actors.

3. **Business actors are valuable civil society allies.**

   Regardless of whether corporations are part of civil society or not, an ongoing debate, businesses have an enormous potential as engines for social change, through corporate sustainability strategies and in necessary proximity to civil society actors within alliances, social enterprises, and other hybrid arrangements. Myriads of common good causes, from climate action to equality, cannot advance without businesses being on board.

4. **Informal civil society actors are being empowered by technology to the detriment of the representativeness of traditional voluntary organizations.**

   The capacity of third sector organizations to represent civil society is being eroded by digital transformation, parallel to the empowerment of virtual communities and other informal actors thanks to social networks. Beyond collaborating with business and public actors, civil society organizations should search for alliances with social movements and other informal actors.

5. **The legitimacy of civil society is grounded in its capacity to blend instrumental and expressive rationales for promoting social change, but this delicate balance is being disturbed by populism and polarization.**

   Spanish civil society sustains its existence in balancing the provision of solutions to social problems, on one hand, with the advocacy for community needs and the articulation of the values of civility, on the other. On the expressive dimension, however, tensions between the democratic values that are endorsed within walls and the need or capacity of civil society to manage other non-state actors with uncivil values or behaviors remain largely unresolved.

6. **Civil society should further evolve as a space for innovation and advocacy that inspires but also confronts the state, rather than aspiring to complement or supplement it.**

   The future legitimacy of civil society is rooted in its innovation and advocacy roles. Civil society innovation does not run parallel to that of the state. Rather than meeting problems that are left unattended by the state, civil society is a source of innovative ideas and practices for state adoption and scaling. Beyond innovation, civil society should also adopt antagonistic roles to keep the state accountable and transparent to communities in need and the common good.

7. **Civil society as a key source for social resilience needs to put collective thinking, dialogue, and action at its core.**

   The core future outcome of civil society consists of collectively articulating ecosystems for inclusive well-being. Although civil leadership by individuals matters—and is being leveraged by social media—civil society as a valued achievement is clearly positioned in the "we" end of the identity spectrum. In Spain, civil society is concomitant with solidarity.

8. **Spanish civil society has gained impetus with shocks like the 2008 economic crisis or the COVID-19 pandemic, but it still lacks the capacity to sustain this momentum and achieve transformation in the long term.**

   Both crises spurred outbursts of civil mobilization and generosity, created awareness about social needs and civil rights and galvanized the innovation role of civil society. However, the effects of the pandemic remain ambiguous due to policies restrictive of rights and liberties. A dual-speed impact was identified: while organized civil society retreated during lockdowns, informal civil society such as families, support groups, neighborhoods, and communities rapidly mobilized for self-support.

9. **The existing political, legal, and fiscal framework, together with cultural factors, slow down further development of civil society in Spain.**

   Overall, the majority of Spaniards support civil society organizations and value civil society. Strength of Spanish civil society is comparable to that of other Western European countries if the resilient fabric of informal actors and networks of support (individual citizens, families,

neighborhoods, communities, or movements) is considered. However, a favorable institutional framework is missing and mechanisms for formal participation are insufficient or rarely used. Also, the historical lack of a deeply ingrained civil society culture, in contrast to the United States, carries weight on this gap, as citizens expect the state to cater for their needs in the first place. Citizenship education emerges as a key enabler of the necessary change in culture.

10. **More orchestration is needed to enhance civil society in Spain.**

    Spain is home of a plural fabric of civil society organizations involved in advocacy and innovation initiatives and a resilient interlining of informal actors that visibly bolsters toward mobilization and self-support in the face of external shocks. Beyond their evident contributions in terms of agitating and innovating, the time has come to orchestrate more. The main levers for orchestration to happen lie in transformational alliances and digital information and communication technologies.

1. Introduction

This paper responds to a normative objective to strengthen civil society in Spain. Further articulation of a vibrant and globally connected civil society seems pivotal in the face of the new domestic and international challenges of the post-COVID recovery period. Threats and opportunities compounded by long-range political, economic, social, and environmental tensions—from climate crisis to conflict in post-Soviet states—call on collective reflection and action by citizens and civil society organizations to protect the common good as cornerstone of a sustainable future.

In the case of Spain, as democracy has consolidated and the country has modernized, the actors and the context have changed dramatically. Civil society has become more secular, diverse, larger, closer to the business sector, and globalized, with the subsequent repositioning of its roles and functions in regard to the state. Civil society has felt both challenged and empowered by social media amidst the unstoppable tide of digital transformation. Shocks have similarly galvanized or constrained civil society developments. While the 2008 economic crisis brought to the forefront the importance of informal civil social actors like the M-15 movement in a context of social protest and political turnaround, the ambiguous impact of the COVID-19 crisis—simultaneously bolstering and restraining civil society—is yet to be systematically assessed. Finally, broader changes in the collective imaginary of Spanish society under the forces of globalization and neoliberalism have further shaped this weaving of a civic social fabric in the country. In light of current disruption, what role will civil society play in the post-COVID recovery period? Will civil society remain as valued in the aftermath of this ongoing crisis as it was during Spain's transition to democracy? Or does civil society need to be redefined in the first place, for its contribution to future prosperity, equality, and freedom in Spain to be unleashed to its full potential?

Against this background, we soon realized that the lens of academic debate on civil society, which traditionally focused on its contribution to the democratic transition in the 1970s, as well as its changing relationship vis à vis the state, needed to be broadened. Beyond this focal concern on the

"how" (*How can civil society be enhanced in Spain?*), questions related to the "what" (*What is civil society?),* the "who" *(What are its boundaries?*), and the "why" (*Why is it important or, in other words, what are the sources of its legitimacy?*) also deserved some thought. Solving these foundational questions was a necessary step to inquire about how recent developments like the COVID-19 pandemic have affected Spanish civil society and to which extent the current institutional context favors its development. These findings were then used as steppingstone for sketching a future agenda to enhance civil society in the country.

To inform the focal agenda-setting reflection on the current configuration, driving forces and future potential of Spanish civil society with actionable knowledge, we adopted an engaged scholarship approach to unfold a dialogue between theoretical and practical reflection.[1] We moved back and forth from the insights of academic literature on recent theoretical and practical developments around civil societies in Europe, to the acumen of Spanish civil society leaders who had participated in the first five editions of the Global Civil Society Seminar (GCSS).

The Global Civil Society Seminar benefited from the expertise of renowned Harvard scholars, including Julie Battilana, Joseph C. Wilson Professor of Business Administration in the Organizational Behavior unit at Harvard Business School and the Alan L. Gleitsman Professor of Social Innovation at Harvard Kennedy School, where she is also the founder and faculty chair of the Social Innovation and Change Initiative, and author of *Power, for All: How It Really Works and Why It's Everyone's Business*; Jim Bildner, Adjunct Lecturer in Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School and CEO of the Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation where he focuses on investing in domestic non-profits and social enterprises that are working to solve complex issues including systemic poverty, food insecurity, access to healthcare, homelessness, community development and second generation strategies to address these issues; Martha Chen, Lecturer in Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School, an Affiliated Professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, and cofounder, International Coordinator Emeritus and Senior Advisor of the global research-policy action

1 Van De Ven, A. H., & Johnson, P. E. (2006). Knowledge for theory and practice. *Academy of Management Review*, 31(4), 802–821.

network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO); Peter A. Hall, Krupp Foundation Professor of European Studies in the Department of Government at Harvard University and a resident faculty member at the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies, and author of *Governing the Economy* (1986), *The Political Power of Economic Ideas* (1989), and *Varieties of Capitalism* (with D. Soskice, 2001); Ricardo Hausmann, founder and Director of Harvard's Growth Lab and the Rafik Hariri Professor of the Practice of International Political Economy at Harvard Kennedy School, who has published in some of the top journals in the world, including *Science*, *Journal of Development Economics, Journal of International Economics, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Journal of International Money and Finance*, *Economic Policy* and the *Journal of Economic Growth*, among many others; Robert Livingston, who is a social psychologist and a leading expert on the science underlying bias and racism in organizations who has served as a diversity consultant to scores of Fortune 500 companies, public-sector agencies, and non-profit organizations; Tawakkol Karman who was awarded the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her nonviolent struggle for the safety of women and their right to full participation in the peace building process in Yemen. Karman was the first Yemeni, the first Arab woman, and the second Muslim woman to receive this honor, and at 32, was the youngest Nobel Prize Laureates to date and the president of the organization Women Journalists Without Chains. Their (as well as other Harvard scholars who participated in previous years) research, contributions and insights were instrumental to the success of the Seminar and this study. We also used the works by Pérez-Díaz, one of the most renowned civil society scholars in Spain, as an anchor to frame and prompt the initial discussion and complemented them with studies by other academics in the field.

On the practitioners' side, GCSS alumni reflections were collected through two brainstorming sessions, one online survey through semi-structured questionnaire, and three focus groups reacting on survey results that were guided by researchers through a shared questionnaire. Preliminary ideas emerging from the two brainstorming sessions were used to inform the online survey questionnaire that allowed us to quantitatively assess the four study themes, each corresponding to a different section: I) conceptualization; II) sources of legitimacy; III) contextual conditions; and IV) enablers

of civil society in Spain. Descriptive statistical measures and cluster analysis were used to quantitatively assess the importance of subtopics and to identify distinct groups of respondents in terms of consensus and dissent around them. Finally, three focus groups with alumni belonging to the business, nonprofit and public sectors allowed for in-depth discussion around the insights emerging from the survey.[2]

2 Details for the methodological approach used to gather insights from civil society leaders can be found in the Methodological Appendix at the end of this document.

2. Background: Civil Society in Contemporary Spain

How can the potential contribution of civil society to freedom and prosperity of Spain be enhanced in a context of disruptive geopolitical, economic, social, and technological shifts? This moral appeal echoes the modern view of civil society as a valued ideal encapsulated by Scottish philosophers of the first half of the 18th century like Smith or Hume: civil society as defined by limited government, accountable to a representative body and to public opinion, under the rule of law, and a market economy and a society where voluntary associations play a pivotal role. At the same time, it also resounds a more pragmatic approach to civil society as the concrete space that lies beyond state walls, cyclically flourishing or shrinking as the Leviathan retreats or expands, enables, or constricts its activities.

Civil society thus understood has joined with the idea and practice of democracy during the contemporary age. Civil society has played a key role not only in checking and balancing state power in liberal democracies, but also in starting, facilitating and consolidating democratic transitions in Southern Europe, post-communist countries, and Latin America.[3] In the case of Spain, Pérez-Díaz, one of the foremost sociologists in the country, hypothesized that its successful transition to democracy was grounded in the previous existence or parallel development of civil society: "a successful transition will come about only if, and only to the extent that, a civil society or something like it either predates the transition or becomes established in the course of it."[4] Together with socioeconomic development, civil society, understood as "social institutions such as markets and voluntary associations and a public sphere which are outside the direct control, in a full or in a mitigated sense, of the state," becomes a touchstone of the emergence of a liberal democratic society.[5]

3 Linz, J. J., & Stepan, A. (1996). *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and post-communist Europe.* Baltimore, MD/London: John Hopkins University Press.

4 Perez-Diaz, V.M. (1993). *The Return of Civil Society: The Emergence of Democratic Spain.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 40.

5 Ibid, 57.

Pérez-Díaz concluded that it was thanks to the development of civil society in the 1960s, during the late reformist period of the Francoist regime and as result of modernization under foreign influence, that the religious, class, and regional divisions that led to civil war ceased to polarize the country as democratic transition culminated. Back to the broader theme of the cyclical state-civil society relationship, Pérez-Díaz argued that during the late 1970s and the 1980s the evolution of civil society in Western Europe took place in parallel to the crisis of legitimacy of the welfare states, a period marked by economic and identity strains.[6]

Much has changed in Spain and in the world since this announcement of the return of civil society to Western Europe. In the Spanish civil society realm, three long-range developments are worthy of note for their impact on its standing vis-à-vis the state and other societal actors: secularization, diversification and expansion, and increased proximity to the business sector.

Firstly, pre-democratic civil society was founded upon the dominant role of the Catholic Church in the provision of social needs and grounding of philanthropic motivations; and upon corporatist arrangements between the state and a few traditional, large civil society organizations (such as Cruz Roja Española, Organización Nacional de Ciegos de España, and Cáritas Española). By contrast, a new framework of state-civil society relationships emerged since the 1980s because of the late but rapid consolidation of a democratic system, entry into the European Common Market, a quasi-federal welfare state deployed through autonomous regional governments, and speedy economic growth until the 2008 economic crisis. The new framework is characterized by progressive secularization; a new more favorable legal and tax environment for nonprofit organizations alongside extended collaboration with the state; a boom in the number and diversity of civil society organizations, volunteers, and individual, corporate, and other philanthropic donors; and increased competition for public and private funding on the side of a myriad public benefit causes.[7]

6 Ibid.

7 Rey-García, M.; Alvarez-González, L.I. and Valls-Riera, R. (2013). The evolution of national fundraising campaigns in Spain: nonprofit organizations between the State and emerging civil society, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 42(2): 300–321.

Secondly, a new civil society actor powerfully emerged after the advent of democracy that complemented the preexisting associational fabric: philanthropic foundations, mostly operating ones. From being almost insignificant in numbers in 1977, the year of Spain's first democratic elections, they became the fastest-growing type of civil organization in the country, to the point of amounting for approximately half of all organizations with nonprofit tax status in 2005; the other half consisting of public utility associations. This relatively young but vigorous Spanish foundation sector constitutes today one of the largest populations of public benefit foundations in Europe. Despite the prevalence of small, weakly endowed organizations, this civil society subsector is highly institutionalized and influential and has seen its roles shift from build-out to innovation, parallel to a continuous interplay between complementarity and, to a lesser extent, substitution.

Thirdly, the increased proximity of civil society to the corporate world is apparent in the creation of new civil society organizations as instruments of corporate citizenship. Parallel to the rise of corporate social responsibility in the business world, corporate foundations boomed in the 2000s, sometimes as substitutes but more frequently as supplement to the corporate social responsibility function of firms. The percentage of corporate foundations over total foundations doubled between 2008 and 2014. Seventy-five percent of the 35 largest publicly held companies in Spain (those listed in the IBEX35) had created foundations in 2016, the probability increasing with firm size.[8]

Another visible manifestation of this rapprochement lies in the appearance of business-nonprofit partnerships and other hybrid actors to tackle ambitious public benefit goals, from climate change to work integration and independent living of the most vulnerable citizens, and in large Spanish firms massively rallying around global sustainability initiatives, from the Global Compact to the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in collaboration with other actors.[9] Whereas traditional actors such as the

8 Rey-Garciá, Marta (2018). Foundations in Spain: An International Comparison of a Dynamic Nonprofit Subsector. *American Behavioral Scientist*. Vol. 62(13) 1869–1888.

9 According to the latest scores of the Carbon Disclosure Project, assessing environmental action by over 13,000 companies around the world, 10 Spanish multinationals are included in the c. 270 companies that scored "A" in climate change; which leaves Spain among the top four European countries after France, UK and Germany. For analysis of a large cross-sector partnership led by Accenture Foundation for work integration in Spain see Rey-García, Marta et al. (2019) Collective social enterprises for social innovation:

Catholic Church and the labor unions have undergone crises of representation, business actors such as large multinational corporations, individual entrepreneurs, and social enterprises have visibly emerged as state interlocutors to the point of playing a quasi-counterpart role in pivotal public benefit fields such as innovation or employment.

All in all, the emergence of a secular, blooming and pluralistic civil society; the unfolding of a foundation sector; and a growing proximity between civil society actors and the corporate world have resulted in emergence of an increasingly vibrant, competitive, and globally connected civil society in the country. However, and parallel to their evident contribution to strengthening the parliamentary monarchy in Spain, civil society actors, particularly social movements, have also forcefully challenged the political status quo.

All in all, the emergence of a secular, blooming and pluralistic civil society; the unfolding of a foundation sector; and a growing proximity between civil society actors and the corporate world have resulted in emergence of an increasingly vibrant, competitive, and globally connected civil society in the country. However, and parallel to their evident contribution to strengthening the parliamentary monarchy in Spain, civil society actors, particularly social movements, have also forcefully challenged the political status quo.

From the perspective of political economy, although the 2008 economic crisis had a devastating impact on the country, it also contributed to awakening civil society.

From the perspective of political economy, although the 2008 economic crisis had a devastating impact on the country, it also contributed to awakening civil society. The crisis exposed the generalized process of degradation that affected institutions across the country, such as Congress, the monarchy, and the judiciary.[10] Spanish society has experienced profound

Understanding the potential and limitations of cross-sector partnerships in the field of work integration, *Management Decision*. 57(6): 1415–1440. For analysis of the leadership role of the Spanish Red Cross in moving forward cross-sector collaborative business models for telecare see Rey-García, Marta et al. (2021): Transitioning Collaborative Cross-Sector Business Models for Sustainability Innovation: Multilevel Tension Management as a Dynamic Capability. *Business & Society*. 60(5), 1132–1173.

10 Sebastián Royo (2020). *Why Banks Fail: The Political Roots of Banking Crisis is Spain*, pp, 238–41. New York: Palgrave; and Sebastián Royo**.** "Institutional Degeneration and the Economic Crisis in Spain." Special issue of *American Behavioral Scientist. The Economic Crisis from Within: Evidence from Southern Europe*. Anna Zamora-Kapoor, and Xavier Coller (eds.). Vol. 58(12), 2014, pp.1568–1591.

changes in the years that followed the economic and political crises that have crystallized in a crisis of representation characterized by a deep breach between citizens, and politicians/political parties. This breach has been deepened by the perceived lack of responsiveness to citizens' needs, as well as by the absence of clear diagnoses and plans to address those needs from the main political parties.[11]

Popular and social discontent over the crisis came to the fore on May 15th, 2011, which became a key day in the political transformation of the country. That day thousands of citizens took over their cities and town squares, including *la Puerta del Sol,* the Sun's Gate (one of Madrid's most iconic squares located at the geographical center of the Iberian Peninsula). This movement was called the "indignados movement," or the M-15 movement. Although the movement did not last long (in early August, taking advantage of the summer lull, the police removed them from la Puerta del Sol), it conveyed a powerful message, not just in Spain but all over the world: The Spanish people were fed up. They wanted their voices heard, and they were ready to fight to have their problems addressed. The movement continued operating in neighborhoods, communal assemblies, and in many other social movements. One year later, thousands of citizens returned to la Puerta del Sol to commemorate the movement's first anniversary.

The M-15 movement was very significant development. On the one hand, the movement seemed to show that something had finally changed in Spain. The crisis exposed a passive society that had failed to hold its political class accountable, that was not vigilant, and that was more interested in perpetuating and living the "fiesta" than challenging the status quo. As long as society benefited overall, no one questioned the situation. However, the expectations raised by the May 15 movement, with its indictment of the political class, changed all that.

The financial crisis had a profound effect on many Spanish citizens, as they seem to be behaving differently.[12] They became more engaged: political

11 Ignacio Urquizu (2016). *La crisis de representación en España*. Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata.

12 Urquizu (2016); and Oscar Pereira-Zazo and Steven Torres (2019). *Spain after the Indignados/15M Movement*. New York: Palgrave.

participation has increased (there was a 71.8 turnout in the April 2019 general election, up 5.3 percent from the previous one); they had higher expectations of their leaders, as well as lower tolerance for corruption (according to polls, the Spanish population considered corruption their second biggest problem, only behind unemployment, and 1,378 officials were prosecuted for corruption between July 2015 and September 2016); and they are willing to hold their leaders more accountable (as evidenced by the fall of the Rajoy government in 2018 following an accumulation of corruption scandals, and the subsequent electoral disaster for the Popular party in the April 2019 election in which it lost 15.9 percent of its votes).

At the same time, the M-15 movement was the precursor of a political movement that transformed the electoral map of the country in 2014 and 2015. At the local and regional levels, it was closely connected with the formation of new political parties and coalitions like *Ganemos* or *en Común*; and at the national level it had a crucial impact in the development of a new political party *Podemos*/*Ganemos* that became a significant political player that contributed to the fragmentation of the political system and is currently (as of May 2022) part of the Spanish government coalition.

Finally, Spain has not been oblivious to the global spread of the idea of the newly created term "global civil society."[13] Domestic debates and practices have intermingled with cross-national conversations about shifting expectations regarding civil society's service providing or advocacy roles vis à vis the state and business organizations. Regarding the service provision facet, civil society organizations have experienced marketization as efficient suppliers of public services. According to Peter Hall and Michèle Lamont, the advance of neoliberal economic policies based on deregulation, privatization, and expansion of

Finally, Spain has not been oblivious to the global spread of the idea of the newly created term "global civil society." Domestic debates and practices have intermingled with cross-national conversations about the shifting expectations regarding civil society's service providing or advocacy roles vis à vis the state and business organizations.

13 Anheier, et al. (Eds.) H., (2001). *Civil society*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

global markets "called for a rearrangement of state-market relations and, in some guises, for a shift to more robust civil societies that could perform the tasks at which states were no longer thought to be efficient. Where others had once seen families or communities, growing numbers of economists and policymakers . . . deliberately extended [market competition] to new spheres, including the delivery of health care and public services.[14] Spain is no exception to this collective re-imagining of communities that defines the neoliberal era.

On the advocacy dimension, civil society has continued its traditional counterweight of state power while extending its watchdog activities on human rights in the corporate realm, in the face of the rampant power of large, multinational companies. John Ruggie analyzed the ability by businesses and business associations for discursive power, that is, for framing and defining public interests in their favor unfolded by shaping "ideas that then come to be taken for granted as the way things should be done, even for non-business entities like governments."[15] Corporate globalization benefited from the massive shift in discursive power that accompanied neoliberalism, and in turn reinforced it through displacing prevailing ideas, norms and identities and promoting new ones. In this context, it had to be the escalating pressure from civil society and adversely affected populations that forced recognition that companies have human rights responsibilities, contributing to the process of social construction of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.[16]

Lately, neoliberalism understood as "a syncretic social process marked by adjustment, resistance, and creative transformation" has been shaken first by the pandemic and then by the war in Ukraine, resulting in restriction of political and economic freedoms and a state-is-back setting.[17] However, the COVID-19 pandemic has also stimulated outstanding accomplishments of global civil society, for example with worldwide research networks

14 Hall, Peter A. and Michèle Lamont (2012), "Introduction," in Hall, P.A. and Lamont, M. (eds.) *Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 4.

15 Ruggie, John G. (2018). Multinationals as global institution: Power, authority and relative autonomy. *Regulation & Governance*, 12(3), p. 321.

16 Ruggie, John G., "The Social Construction of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights." Corporate Responsibility Initiative Working Paper No. 67. Cambridge, MA: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

17 Hall and Lamont (2012), ibid. p. 22.

collaboratively developing the vaccines in a race against time. All this leads to inevitable questions about new conceptual and practical shifts in the state-business-civil society triangle. Overall, the power dynamics of key civil society institutions have undergone radical transformation in Spain and globally. Beyond civil society and business actors, two new non-state actors are forcefully reclaiming their own space: the planet with its boundaries and digital technologies. Social networks have broadened the limits of the public space beyond the circles of enlightened elites and those with voice or influence in traditional mass media. Last, but not least, old cleavages such as nationalism compound today with new ones anchored on partisan politics polarized around race and ethnicity, age, gender, or environmental issues, to mention just a few.

Overall, the power dynamics of key civil society institutions have undergone radical transformation in Spain and globally. Beyond civil society and business actors, two new non-state actors are forcefully reclaiming their own space: the planet with its boundaries and digital technologies.

3. Conceptualization and Boundaries of Civil Society

3.1 Brainstorming Civil Society as a Multi-Layered Idea

Civil society has been characterized as a complex, polysemous concept that is used in academic and public debates in fundamentally different and even conflicting ways. To start the conversation about the current conceptualization of civil society in Spain and to avoid vagueness or confusion, we used Pérez-Díaz idea of a multi-layered concept of civil society, composed by four different levels of meaning:

1. *Broad sense*: a type of society with limited government under the rule of law, markets, a public sphere, and voluntary associations. In other words, a "commercial and polite" society.
2. *Intermediate sense*: markets and voluntary associations. The political state is in full charge while allowing for markets and class plurality.
3. *Restricted sense*: associations and social networks of any kind (including related concepts such as third sector, social capital, public sphere, or the realm of civility). Civil society provides here the space for people to influence markets and politics from the distance trough their associational life.
4. *Ultra-restricted sense*: a subset of associations that convey a moral message connected with the value of civility.[18]

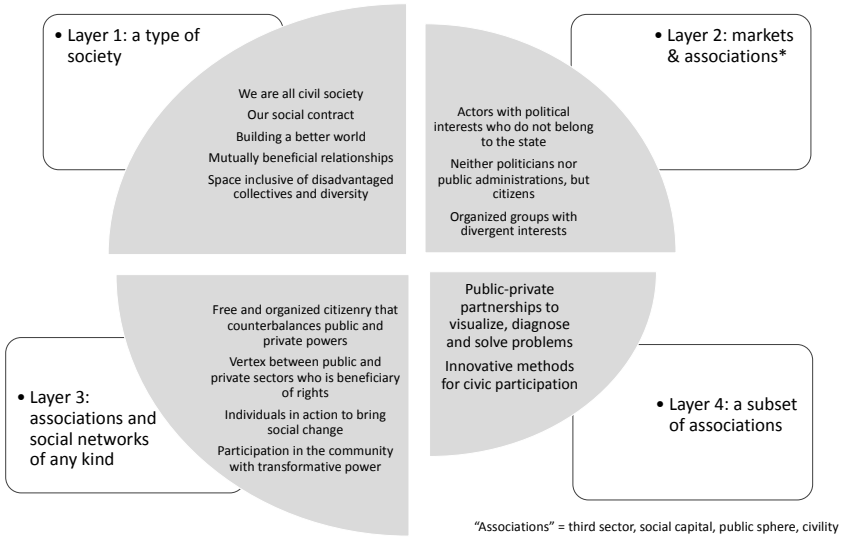
We then went back and forth between extant academic literature and debate among practitioners participating in the two brainstorming sessions that took place during the 2020 GCSS. In the first session, participants were asked to provide a short response to the question "What does civil society mean for you?" Next, their answers were grouped according to frequency and mapped to each of the four layers described by Pérez-Díaz. Results of this mapping were presented to them in the second brainstorming session for open discussion and further refinement. This theory-field dialogue served as a starting point to preliminarily explore adherence and

18 Pérez-Díaz, V. (2014). "Civil Society: a Multi-layered concept." *Current Sociology Review*, Vol. 62(6), pp. 812–830.

interpretation by GCSS alumni with different conceptualizations of civil society and to identify relevant topics under the four themes of the study.

Most participants aligned with layers 1 and 3. Figure 1 depicts the main conceptualizations and subthemes that emerged under each layer on occasion of the mapping exercise and discussion.

Figure 1. Civil Society as a Multi-Layered Concept



Source: Authors' elaboration

Most prevalent interpretations aligned with the normative approach to civil society as an ethically and politically superior type of society gathering individual citizens for the common good (layer 1), and with the associational approach where civil society develops strategies to achieve transformation toward that predefined good through its organizations, social movements, and civic engagement (layer 3). Civil society would be a signifier for pluralism, a precondition for egalitarian diversity, and a counterbalance to both public and market powers. By contrast, the belonging of market actors to civil society was relatively less prevalent and intertwined with the idea of non-state actors lobbying for their political interests against a powerful state (layer 2). The most restricted view of civil society was skewed toward the ideas of cross-sector partnering and social innovation as prerequisites for broader society to face pressing challenges.

3.2 Defining and Delimiting Civil Society: What Is It and Who Belongs?

Survey responses to section I on conceptualizing civil society suggest a high level of agreement with the following five core characterization ideas (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Conceptualizing Civil Society

1. A strong civil society is a key prerequisite for the quality of democracies.
2. Civil society should actively participate in the design and implementation of public policies at a local, national, and supranational level.
3. Civil society consists of non-state actors organized for collective action toward social change, regardless of sector affiliation.
4. Civil society consists of those actors that endorse civil values (democracy, solidarity, rule of law, freedom, equality, fraternity, justice . . .).
5. Civil society watchdogs state actors, the government and the public administrations, and counterweights their power.

Source: Authors' elaboration

Beyond this basic consensus, cluster analysis allowed us to identify two clearly distinct, largely asymmetric groups of respondents. The first cluster consists of an overwhelming portion of respondents (74) who aligned with the ideas that a strong civil society is a key prerequisite for the quality of democracies and that civil society should actively participate in the design and implementation of public policies at a local, national, and supranational level. A second cluster, consisting of nine respondents, considers that civil society is not equivalent to the third sector (diverging from the associational approach of layer 3) and that political parties and labor unions are part of it. In the first cluster, the boundaries between politics and civil society are clearer, though the latter is called to actively engage in the outside realm of policy making; in the second cluster, boundaries between politics and civil society are blurred as the latter includes traditional mechanisms of political and group interest representation.

Cleavages between both clusters further accentuated when assessing the standing of political parties vis-à-vis civil society, the equivalence between civil society and the third sector, and the idea that civil society consists of non-state actors organized for collective action toward social change. By contrast, both groups agreed that while civil society excludes societal actors that belong to the state, it still needs to inclusively manage actors with values that dissent from civility and is useful to build majority agreements on conflicting political and economic interests.

3.3 Focus Group Discussion

It is remarkable that section I of our online questionnaire on the conceptualization and boundaries of civil society had the highest variance. In the words of one public sector practitioner, "the only conceptual basis where there is a consensus is that civil society is what is not state" (Rafael Eguiguren[19]). Focus group discussions shed more light on the reasons for these cleavages. Most participants clearly differentiated the realm of political participation, representation of concrete ideological stands, or representation of specific interests from that of civic engagement or individual participation in pro of the common good or the general interest, apolitical and non-denominational. For them, whereas the goal of political parties is to seize power through politics, civil society is not an instrument for take-over of power. This, according to them, does not preclude either party members belonging to civil society, or the possibility that civil society organizations influence policy making and propel agendas for social change. Regarding political parties, some of the participants who supported that political parties were part to civil society specified that, once in power (because of having achieved parliamentary representation or having won

Most participants clearly differentiated the realm of political participation, representation of concrete ideological stands, or representation of specific interests from that of civic engagement or individual participation in pro of the common good or the general interest, apolitical and non-denominational.

19 Rafael Eguiguren: https://www.linkedin.com/in/rafael-eguiguren-23674534/.

the executive), they are not part of civil society anymore, but rather belong to institutionalized political power.

With respect to labor unions, participants supported the idea that in principle they could be considered part of civil society as voluntary associations representing the interests of workers. In Spain, however, unions have become not only entangled with political parties but also with public administrations to the point that they rather belong to the state, rather than civil society. Further reasons for this ambiguity included the fact that the Spanish Constitution states clear roles for both political parties and unions but does not even mention the term civil society; and the recent emergency of a multi-party system that broke the traditional bipartisan model PP-PSOE. One public sector practitioner voiced the minority opinion that political parties and labor unions are a key pillar of civil society for their capacity to frame participation and articulate pluralism, and graphically concluded that "opposing politics to civil society is a bad idea that leaves civil society in a residual role, confined to rowing clubs and choir and dances associations" (Javier Zarzalejos[20]).

By contrast, there was full consensus about the third sector belonging within civil society, with the caveat that both terms are not synonyms, but rather the third sector is just a portion of civil society (again diverging from the ultra-restricted meaning as a subset of associations). The realm of organized civil society not only includes entities that may not be considered as typical third sector organizations (e.g., neighborhood associations, clubs, hybrid organizations), but also encompasses all types of informal actors, from social movements (e.g., Fridays for Future, Black Lives Matter, youth or religious movements) to civic platforms (e.g., 8M, Change.org), virtual communities (Anonymous, Forocoches, WhatsApp groups) and individual citizens (e.g.,

. . . digital technologies are empowering informal actors at the expense of representativeness of traditional third sector actors, to the point that informal actors have become the main source for impact of civil society and are receiving increased attention from public authorities.

20 Javier Zarzalejos: https://www.linkedin.com/in/f-javier-zarzalejos-nieto-016719150/?originalSubdomain=es.

volunteers; influencers, celebrities and other opinion makers; groups of intellectuals or scientists). In fact, some nonprofit and public sector practitioners concluded that digital technologies are empowering informal actors at the expense of representativeness of traditional third sector actors, to the point that informal actors have become the main source for impact of civil society and are receiving increased attention from public authorities. In the words of a nonprofit participant, "there is a brutal movement in connection with technology . . . similar to what happened to labor unions, third sector organizations are losing some of its capacity to represent civil society . . . movements of people who self-organize through the Internet for ad hoc purposes are key to understand where civil society is headed for, and which trends exist" (Borja Monreal[21]).

The split surfaced again when debating the membership of businesses within civil society. Only three participants from the focus groups of nonprofit and public sector practitioners positioned all types of businesses, regardless of size or purpose, within the boundaries of civil society, with the only exception of firms providing public services. By contrast, most participants considered businesses to be outside (the core of) civil society for having profit making as their main goal, in contrast to the common good that is the first aim of civil society actors. In the focus group with public sector practitioners, it was stressed that businesses themselves are the first to recognize that they do not belong within civil society. At the same time, a majority acknowledged businesses' increasing collaboration with civil society actors (through cross sector partnerships) and direct participation through their own hybrid, civil society organizations (e.g., corporate foundations) and employee mobilization (for example through corporate volunteering).

However, in the three focus groups many participants qualified this position depending on size and purpose of the firm. The company size was used as a proxy for institutionalized power: whereas small and medium enterprises would belong within civil society, large corporations would not if they tend to operate in close proximity to state power, intermingle with it, or even co-opt it. Regarding purpose, the growing focus of businesses

21 Borja Monreal: https://www.linkedin.com/in/borja-monreal/?originalSubdomain=es.

on stakeholders (rather than the more traditional focus on shareholders) as well as their increasing role as change makers with the full capacity to solve social and environmental problems, mobilize public opinion, or advocate for social or environmental issues was highlighted, echoing the words of Larry Fink, CEO of the world's largest asset manager, BlackRock: "a company cannot achieve long-term profits without embracing purpose and considering the needs of a broad range of stakeholders . . . a strong sense of purpose and a commitment to stakeholders helps a company connect more deeply to its customers and adjust to the changing demands of society."[22]

. . . whereas small and medium enterprises would belong within civil society, large corporations would not if they tend to operate in close proximity to state power, intermingle with it, or even co-opt it.

As one business practitioner concluded, any type of non-state actor, including businesses, can belong within civil society as long as their purpose is to make a positive impact on people and/or the planet, thus contributing to the common good. "Many firms have the capacity to mobilize public opinion, to influence people's behaviors and to become an engine for change. This does not necessarily mean that businesses belong within civil society, but there is a growing perception among them and by other actors that we can deliver value for society too through initiatives that are typical of civil society" (Susana Gato[23]). This latter argument echoes the idea by Robert Livingston that companies may be uniquely positioned to tackle deeply ingrained societal problems like discrimination. Compared with broader society, companies are "ideal places to develop policies and practices that promote racial equity" because as organizations they "are relatively small, autonomous entities that afford leaders a high level of control over cultural norms and procedural rules."[24]

22 Letter from Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock. Retrieved from https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/investor-relations/larry-fink-ceo-letter.

23 Susana Gato: https://www.linkedin.com/in/susana-gato-garc%C3%ADa-72b5aa9/?originalSubdomain=es.

24 Robert Livingston (2020). How to Promote Racial Equity in the Workplace: a five-step plan, *Harvard Business Review*, September–October 2020, p. 5.

4. Sources of Legitimacy for Civil Society

4.1 Why Is Civil Society Valued? Dimensions and Roles vis-á-vis the State

How does civil society sustain its existence? Or, in other words, why is it valued by broader society? Nonprofit and voluntary sector literature has made a fundamental distinction between the instrumental and expressive dimensions of civil society activities: actions based on an instrumental rationale are related to service delivery and social entrepreneurship while actions based on an expressive rationale involve civic and political engagement or articulating values and beliefs. Most often, both dimensions are combined in practice, as most civil society actors adopt blended roles as service providers and advocates or value guardians.[25]

The sources of legitimacy of civil society have been further nuanced in connection with their expected roles vis-à-vis the state. A traditional typology of roles distinguishes between: 1) innovation: promotion of new social perceptions, values, relationships, and ways of doing things parallel to state activities; 2) complementary or supplementary: completing or adding to the activities of the state under a mutually beneficial division of labor, e.g., serving otherwise undersupplied groups and their minority interests), substitution (taking on general interest functions otherwise previously supplied by the state, particularly local government) and 3) adversarial (engaging in advocacy or contestation to seek political, policy or social change).[26]

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25 Under the instrumental dimension, civil society is instrumental to meet the needs valued by the community through delivery of services and innovative activities. Under the expressive dimension, civil society serves as an outlet for individual beliefs, for value driven, often altruistic activities (promoting ethical, religious, or civil values, advancing voluntarism), and for making social causes and community needs visible. Frumkin, P. (2002). *On being nonprofit: A conceptual and policy primer*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

26 Civil society organizations are seen as complementary or substitutional actors of public services in the wake of government or market failure, meeting a range of minority preferences with public and quasi-public goods. By contrast, the advocacy role varies according to the civic culture and civic mindedness of communities. Within this latter role, it is important to distinguish between its involvement in civic dialogue and political decision-making, and its role as watchdog outside the political system in defense of the political or social rights of citizens. Young, D. R. (2000). Alternative models of government-nonprofit sector relations: Theoretical and international perspectives. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 29(1), 149–172; Young, D. R. and Casey, J. (2016). Supplementary, Complementary, or Adversarial? Nonprofit-Government Relations. In: Elizabeth T. Boris and C. Eugene Steuerle, eds., *Nonprofits & Government: Collaboration & Conflict*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 37–80; and Weisbrod, B. A. (1998). *To profit or*

Along this categorization, survey respondents ranked the following sources of legitimacy for civil society as the most relevant (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Sources of Legitimacy for Civil Society

The main source of legitimacy for civil society is . . .

1. Its capacity to generate solutions to social problems
2. The civility of the value sets it endorses
3. The democratic participation that nurtures its functioning
4. Its capacity to inclusively manage groups and social movements that are not aligned with civil or democratic values (e.g., racist, supremacist, . . .)

Source: Authors' elaboration

Again, the divisions among survey respondents were evidenced through cluster analysis, that served to identify two groups of similar sizes: one "expressive" cluster of 45 individuals rallying around the idea that its main source of legitimacy originates from the civility of the value sets it endorses, an another "instrumental" cluster of 38 participants who believe civil society is legitimized by its capacity to generate solutions to social problems. On the one hand, respondents agreed that the efficacy of civil society is grounded on its value sets, its capacity to address societal challenges and the democratic participation that substantiates its functioning. On the other hand, consensus was low when asked whether one of its sources of legitimacy was its capacity to inclusively manage groups and social movements that are not aligned with civil or democratic values.

4.2 Focus Group Discussion

Discussion on the topic of civil society's sources of legitimacy surfaced relevant differences in connection with its expected roles vis-à-vis the state. A majority of practitioners considered that collectively promoting social change was intrinsic to civil society and coupled such a goal to its

not to profit: The commercial transformation of the nonprofit sector. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

innovation and supplementary roles. The subsidiarity principle was alleged as a locus for legitimacy, due to the closer proximity of civil society actors to changing people's problems in opposition to the state. The complementarity of civil society was mostly emphasized by the focus group with public sector practitioners, who used fiscal incentives for philanthropy and patronage to illustrate how the state sets the priorities and the framework to make them happen, and civil society actors follow suit according to their different preferences.

The complementarity of civil society was mostly emphasized by the focus group with public sector practitioners, . . . By contrast, the nonprofit focus group took one step beyond and inverted the roles: . . . the distinct trait of civil society is being the diverse, plural space where the dreams of betterment of society germinate. Then, it is on the public sector to achieve them sooner or later, eagerly or reluctantly, it depends.

By contrast, the nonprofit focus group took one step beyond and inverted the roles: "It is natural for civil society to organize itself to promote positive change, its primary goal. The role of the state would be subsidiary in adopting civil society innovative debates, proposals and models of intervention: the state will reach where civil society does not, rather than the opposite" (Alfonso Rodriguez[27]). In the words of another nonprofit practitioner, "the distinct trait of civil society is being the diverse, plural space where the dreams of betterment of society germinate. Then, it is on the public sector to achieve them sooner or later, eagerly or reluctantly, it depends. And business make a profit from some of those dreams. Just think about the green economy, renewable energies or electric mobility." However, some practitioners questioned the legitimacy of the supplementary or substitution roles and supported the need to adopt innovative or adversarial roles as counterweight. As graphically expressed by a nonprofit leader, "think about hunger queues [organized in front of soup kitchens]. Is that complementarity or showing the need for a response to fight against a social problem? I prefer to call it advocacy. Civil society should not assume as its own function feeding the hungry" (Antoni Bruel[28]).

27 Alfonso Rodríguez: https://www.linkedin.com/in/alfonsorodriguezmaroto/?originalSubdomain=es.

28 Antoni Bruel: https://twitter.com/tonibruel.

Other participants questioned the association between civil society and positive social change for being based on naïveté or do-goodism and emphasized that civil society encompasses all types of dreams and impulses for change, including uncivil ones. This topic was further debated in connection with the convenience of inclusively managing groups or movements that, though operating within the limits of legality, dissent from democratic values. The focus groups split in two, with some participants alleging that uncivil groups should be listened to but be kept outside of the walls, while others still considered uncivil groups or movements a portion of civil society but stressed the need to work with them toward inclusion (e.g., by attending their legitimate demands or providing education on the values of civility). One public representative took the argument further and stated that populism is precisely about questioning or denying the capacity of contemporary civil societies and political systems to inclusively manage undemocratic dissent: "they are trying to overflow institutions with demands that lead to the impression that they are not represented within the system" (Javier Zarzalejos).

By contrast, a broad consensus emerged when discussing the positioning of civil society between individual and collective identities. This is a relevant question, as evidenced by the eminent sociologist and seminar GCSS lecturer, Robert Putnam's analysis of the effects of the interplay between individualism and solidarity on the economic, political, social, and cultural life for twentieth century America. His diagnosis is that since the late 19th century and until the mid-1960s "more than six decades of imperfect but steady upward progress toward greater economic equality, more cooperation in the public square, a stronger social fabric, and a growing culture of solidarity" happened. Afterwards, however, the upswing trend reversed, and America has been experiencing "declining economic equality, the deterioration of compromise in the public square, a fraying social fabric, and a descent into cultural narcissism" that continues as of today. This inverted U-curve is called the "I-we-I" as a mega-trend climbing "into greater interdependence and cooperation, followed by a steep descent into greater independence and egoism." Its aggregate measures are nuanced for

the complexities of racial and gender equality as "the "we" taking shape at this time [the first two thirds of the twentieth century] was a fundamentally white, male "we."[29]

The three focus groups primarily positioned the identity of civil society in the "we" end, as a space for collective dialogue and action. However, they also acknowledged the important role that individual responsibilities, individual leadership (such as Greta Thunberg, or labor leaders in Africa) and individual behaviors (e.g., responsible consumption) play in achieving collective well-being. Practitioners stressed the need to use collaboration and conflict strategically to articulate pluralism for the common good and highlighted the role of civil society in establishing channels for peaceful confrontation. The importance of collective action would again be highlighted when discussing civil society response to the COVID-19 crisis. This massive positioning of civil society identity in the "we" end is coherent with the image that European countries and Spaniards themselves have of Spain, with 79% Europeans defining it as a solidary country.[30] Once the contribution of civil society to consolidation of democracy in the country has culminated, participants rather perceive its future value in becoming a source of social resilience, defined as the capacity of groups to collectively sustain their well-being by imagining new environments and constructing new responses to emerging opportunities and challenges.[31]

Practitioners stressed the need to use collaboration and conflict strategically to articulate pluralism for the common good and highlighted the role of civil society in establishing channels for peaceful confrontation. . . . Once the contribution of civil society to consolidation of democracy in the country has culminated, participants rather perceive its future value in becoming a source of social resilience.

29 Putnam, R. D., with Shaylyn Romney Garrett (2020). *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*. Simon & Schuster. Pages 10–14.

30 Data from April 9, 2021, oleada. Barómetro Imagen de España, Real Instituto Elcano. http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/observatorio-imagen-espana/barometro-imagen-espana/.

31 Hall and Lamont (2012), ibid.

5. Civil Society in Spain: Contextual Conditions

5.1 Exogenous Shocks and Institutional Context Shaping Spanish Civil Society

Section III of the study dealt with two interrelated topics: how recent exogenous shocks have affected civil society in Spain and to which extent the current institutional context favors its development. Our first goal was to shed light on the effects of major societal challenges on civil society, particularly urgent ones such as those triggered by the 2008 economic crisis and the disruptive COVID-19 pandemic.[32] Our second goal was to inquire about the quality of the institutional and cultural context currently surrounding Spanish civil society, mainly in regard to the European context.

Extant literature has evidenced radically different levels of civil society and the accompanying social capital among European countries, as measured by formal volunteering and informal social support as a percent of total population, or by trust in the political system or in other citizens. Overall, the highest levels of these proxies for civil society and social capital correspond to the Nordic countries, followed by the liberal and conservative welfare systems. Spain and other Mediterranean countries as well as the former socialist countries tend to report the lowest levels.

These differences have been mainly attributed to two types of factors: 1) the diversity in the size, structure, and strength of organized civil society, understood as an intermediate public space between the state and the individuals and their families that counterbalances individualism, state control and market forces; and 2) the different role that the family plays (defamiliarization combined with a strong state and informal support in Northern Europe vs. families providing welfare and social protection in Southern

32 Exogenous shocks affect institutions in paradoxical ways. Such jolts not only may lead to deinstitutionalization, or even imperil their future survival; but may also stimulate the emergence of creative solutions to grand challenges, galvanize joint implementation that is inclusive of all types of formal and informal actors, and foster new participatory architectures into the future that allow "diverse and heterogeneous actors to interact constructively over prolonged timespans." Ferraro, F., Etzion, D., & Gehman, J. (2015). Tackling Grand Challenges Pragmatically: Robust Action Revisited. *Organization Studies*, 36(3), 363–390. Page 373.

and Eastern Europe).[33] Although our goal is far from attempting any kind of systematic analysis on this matter, we used these two interrelated topics, exogenous shocks and institutional conditions, as a background check to better understand the characteristics of the soil where GCSS alumni proposals for a future agenda of civil society enhancement may take root—the focus of the last section of this study.

Survey participants showed a high level of agreement on the following effects of recent shocks and institutional conditions on Spanish civil society (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Framework Conditions of Civil Society in Spain

1. The COVID-19 pandemic is strengthening Spanish civil society
2. The economic crisis of 2008 has made Spanish civil society stronger
3. Civil society organizations enjoy credibility and social support in Spain
4. Spanish citizens identify civil society as an asset that is worthy of enhancement
5. The strength of civil society in Spain is comparable to that of other Western European countries

Source: Authors' elaboration

Parallel to section II on the sources of civil society's legitimacy in general, two balanced clusters emerged on the topic of the recent developments and current outlook of civil society in Spain. While a group of 37 individuals was distinguished by its perception that both the 2008 economic crisis and the pandemic were shocks that strengthened Spanish civil society, a second cluster of 44 individuals stood out by their belief that the institutional, legal, and fiscal frameworks existing in Spain do not favor the development of civil society. Both clusters agreed that Spanish citizens cannot access sufficient mechanisms of participation. By contrast, both the effects of the 2008 crisis on Spanish civil society and the quality of its institutional, legal, fiscal, and cultural frameworks (the latter assessed by the extent to which Spanish citizens identify civil society as an asset that is worthy of enhancement) elicited dissenting opinions between both groups.

33 Boje T.P. (2020) Civil Society and Social Capital in the European Context. In: List R., Anheier H., Toepler S. (eds) *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99675-2_637-1.

5.2 Focus Group Discussion

Overall, the effects of both crises on civil society were assessed as positive based on the understanding that they accelerated ongoing structural changes and created awareness about preexisting and new social needs, opening further windows of opportunity for the innovative role of civil society. However, in line with studies of other European countries, they acknowledged the inherent ambiguity of the effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. On the one hand, in Spain (as in many other countries) fundamental and human rights and civil liberties were restricted, the work of many CSOs was disrupted due to the impossibility of face-to-face activities, and the state took full leadership for managing the crisis. In the words of a public sector practitioner, "it is too early to assess the effects of the pandemic, but my impression is that organized civil society is retreating in Spain" (Javier Zarzalejos).

The effects of both crises on civil society were assessed as positive based on the understanding that they accelerated ongoing structural changes and created awareness about preexisting and new social needs, opening further windows of opportunity for the innovative role of civil society. However, in line with studies of other European countries, they acknowledged the inherent ambiguity of the effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

On the other hand, participants echoed what happened in other European countries, where "a new awareness of the importance of freedom and assembly rights has grown in many sectors of society. This can lead to an increase in the importance of CSOs in the post-pandemic period, if more people can be mobilized for their causes."[34] According to another public sector participant, the pandemic, "like any other disruptive event, galvanized civil society and particularly informal action around support groups, neighborhoods or schools."

34 Simsa, R., Mayer, F., Muckenhuber, S., & Schweinschwaller, T. (2021). *Framework Conditions of Austria's Civil Society*. (Opuscula, 153). Berlin: Maecenata Institut für Philanthropie und Zivilgesellschaft. Page 4. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-73928-5.

The positive response of informal civil society during the most acute phase of the pandemic, providing innovative solutions that complemented or anticipated state measures, was repeatedly highlighted (e.g., virtual communities of people who developed breathing machines). Overall, the enormous capacity of Spaniards for outbursts of innovative solutions, generosity, and civic mobilization on occasion of emergencies or crises in comparison with other European countries and the United States was highlighted.[35] According to one public sector practitioner, "we cannot find any European country with massive mobilizations of citizens that can be compared to Spaniards demonstrating after the terrorist attacks of March 11, 2004, every year during 8M (International Women's Day), against the war (in Iraq), or against the judicial sentence of La Manada (rape) case . . . These massive mobilizations generate individual commitments, active participation in more formalized civil society initiatives, changes in mentality and transformations in public policies (e.g., Ley de Violencia de Género, "Sí es Sí," etc.) (Eva García[36]).

The enormous capacity of Spaniards for outbursts of innovative solutions, generosity, and civic mobilization on occasion of emergencies or crises in comparison with other European countries and the United States was highlighted.

However, participants made a relevant distinction between these impulses for mobilization and altruism vs. the below-average capacity of Spanish civil society to sustainably self-organize, taking advantage of both exogenous jolts and institutional opportunities over the long term. According to a business practitioner, "when the pandemic started there was a hope that it would bring that harsh setting where it is imperative to build a shared

Participants made a relevant distinction between these impulses for mobilization and altruism vs. the below-average capacity of Spanish civil society to sustainably self-organize, taking advantage of both exogenous jolts and institutional opportunities over the long term.

35 Reactions of Spanish civil society to national fundraising campaigns on occasion of catastrophes such as Hurricane Mitch or the Indian Ocean Tsunami point toward the same direction. An international comparison can be found in Rey-García et al. (2013), ibid.

36 Eva García: https://www.linkedin.com/in/eva-garcia-bouzas-443690/?originalSubdomain=ch.

understanding to bring about structural change collaboratively. With all due caution, a type of tipping point similar to the [Spanish] transition to democracy . . . But more than a year later what we see is still that lack of strong institutions, leadership for the common good or a culture of constructive dialogue" (Bárbara Manrique[37]).

The latter idea powerfully surfaced during discussion on the quality of contextual conditions. Although the questionnaire explicitly used other countries in Western Europe as anchor for comparison, discussants contrasted the institutional context of civil society in Spain to that of the United States, particularly when referring to the current cultural and legal/fiscal context. According to a business practitioner, "historically, Spain lacks a culture of articulated civil society, of a multi-layered sense of community" (Bárbara Manrique). According to a nonprofit participant, 'over history' we have mistaken public with governmental . . . that's why all our hardware as a society, from the Constitution to the last regulation, is designed to be water-proof for civic engagement." It was also noted that the fiscal incentives for philanthropy and patronage are much lower in Spain than in the U.S. because the state is expected to guarantee the public interest in the first place.

The participants emphasized the two main cultural barriers that operate against civil society in Spain: 1) citizens expect the state to solve their problems in the first instance due to a lack of education regarding the value of the community and/or its capacity to take initiative (for example when the Filomena storm fell upon Madrid, citizens waited for public authorities to take the snow away, whereas in Central Park surrounding neighbors communities took care of cleaning and safety); and 2) there is a fragmented proliferation of civil society actors racing in parallel with their own very interesting initiatives, but it lacks an ecosystem grounded in constructive dialogue, effective collaboration, civic engagement and a common understanding toward the common good.

In regard to the role that the political environment currently prevailing in Spain plays in the development of civil society, the participants'

37 Bárbara Manrique: https://www.linkedin.com/in/b%C3%A1rbaramanriquedelara?originalSubdomain=es.

assessments were very pessimistic overall, mainly for two reasons. First, many times civil society platforms, movements or other informal initiatives are tutored by the state or bluntly co-opted by political parties, as it recently happened with the new parties that emerged after the 2008 economic crisis that broke the established two-party system. Vox and particularly Podemos were cited as examples of political parties that decapitalize social movements by taking away social tissue and institutionalizing it as an additional instrument for politics. Secondly, some public administrations distrust civil society organizations and citizens and none are ready to integrate their participation in their decision-making. According to a nonprofit practitioner, "there is a culture within the public administration of considering civil society as a nuisance . . . and there is a political belief that the state budget is not understood by citizens."

Many times civil society platforms, movements or other informal initiatives are tutored by the state or bluntly co-opted by political parties, as it recently happened with the new parties that emerged after the 2008 economic crisis that broke the established two-party system

However, as one participant reminded, these results should be qualified by the fact that that Spaniards' self-esteem ranks consistently low in comparison with the image that other European countries have of Spain and drops with each economic crisis (2008 and post-COVID).[38] As the discussion advanced, practitioners largely agreed on a more optimistic view in regard to the current and

On the one hand, the capacity for active listening, collaboration, and political co-participation on the side of state, market and civil society actors has been improving as evidenced by the receptivity of the state to claims by feminist or youth associations, or by the advanced business-nonprofit partnerships that have unfolded around CSR. On the other hand, there is evidence that the current social contract is exhausted and trust in institutions is eroded, opening a new window of opportunity for civil society to reimagine the future.

38 *Barómetro Imagen de España*, Real Instituto Elcano. http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/observatorio-imagen-espana/barometro-imagen-espana/.

future evolution of these contextual conditions, parallel to the conviction that Spanish civil society has already reached high levels of pluralism and momentum. On the one hand, the capacity for active listening, collaboration, and political co-participation on the side of state, market and civil society actors has been improving as evidenced by the receptivity of the state to claims by feminist or youth associations, or by the advanced business-nonprofit partnerships that have unfolded around CSR. On the other hand, there is evidence that the current social contract is exhausted and trust in institutions is eroded, opening a new window of opportunity for civil society to re-imagine the future.

Along this line of reasoning, discussants agreed on the need to disseminate the existence of effective mechanisms for participation by civil society that are already available but are rarely used by civil society actors. One example is the invitation to civil society leaders to intervene as experts in parliamentary commissions at the state or regional levels. According to a participant "it is an effective mechanism to participate in the design of public policies in a non-partisan setting" (Elisa de la Nuez[39]). Another example is the compulsory public hearing procedure that every proposed law/norm is subject to, opening the door to individual citizens or civil society organizations to pose questions or leave comments by email. Whereas civil society engagement with policy making at a state level seemed more difficult, successful experiences, at both the regional and particularly at the local level, were highlighted, all in the context of the unique opportunities that digital technologies (big data analysis, apps, digital platforms, etc.) entail for civic participation and deliberative democracy.[40]

In sum, the need for a more organized and proactive civil society to take ground in Spain is clear. Social change needs not only agitators and innovators but also orchestrators. According to Julie Battilana, agitators articulate the demands of individuals or groups that challenge the status quo, make them visible and rally awareness and support around them. Innovators create

39 Elisa de la Nuez: https://www.linkedin.com/in/elisa-de-la-nuez-s%C3%A1nchez-cascado-03a8045/?originalSubdomain=es.

40 Cases of success included local participation inspired by the Local 21 Agenda by United Nations (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/outcomedocuments/agenda21), participation in sustainable development at a local level based on the ISO 18091:2019 international standard for a Quality Management System of local governments in alignment with the 2030 Agenda; or UNICEF policies to foster participation of children and adolescents (https://ciudadesamigas.org/municipio-amigo-infancia/participacion-infantil/).

actionable solutions in response to those demands. Orchestrators are the pollinators of social movements who coordinate action across different constituents toward scaling adoption of those innovative solutions.[41] Spanish civil society needs more orchestration for collective action to be sustained.

41 Battilana, Julie, and Tiziana Casciaro (2021). *Power, for All: How It Really Works and Why It's Everyone's Business*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

6. Civil Society in Spain: Actionable Levers to Strengthen It

6.1 Toward a Reflective Agenda for Strengthening Spanish Civil Society

Beyond contextual conditions, the transformative power of civil society is enabled, among other mechanisms, by the intermingling of both intangible assets (e.g., values, social capital, stakeholder engagement, cross-sector partnerships) and tangible resources (e.g., public or private funding, volunteer support, organizational capacity). The hybrid nature of civil society levers is consistent with the blended nature of its societal outcomes, which are both material and symbolic. Turning these valued material and symbolic resources into power is what transforms civil society dreams into results. Digital technologies, as recently evidenced by the #MeToo, #BackLivesMatter or #FridaysforFuture movements, are disrupting the ability of organized and informal civil society actors to gain and exercise power to enact social change.

However, social media platforms entail a huge potential but also limitations as tools for social movements and other informal civil society actors. According to Julie Battilana, in the realm of agitation, they hold a substantial promise for mobilization, but they also tend to reinforce divides due to confirmation and other cognitive biases. For innovators, they multiply the chances that the innovative solution is diffused, but do not address the underlying political problems. For orchestration purposes, social media helps build far-reaching coalitions more quickly, but falls short of fostering deep connections and collective decision-making.[42]

In the next questionnaire section practitioners were asked to assess the importance of the levers to favor the development of civil society in Spain. Participants largely agreed on the relevance of five mechanisms that are key to build civil society capabilities and transform them into power for social change (see Figure 5).

42 Ibid.

Figure 5. Enablers of Civil Society in Spain

1. Educating Spaniards in civil values (democracy, solidarity, rule of law, freedom, equality, fraternity, justice . . .).
2. Increasing the transparency and accountability to relevant stakeholders of civil society actors.
3. Building the capacity of civil society organizations (e.g., through professionalization, digitalization, cross-sector alliances, etc.).
4. Increasing citizens' participation at a local level (educational, social, religious or sports institutions; community groups, mutual aid groups, neighborhood meetings, local assemblies, businesses . . .).
5. Building alliances with informal networks and social movements.

Source: Authors' elaboration

Thus, citizenship education, transparency and accountability and organizational capacity building emerged as the three most promising levers. In contrast, opinions about the relevance of increasing public funding for civil society organizations were highly contested. Along the same lines of section I on conceptualization of civil society, two largely asymmetric clusters emerged on the topic. One cluster, composed of 79 individuals, identified as key enabling mechanisms educating Spaniards in civil values, building the capacity of civil society organizations, increasing the transparency and accountability to relevant stakeholders of civil society actors, and increasing citizens' participation at a local level.

In contrast, a second cluster of only four individuals discarded all resource-related levers, as they considered that neither building the capacity of civil society organizations nor increasing their public or their philanthropic funding are enabling mechanisms of civil society in Spain. High consensus emerged, however, between both clusters about building alliances with the private and public sector as the main enabling mechanism. By contrast, dissenting opinions crystallized around the importance of educating in civil values, the relevance of philanthropic funding, or fostering the effective use of social networks by civil society actors for two-way communication and advocacy.

6.2 Focus Group Discussion

Three key enabling mechanisms emerged from the focus group discussion regarding an agenda to strengthen the impact of civil society in Spain: 1) citizenship education; 2) transformative alliances; and 3) digital technologies and social media networks; accountability and transparency being cross-cutting levers.

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Citizenship Education

Participants agreed upon the relevance of citizenship education and civil leadership in local communities as the main lever for the long-term betterment of civil society. They emphasized the significance of real-world learning opportunities that expose students to real civil society challenges and exemplary responses in real community settings. In the case of Spain, this entails redefining educational curricula to facilitate hands-on learning on how to become citizens who take responsibility for their communities, have the capacity for critical thinking, and proactively engage with the common good.[43] A public sector practitioner insisted that "it is a matter of culture, and culture is shaped by education. Rather than theoretically explaining to school children how important associational life is, it is rather a matter of making them participate in collective action toward causes they really care about, it is about learning by doing and leading by example" (Elisa de la Nuez).

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43 For an assessment of the implementation of citizenship education across the EU see https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/694207/EPRS_STU(2021)694207_EN.pdf; for a broader international assessment see https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-319-39357-5.pdf.

Two segments of population should be prioritized by citizenship education. First, children in their early educational stages by enhancing their capabilities for collaborative social interactions. Against the background of recent political controversies around educational reform and the "Educación para la ciudadanía" school subject, practitioners highlighted the importance of safeguarding the education of (future) citizens from partisan and ideological battles. Secondly, future public officials so that knowledge and trust on civil society on the side of the state and public administrations are built (Margarita Albors[44]).

Emphasis by participants on the need to educate in the values of civility these two radically different segments of Spanish population, school students and public servants, recalls writings by two GCSS lecturers who were awarded the Nobel Prize in recognition for their work in non-Western settings. Esther Duflo has reflected on the importance of early education and community leadership to shape civil values and norms in her groundbreaking economic research on poverty in India. For example, she has provided experimental evidence on how female leaders shift social norms related to gender in communities by raising the educational aspirations and accomplishment of girls.[45]

Similarly, Tawakkol Karman, in her work as human rights and peace activist in Yemen, has linked accountability and transparency of institutions to the probity of public officials: "only competent people should, first and foremost, hold public offices, which must be immunized against nepotism, bribery and corruption by adopting proven and objective measures and mechanisms . . . in conjunction with creating transparency and accountability in various state institutions . . . which allow citizens access to all information and data on public affairs and hold immediate and comprehensive accountability for all cases of corruption and abuse of power."[46]

44 Margarita Albors: https://www.linkedin.com/in/margaritaalbors/?originalSubdomain=es.

45 Beaman, Lori, Esther Duflo, Rohini Pande, and Petia Topalova. 2012. Female Leadership Raises Aspirations and Educational Attainment for Girls: A Policy Experiment in India. *Science* 335 (6068): 582–86.

46 Karman, Tawakkol (2017). Working toward a just and effective development. March 20, 2017. https://www.tawakkolkarman.net/texts/articles/2571-working-toward-a-just-and-effective-development%20.

Transformational Alliances

Cross-sector alliances emerged as one of the most powerful short-term enablers for civil society impact. However, they are not easy to develop in practice: in the words of one business practitioner, "we take for granted that we know how to build and manage alliances, but we only know how to sign collaboration agreements and socialize next. Partnering processes are complex and require a respect for diversity and a culture of generosity that pave the way for partners to bring to the table their respective social capitals to fight for the common good" (Isabel Roser[47]). Along this line of reasoning, participants made some recommendations to facilitate them.

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First, as suggested by public sector practitioners, the easing of regulations that currently hinder public-private collaboration and the development of new normative tools that minimize the risks of failure, including political ones. For instance, public contracting which is currently based on a top-down, asymmetric power relationship where economic value is maximized for the state, should transition toward a more egalitarian relationship that seeks to include civil society actors and aims at creating shared value. Beyond punctual partnerships for specific goals, a structural alliance between the state and civil society was proposed, along the lines of the normative approach to civil society as an ethically and politically superior type of society, by gathering individual citizens for the common good (layer 1 of our multi-layered approach). This latter proposal is grounded on evidence that the state is stretched out beyond its limits: public debt in Spain, along the same lines as other Western European countries, has overflown EU budgetary policies and is largely uncapable of tackling any compelling societal challenges by itself.

Secondly, participants stressed the crucial importance of alliances and challenged experts' tendency to undervalue the relevance of philanthropic

47 Isabel Roser: https://www.linkedin.com/in/isabel-roser-2371796/?originalSubdomain=es.

partnerships for civil society impact. However, they also emphasized the importance of impact measurement to transition low value-added collaborative relations toward more transformational ones, along the lines of the collaboration continuum proposed by James Austin.[48] Many opinions echoed the growing body of academic work on collective impact synthesized by Alnoor Ebrahim, demonstrating the importance of "a system framing, shared outcomes, and backbone capacity for delivering system-level results in sectors as diverse as health care, livelihood development, and education."[49] Furthermore, participants agreed that the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals provided a unique momentum for alliances to take root. The high potential for impact of alliances around SDGs that are in alignment with the core business of firms was underlined.

They also emphasized the importance of impact measurement to transition low value-added collaborative relations toward more transformational ones . . .

Digital Technologies and Social Media Networks

Participants identified a first digital lever in the use platform models to rally alliances of multiple actors around concrete challenges, that are then tackled at a local or regional level in accountable and transparent ways. There is a considerable potential in using data analytics and digital platforms to enable civil society actors to self-organize around a shared purpose, produce a joint diagnosis of the problem, envision a logic model to tackle it, and connect the right people to collaboratively implement the most effective solutions.[50]

There is a considerable potential in using data analytics and digital platforms to enable civil society actors to self-organize . . . dominant social media networks. . . . Facebook, Twitter or Instagram were mostly assessed as double-edged swords for civil society.

48 James Austin and May Seitanidi assessed the limitations and transformative potential of alliances between nonprofit and business actors across four stages: 1) philanthropic; 2) transactional; 3) integrative; and 4) transformational. Austin, J. E. (2000a). Strategic Alliances Between Nonprofits and Businesses. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 29(1), 69–97.

49 Ebrahim, Alnoor (2019). *Measuring Social Change: Performance and Accountability in a Complex World*. Stanford University Press, 205.

50 For an example, vid. Rafael del Pino Foundation Call for Impact. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apBfPIvmTRs.

Democratization of digital technologies also emerged as a key enabler of civil society impact and in opposition to the oligopolistic power of dominant social media networks. Along this line of reasoning, Facebook, Twitter or Instagram were mostly assessed as double-edged swords for civil society. On the one hand they facilitated organization and communication. However, participants cautioned against their capacity to intensify extreme polarization and facilitate the dissemination of fake news as shown by the recent U.S. presidential elections.

Some practitioners were more optimistic as they diagnosed user fatigue and business model exhaustion on the side of large social media networks, already evident in the quest of Generation Z for alternative social media sources. By contrast, others highlighted the vulnerability of children and the elderly who enter the digital world for the first time to a zero-sum scenario where social media usage reduces real interactions with other people and the community and insisted on the risk that digital transformation increases the breach with senior citizens. However, practitioners unanimously underlined the positive role of digital media in two different realms. First, accelerating the creation of business-nonprofit alliances. Secondly, democratizing civil society action beyond formal actors, making visible worthy initiatives by anonymous individuals or small organizations, and generating engagement and a sense of belonging around them.

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7. Discussion: Grounding a New Social Contract on a Contested Concept

From the very first step of this study, GCSS alumni approached civil society in aspirational terms, defining it as a valued achievement. They brainstormed civil society as an ethically and politically superior type of group gathering individual citizens who come together to develop strategies to achieve transformation toward the common good through organizing and engaging in social movements. Civil society is both a prerequisite for a pluralistic and healthy democracy and a desired counterbalance to state and market powers.

In parallel, as the conversation unfolded, important cleavages emerged about who belongs within the boundaries of civil society, as well as regarding the role of such set of actors vis-à-vis the broader society and the state in terms of building consensus vs. propelling contestation and change around status quo. The ambiguous relationship between civil society, policymaking, and politics fueled controversy between concept users. It became evident that the idea of civil society is underpinned by value judgments, that its internal complexity leads to different ways of describing it, the way in which some concept users employ the concept is contested by others across time and/or space, and the idea of civil society as an enabler of democratic transition serves as exemplar. For these reasons, we argue that civil society is an essentially contested concept in Spain.[51]

. . . the idea of civil society is underpinned by value judgments, . . . its internal complexity leads to different ways of describing it, the way in which some concept users employ the concept is contested by others across time and/or space, and the idea of civil society as an enabler of democratic transition serves as exemplar. For these reasons, we argue that civil society is an essentially contested concept in Spain.

51 It was W.B. Gallie (1956) who originally identified the following defining criteria for an essentially contested concept: (1) appraisiveness: the concept is representative of 'some kind of valued achievement'; (2) internal complexity: its structure must be of 'an internally complex character'; (3) diverse describability:

However, the fact that the concept of civil society is essentially contested in Spain does not necessarily question its value and potential societal impact. Firstly, recognizing the essentially contested nature of the idea of civil society may be crucial to avoid problems of conceptual ambiguity, vagueness and miscommunication hindering theoretical or practical progress in the field.[52] Secondly, conceptual contestation is inherent to the pluralistic nature of the phenomenon of civil society and to the dynamism of its diverse manifestations. In this context, "to speak favorably of civil society is not to plummet into so-called relativism . . . It is rather to be committed everywhere to the construction, preservation, and development of a legally protected nongovernmental order, whose diverse identities, mediated by representative mechanisms such as political parties and independent communication media, together ensure that hierarchies and abuses of power are checkable."[53]

. . . civil society is being reframed in Spain, at least from the perspective of expert practitioners.

The empirical exercise we have attempted here confirms that civil society is being reframed in Spain, at least from the perspective of expert practitioners. Twentieth century academic sources acknowledged the pivotal role that civil society played in the transition to democracy. However, civil society tended to be accounted as a residual space, the space unoccupied by the state or, from a dynamic view, what is left behind when the state retreats. In this study, civil society emerges as a contested concept that, regardless of its many definitions, is consolidated as a relevant public space that is essential for Spanish democracy. Furthermore, its development in the country is perceived as leveled within the Western European context.

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related to the former, the concept is initially described in a variety of different ways; (4) open character: the concept can be modified in accordance with 'changing circumstances'; (5) aggressive and defensive use of concept: scholars and other concept users mutually recognize that the way in which they employ the concept is likely to be contested by other concept users; (6) role of the exemplar: the concept is 'derived from an original exemplar whose authority is acknowledged by all the contestant users of the concept'; (7) continuous competition amongst scholars that 'enables the original exemplar's achievement to be sustained and/or developed in optimum fashion'. Collier, D., Hildago, F. D., & Maciuceanu, A. O. (2006). Essentially contested concepts: Debates and applications. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11, 211–246.

52 This same argument has been advocated for the concept of philanthropy. Daly, S. (2012). Philanthropy as an Essentially Contested Concept. *Voluntas* 23, 535–557.

53 Keane J. (2010) Civil Society, Definitions and Approaches. In: Anheier H.K., Toepler S. (eds) *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society*. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-93996-4_531 p. 463.

The value of civil society, as depicted by GCSS participants, lies in its hybrid and open nature, interweaving normative and instrumental dimensions and leaving its boundaries permeable for new actors and issues to engage. Paying attention to the normative dimension of civil society is crucial in the context of increasing threats to fundamental values such as peace, equality, freedom, and human rights in Europe. But civil society is esteemed in Spain not only because it encapsulates the values of civility, but also because it is useful in many ways: as a pillar for democracy, as a mechanism for brokering majority consensus, as a venue for inclusively managing dissent, and as a space for developing solutions to societal challenges. Not by surprise, our sample of civil society leaders shows not only a pragmatic approach to civil society, but also an entrepreneurial perspective on its utilitarian role. It is worthy of note that, while the most restrictive definition of civil society traditionally referred to the subset of associations conveying a moral message connected with the value of civility, GCSS alumni expanded the range of that definition with partnering and innovation.

The value of civil society, as depicted by GCSS participants, lies in its hybrid and open nature, interweaving normative and instrumental dimensions and leaving its boundaries permeable for new actors and issues to engage.

A hybrid and open understanding of civil society, however, does not preclude a difficult balance in practice. One of the main consequences of the pandemic has been the further erosion of the public trust in government. Indeed, the pandemic has already affected Spaniards' views on politics, society, and the country's place in the world. All this speaks to a growing loss in trust and confidence. The crisis has also laid bare the weakening of the country's civic strength and the social compact seems to be broken. For a political community to acquire and sustain legitimacy over time requires a common purpose. The growing polarization and the conflict with and within Catalonia were already symptoms of the erosion of that common purpose.

A hybrid and open understanding of civil society, however, does not preclude a difficult balance in practice. One of the main consequences of the pandemic has been the further erosion of the public trust in government.

The pandemic seems to have accelerated it further. The COVID-19 crisis has shown us, yet again, that to regain public trust and legitimacy, our governments must produce satisfactory outcomes (our source of legitimacy after all comes from outputs i.e., "what have you done for me lately?"), while providing appropriate voices to our citizens in decision making. If anything, this challenging context demands an even more important role for the country's civil society.

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Yet, this research has identified two hot spots where the fluid boundaries of an open civil society may turn into cutting edges: incivility and politics. Both hot spots are closely connected, as political activity by civil society actors representing narrow or even uncivil groups can reinforce existing economic, social, or cultural cleavages, and even lead to regression in rights. This development, if it materializes (as we are seeing in some countries), may backfire and may hurt civil society by reducing citizens' engagement in policymaking. Discussion regarding the role of civil society vis-à-vis undemocratic or uncivil groups or social movements suggests that more in-depth debate is needed on the convenience and most effective instruments for managing this type of dissent.

Regarding the contentious relationship between civil society and (institutionalized) politics, the fierce debate on the standing between labor unions and civil society that we described evidenced the extent to which they have become intermingled with partisan politics. By contrast, our experts located professional associations, including business associations, and hybrid organizations such as corporate foundations within civil society

Overall, the dire need and responsibility of civil society actors to participate in political decision-making processes should be cautiously balanced in practice with the risk of civil society capture by political parties and other institutionalized political actors.

boundaries.[54] Overall, the dire need and responsibility of civil society actors to participate in political decision-making processes should be cautiously balanced in practice with the risk of civil society capture by political parties and other institutionalized political actors.

Finally, a core idea underlying debate is that the current social contract that is the basis for Spanish civil society shows signs of exhaustion that constrain its further development. Whereas GCSS experts deemed the net effects of recent external shocks as positive or, in some cases, as ambiguous, the institutional, legal, fiscal, and cultural frameworks surrounding civil society in Spain were assessed as plainly insufficient. Overall, there was consensus among practitioners that civil society should play a central role of caring, checking, balancing and dismantling in regard to the prevailing social contract.

54 According to United Nations, all types of unions belong to civil society: trade unions as well as professional associations such as journalists' associations, judges' and lawyers' and bar associations, magistrates' associations, or student unions. *Working with the United Nations Human Rights Programme, A Handbook for Civil Society*, OHCHR, 2008, p. vii.

8. Conclusions

The lens of academic debate on civil society in Spain, which traditionally focused on its contribution to the democratic transition in the 1970s, as well as its changing relationship vis à vis the state, needs to be broadened. Beyond this focal concern on the "how" (*How can civil society be enhanced in Spain?*), this paper addressed questions related to the "what" (*What is civil society and what are its boundaries?*), the "why" (*Why is it important or, in other words, what are the sources of its legitimacy?*), or "where" and "when" (*How does civil society look like in Spain under the light of recent developments like the COVID-19 pandemic?*).

Civil society is an essentially contested concept in Spain: there are divisions among practitioners regarding the term "civil society," as well as differences about who belongs within the boundaries of civil society, and regarding the role of such set of actors vis-à-vis the broader society and the state in terms of building consensus vs. propelling contestation and change around status quo.

Although the net effects of recent external shocks such as the 2008 financial crisis or the COVID pandemic seem to have strengthened Spanish civil society, institutional, legal, and fiscal frameworks in Spain do not favor the development of civil society. The two main cultural barriers are 1) Spanish citizens expect the state to solve their problems due to a lack of education regarding the value of the community and/or its capacity to take initiative; and 2) there is a fragmented proliferation of civil society actors racing in parallel with their own very interesting initiatives, but lacking an ecosystem grounded on constructive dialogue, effective collaboration, civic engagement and a common understanding toward the common good.

Political activity by civil society actors representing narrow or even uncivil groups can reinforce existing economic, social, or cultural cleavages, and even lead to regression in rights. This development, if it materializes, may hurt civil society by reducing citizens' engagement in policymaking. Spanish civil society actors must participate in political decision-making processes, but this participation should be cautiously balanced in practice

with the risk of civil society capture by political parties and other institutionalized political actors.

Spanish civil society should play a central role in preserving the core of the prevailing social contract by contributing to articulating majority agreements, ensuring that human and civil rights are protected, respected, and held equally for everybody, and securing that all actors are held accountable. Civil society should also contribute to rethinking the social contract by pushing for new rules of the game in response to majority or minority rights, interests and emerging challenges that remain unattended, and imagining new scenarios for the future.

Methodological Appendix

Our engaged scholarship approach required that we collected data from civil society leaders in Spain. We used the first five cohorts of GCSS alumni as population for the study based on the fact that their participation in the seminar results from a combination of self-selection (a preexisting interest on or engagement with civil society issues) with selection by the Foundation in terms of the profile of beneficiaries it aims at reaching (individuals with a track record of leadership in society from a diversity of professional backgrounds, including public, business or non-profit organizations).

We chose a mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis. Firstly, in September 2020, the mid-networking of the undergoing GCSS was used to conduct two brainstorming sessions around the conceptualization of civil society that were used as the foundation to structure the survey questionnaire. Both sessions were conducted and recorded through Harvard's Zoom. Then, the authors of this study drafted a questionnaire which sections and items were revised and validated in two rounds with a mixed group of academics and practitioners.

The final survey questionnaire was structured along five different sections: (1) sociodemographic information of respondents; (2) defining civil society and its boundaries; (3) sources of legitimacy of civil society; (4) contextual conditions and recent developments affecting Spanish civil society; and (5) importance of mechanisms for strengthening civil society in Spain in the near future. It was semi-structured, as sections 2–5 were mostly composed of items that could be answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale, but it also asked respondents to tweet (max. 240 characters) their own definition of civil society and invited them to write down and rank in order of importance what they considered to be the top five enablers of Spanish civil society over a 5-year horizon. The questionnaire was then distributed by email to the 145 alumni of the first five editions of the Global Civil Society Seminar (2016–2020), with a response rate of slightly over 59%. Survey data were collected in two waves between November 30th and December 21st, 2020. Sample sociodemographic descriptors are detailed in Table 1 and compared with those of the alumni population.

Table 1. Sample Description

	GCSS Alumni (2016–2020) (N=145)	Survey Responses (N=85)
Edition		
First 2016	18%	12%
Second 2017	17%	16%
Third 2018	20%	23%
Fourth 2019	23%	23%
Fifth 2020	21%	26%
Gender		
Male	35%	41%
Female	65%	59%
Age		
Under 25	1%	1%
25–34	1%	3%
35–44	41%	22%
45–54	46%	58%
55 or more	11%	15%
Education		
Economics and Business Administration	33%	30%
Law	19%	20%
Political Science and Sociology	12%	12%
Engineering	10%	13%
Architecture	0%	0%
Communication and Journalism	11%	10%
Education Sciences / Pedagogy	1%	1%
Chemistry and Life Sciences	1%	2%
Other	12%	12%

The goal of quantitative analysis, which included basic statistic measures and hierarchical clustering analysis, was not to reach any representative results, as it dealt with self-reported, perceptual data from a convenience sample. Instead, it aimed at quantitatively assessing the extent of consensus and dissent around key civil society topics. A hierarchical clustering technique was used to combine cases (i.e., alumni) into homogeneous clusters by merging them together one at a time in a series of sequential steps.[55] Using SPSS software, this analysis was carried out to identify different

55 Yim, O. and Ramdeen, K.T. (2015), Hierarchical cluster analysis: comparison of three linkage measures and application to psychological data, *The Quantitative Methods for Psychology*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 8-21.

groups according to their reactions to the four study themes: conceptualization, sources of legitimacy, contextual conditions and enablers of civil society in Spain.

Finally, three focus groups were held to qualitatively nuance and expand the results of the hierarchical clustering analysis, each convening 10–11 alumni belonging to three different professional profiles: (1) alumni in leading positions in nonprofit organizations, philanthropic foundations or social enterprises; (2) alumni with a corporate background (mainly holding CSR, sustainability or corporate diplomacy positions); and (3) alumni in relevant positions in public administrations or agencies. The three focus groups were held in April 2021 and discussion was guided through a common questionnaire, structured along the same four thematic sections as the online questionnaire. For each section, the basic consensual position emerging from the online survey was stated upfront, and then 4–5 open questions followed regarding the topics that had been identified as locus of dissent. The three focus groups were conducted and recorded through Harvard's Zoom and transcribed by a research assistant at the Universidad de A Coruña.

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