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Europe as a Beacon of Democracy? Citizenship Policies Relating to Youth and Migrants in Portugal

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ABSTRACT. This article aims to compare discourses about national and European policies on active citizenship and democratic participation, with a particular focus on youth and migrants. For this purpose we analysed official documents of public institutions and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in order to assess how the process of Europeanization has influenced national policies with regard to increasing political participation and citizens' civic awareness. Additionally, we conducted interviews with policy makers and NGO leaders in order to integrate and compare different levels of discourse and thus identify potential dissonances. Analysis of the documents shows that there is a strong concern to match national policy priorities with those established by international organizations. Notwithstanding positive perceptions, NGO leaders and policy makers criticize the ways policies have been implemented, stressing the need to adopt a strategy that bridges the gap between the prescribed and the real, as well as the importance of overcoming the hegemony of economic factors in policy decisions. In this regard, NGO leaders criticize the cynicism of political leaders and policies motivated by demographic and economic concerns. In relation to European identity and integration, NGO leaders argue that Europe must be collectively constructed; yet, policy makers stress that the failure of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 resulted from a deficit in the negotiation process. In sum, this article suggests that it is necessary to promote greater involvement of civil society in the design and implementation of policies which, in turn, may contribute to the strengthening of shared democratic principles.

KEY WORDS: Citizenship policies, youth, migrants, democratic participation

Introduction

The European Union is currently facing one of the most significant challenges to its political evolution since the ratification of the founding treaties. On the one hand, it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 for its commitment to stability and peace in

Europe; on the other hand, the last couple of years have been marked by intense social and economic unrest. The growth of demonstrations such as 'Geração à Rasca' in Portugal, 'Indignados' in Spain, or 'Occupy Brussels', mainly contesting high rates of unemployment among young people and opposition to European austerity, are a clear example of increasing social conflict and an expression of lack of trust in political institutions, culminating in a challenge to the legitimacy of European governance and institutions.

Several international studies show that low levels of civic and political participation are more apparent in young people (e.g., Benedicto & Morán, 2002; Perliger, Canneti-Nisim & Pedahzur, 2006). Research developed in the Portuguese context has been only partially in line with this analysis (e.g., Ferreira, 2006; Veiga, 2008; Azevedo, 2009). Indeed, although Portuguese young people do have low levels of civic and political participation, they are nonetheless more involved in civic and political issues than adults (Magalhães & Moral, 2008). Significantly, some literature points to a 'participatory revolution' (Norris, 2002) or, as more recently stated by Menezes et al. (2012), a 'paradoxical movement'. That is, against the common notion of a detached youth, some authors have been arguing that new forms of participation are emerging, with young people involved in meaningful experiences (e.g., Norris, 2002; Juris & Pleyers, 2009). This means that we are witnessing a generational change, with young people investing in forms of civic and political participation beyond conventional ones (cf. Putnam, 2000; Zukin et al., 2006, Marsh, O'Toole & Jones, 2007). This literature suggests that it is not so much a lack of commitment on the part of young people, but rather them finding new ways of exercising their citizenship (Harris, Wyn & Younes, 2010) based in less institutionalized political practices and in more horizontal forms of participation (Norris, 2002, Menezes et al., 2012).

However, even if it is true that the ways young people participate are changing, it is equally true that they value traditional forms of political participation less, which may lead to youth becoming detached from the higher, formal instances in which collective decisions that affect our societies are taken.

Research also stresses that immigrants are another disadvantaged group when it comes to civic and political participation (cf. Ahmad & Pinnock 2007; Lopez & Marcelo, 2008), particularly in terms of their limited access to political rights (e.g., the right to vote and to stand as candidates in local elections). In this context, youth and migrants are two groups that tend to be on the margins of the political processes and,

therefore, at increased risk of exclusion. For this reason, this article takes both these groups as the main units of analysis.

The analysis presented here fits into the debate about post-national citizenship (cf. Benhabib, 1999; Janoski, 2000; Carvalhais, 2004) which calls for a more inclusive understanding of citizenship. Carvalhais (2004, p. 17) argues that all members of the polity 'are equally instructed of democratic participation rights and of full communication, enabling them in equality and freedom to be active parts in the decision processes that potentially affect them' – an empowering project that implies that nation states are willing to debate the criteria underlying citizenship rights.

However, the application of those principles in the European Union has been disappointing, particularly if we consider the implementation of very restrictive policies, such as the 'Return Directive'[1] which establishes common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegal migrants. Therefore, these policies strengthen the idea, already denounced by Benhabib, that 'a two-tiered status of foreignness is developing throughout Europe. There are different rights and privileges accorded to each category of foreigner within member states' (1999, p. 716). Recent developments in EU social politics highlight the need to re-engage with these debates. Increasingly restrictive immigration policies and high levels of youth unemployment are crystallizing social hierarchies and exclusions from – at least the more formal and traditional – political processes.

Several studies show that immigration policies play an important role in shaping the civic and political participation of immigrants, i.e. their effective integration[2] in the host country (cf. Ireland, 1994; Soysal, 1994; Geddes, 2000; Koopmans & Statham, 2000; Koopmans, 2004; Hooghe, 2005; Schrover & Vermeulen, 2005). For instance, Koopmans (2004), in his comparative analysis of the involvement of migrants and ethnic minorities in public debates and mobilization in Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, considers that local and national integration and citizenship regimes can be seen as political opportunity structures that may stimulate, inhibit or prevent immigrants' involvement and participation. In Portugal, existing research has reached similar conclusions regarding the influence of institutional and political opportunities on the participation of immigrants (Teixeira & Albuquerque 2005; Sardinha, 2007). Sardinha (2007) stresses that, despite the funding provided for immigrants' associations by the Portuguese State, the existing policies are not effective. Immigrants' civic and political participation is limited by their social status.

Low levels of political participation among foreign-born immigrants have also been explored. Zobel and Barbosa (2009), for example, stress the need to consider the influence of several elements of the Portuguese political context in order to effectively improve immigrants' political integration. In that sense, they criticize, firstly, the poor use (that is made) of laws that guarantee the rights of active and passive political participation. They believe this is caused by the frailties of a state that does not complement political and legal innovation with assessment and information strategies. Second, the stress on the importance of the principle of reciprocity in the debate around the 1996 Act[3] (that, broadly speaking, allows foreigners the political right to vote and be elected on the condition that the same rights are granted to the Portuguese citizens abroad) indicates that Portugal still holds interest in excluding a significant proportion of immigrants. Finally, the fact that political parties have not exhibited any clear position on the issue of immigrant voting or on the possibilities of their integration into their structures indicates that the political rights of immigrants are still not a priority when compared to their economic and social rights – as Carvalhais (2006, pp. 58-9) concludes, Portugal's recognition of post-national citizenship is tenuous.

In a different, yet related vein, other studies report that some groups of immigrants distrust the state (cf. Marques & Santos, 2004; Grassi, 2007, 2009; Menezes *et al*., 2012). Grassi (2007), for instance, shows that young Angolans mainly distrust strangers (51%), but also local government politicians (42%) and central government politicians (39%) – although national studies also show that young Portuguese distrust the political institutions as well (Menezes, *et al*., 2005), and feel sceptical regarding the effectiveness of traditional politics (Magalhães & Moral, 2008). In another study, Grassi (2009) also points out that young Cape Verdeans do not trust the Portuguese government and more than half of them feel that little or no attention is given to immigrants by the Portuguese executive.

In sum, as the criticisms pointed out by the literature suggest, the current socio-political context might be interpreted as presenting a dissatisfaction of young people and immigrants with national and European policies that resonates with Benhabib's criticism: 'Europe has ceased to be an ideal, for some it has long become an illusion' (1999, p. 714).

Research Questions, Methodology and Data

This article aims to compare institutional and civil society discourses about European and Portuguese national policies on active citizenship and democratic participation[4], with a particular focus on young people and migrants. To do so, we analysed official documents of public institutions and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in order to explore how the process of Europeanization has influenced national policies that aim to foster citizens' political participation and civic awareness, particularly at the European level. Document analysis focused on discourses on key political issues (e.g., European citizenship, European social policies, and the European public sphere). More specifically, we examined the visibility of European issues; the alignment of national policies with European standards; criticism of European policies; and the development of the 'European dimension'.

Our analysis recognizes the existence of significant discrepancies between policy makers, official documents and implementation mechanisms. In order to highlight these competing narratives and objectives, we carried out interviews with NGO leaders and policy makers. These interviews allowed us to integrate and contrast different levels of discourse and thus identify potential dissonances. Like the analysis of documents, the interviews aimed to: map the convergence of European priorities and national priorities; define patterns of Europeanization in the context of national policies; identify the visibility of European policies at the national level; and evaluate the impact of European legislation and policy making at the national level. To this end, the interviews were structured around three key dimensions: political priorities and institutional views on those priorities; European priorities; and European integration, to account for the personal opinion of participants regarding, for example, the Constitutional Treaty of 2005, the Lisbon Treaty and the existence of a democratic deficit in the EU.

The study adopted a qualitative approach that enabled the exploration of narratives and political objectives through the application of discourse analysis to selected documents and interviews. The main assumption underlying this theoretical-methodological approach was that language reflects the structures and dynamics of power within society in general, and in politics in particular (cf. Hajer, 2002; Hajer, 2005; Howarth & Torfing, 2005). Thus, this approach was used in the analysis of the dominant discourses in the documents and interviews in order to enable the identification of policy priorities and their impact on policy outcomes. In other words, this approach, as argued by Hajer (2005, p. 300), 'would illuminate a particular

discursive structure in the discussion of the policy towards, say, immigration in the European Union. Here a discourse analysis would bring out a certain regularity in the particular ideas, concepts, and categories *in which terms* immigration is discussed. In addition, it identifies the practices in which this discourse gets reproduced' (emphasis in the original). To be sure, we acknowledge that this theoretical-methodological approach may raise discussion about the level of analytical detail needed. Being aware of this, we follow Hajer (2005, p. 308) and focus on 'emblematic issues' to overcome the 'false dichotomy of detail versus relevance'.

The study looked at 22 documents: 12 from NGOs, six for each area (youth and migrants), and 10 documents from public institutions (PIs), resulting from the selection of five documents for each area. Eight interviews were conducted and analysed: five NGO leaders that have worked in the fields of youth and migrants, and three policy makers working at the national level in the two areas. The choice of NGO leaders and policy makers was influenced by the relevance of their work in the two fields considered.

Document Analysis: Main Findings

This section sets out key trends in the development of a policy framework and the interactions between civil society organizations, national institutional structure and European policies. This helps us establish how youths, migrants and related policies are positioned within the wider policy framework. It also highlights continuities and disjunctures in the way policies are formulated and implemented. European policy trends are discussed in the light of the dominant discourses presented in official documents of PIs and NGOs. In a political context that has been characterized by the 'crisis of Europe', brought to the fore by the failure of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 and by Ireland's rejection of the Lisbon Treaty in 2008, particular attention is paid to the European dimension and to the criticisms of the European project in both PI and NGO documents.

Youth

One of the main concerns in the youth-related documents analysed relates to the decline in civic and political participation amongst young people and how to find strategies to stimulate and improve the way they engage in society. The main issues raised are: 1) the level and quality of participation in a society that is undergoing profound

transformation; 2) how youths can be an active part of this change; and 3) how to overcome the difficulties and anxieties that young people feel about their responsibility for social renewal. Areas such as employment, housing, education and training are considered factors that influence participation opportunities. These concerns, in fact, match the overall objectives of the EU Youth Strategy, which seeks 'to provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and in the labour market' and 'to encourage young people to be active citizens and participate in society'[5]. The values most often mentioned in relation to youth policies are civic participation, respect for diversity, human rights, democracy and sustainable development. In addition, it is considered necessary to strengthen youth organizations at the municipal level.

In general, Portuguese public institutions have adopted the following goals to increase the participation of young people: 1) promote the creation and development of partnerships that enable the improvement of interventions in key areas of youth policy; 2) promote youth participation in public affairs; 3) contribute to the active citizenship of young people; 4) promote events that discuss youth issues (such as education and healthy lifestyle); 5) encourage young Europeans to build democratic societies that respect diversity and human rights; 6) create a sense of responsibility for environmental issues; and 7) fight against racism. The main reason that led to the draft of the PI documents was, in fact, the decline in civic and political participation and in the engagement of youngsters. Clearly expressing this central concern, the *Roadmap for Youth* (Presidency of the Portuguese Republic, 2008, p. 2) establishes as a priority 'to stimulate and to enhance the way that young people should participate in a society which is in a deep transformation, becoming an active part of this change, overcoming the difficulties and anxiety they feel about their responsibility for social renewal'. In the same vein, the Law nº 8/2009 of 18 February, which establishes the legal basis of municipal youth councils, presents a set of objectives that gives young people a greater role in community life, such as: 'to ensure the hearing and representation of public and private entities which, at the municipal level, are related with youth', and 'to encourage and support activities of youth associations, ensuring their representation in municipal bodies, as well as from other public and private, national or foreign entities'.

The NGOs, on the other hand, present a set of projects that bring together a multiplicity of territorial levels, namely local, national and European. The main objective, for instance, of the Action for Justice and Peace (2008) activity plan is to foster a normative-based discourse around the values of peace and justice 'locally and

globally'. The plan's implementation takes place through volunteer work, training opportunities, partnerships with local actors and institutional support for the creation of small businesses. It seeks to improve the participation and engagement of young people through non-formal mechanisms, and promote the exchange of experiences and good practices of active citizenship among young people. Young people are considered the main actors to be mobilized to achieve these ends, and 'global citizenship' is seen as underpinning the promotion of human development, which has to be sustainable and equitable. Alternative economies and the creation of mechanisms to foster participation and citizenship are also presented in order to achieve socioeconomic justice (Action for Justice and Peace, 2008).

Regarding the changes that globalization and modernization have brought about, the National Federation of Youth Associations (FNAJ, 2006) mentions that new approaches and perspectives are necessary to locate young people as social and political actors. The document suggests the implementation of a youth policy that will create conditions for young people's emancipation, countering several obstacles for their successful inclusion such as the crisis of the educational system; the high level of unemployment and precarious jobs; the deregulation of the labour market, which affects the youngsters by converting work (a major element in identity construction) in an element of instability; and the difficulties in obtaining housing and, therefore, the difficulty of an independent life.

Along the same line, the document of Humana Global (2006) draws attention to the fact that society is experiencing a revolution caused by the development of new information and communication technologies. The sense of identity (with less common values and less shared interests and values than before), the nature of politics, and the ways citizens participate in political processes have changed. Facing these developments and changes, the document suggests that it is necessary to stimulate youths to develop their civic and political participation and their citizenship.

The Portuguese Network of Youth for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (2006) also presents as its main aim to contribute to the development of more effective participation, specifically in youth organizations. Presenting statistical data regarding the lack of involvement of youth in civic, social or political groups, it mentions that the low participation of young people is an obstacle to the exercise of their full rights as citizens and leads to political decisions that tend to ignore their specific problems and points of view. The document also stresses that Europe is

experiencing a crisis of representation in political and civic life, reflected in a high level of abstention in elections and in low participation in political parties, as well as in other forms of civic and political participation, such as youth associations.

With regard to the European dimension, our sample of both PI and NGO documents contains several references to key priorities and European discourses. Particular emphasis was placed on the promotion of European citizenship based on participatory democracy and the need to improve civic engagement. Important European programmes such as Erasmus, but also 'Youth in Action', are mentioned as essential reference points for building a more cohesive Europe based on the principles of justice and social inclusion which, in turn, are stimulated by mobility and lifelong learning. The documents also stress the importance of promoting positive attitudes towards European identity. The adjective 'European' is used as a reference to the territory, but also to identify a sense of belonging and a set of cultural rights. So, as Humana Global (2006) indicates, when 'European citizenship' is mentioned, it implies not only citizenship but a broader set of values and principles.

Regarding this broader sense of European citizenship, public institutions claim they share similar political priorities with the European Union, emphasizing that the formative activities developed by the European Council will be maintained by the promotion of the European Youth Campaign 'All different, all equal' for Diversity, and also by the promotion of Human Rights and Participation (National Youth Council, 2007). The *Roadmap for Youth* (Presidency of the Portuguese Republic, 2008) mentions, in addition, that the laws are becoming more European and that European citizenship is gaining autonomy, arguing that the construction of a cohesive Europe, which ensures social justice and responds to the anxieties of today's youth, is the major challenge for the next generations.

In terms of criticisms, NGOs argue that it is really necessary to create policies – at the European and national level – to support entrepreneurship among local communities. These policies should provide support to certain groups that are sometimes excluded from the labour market – such as youths – with a view to increasing their autonomy. Youth policies should also take into account the position of young people as citizens, providing resources for full-rights citizenship and enabling them to build their own life project and to participate in collective projects. To achieve this goal, the Action for Justice and Peace (2008) proposes that public policies should increase sustainable development through support of alternative and solidarity

economies, stressing that political authorities should adopt the Local Agenda 21, a part of Agenda 21. Moreover, the National Federation of Youth Associations (FNAJ, 2006) emphasizes that a new concept of youth requires a new perspective in youth policies, i.e., the recognition of youth as having its own identity, with specific needs and circumstances that demand that public policies take into account their specific reality in relation to adults. In that sense, it suggests that youth policies must overcome elements of generational and institutional paternalism, as well as the 'adultocratic' perspectives that guide them, in order to achieve a more inclusive society, to promote equal rights and duties among all citizens, and to fight situations that may generate processes of social exclusion.

In summary, documents from both sources share significant commonalties in the recommendations for national policy, including the development of inter-institutional networks, the promotion of social inclusion and diversity, and the reinforcement of youth participation. The Constitutional Programme (2009–13) sums up these ambitions:

> A more developed country involves also instilling young people with democratic and environmental principles and values, of responsibility and social awareness and of civic and political participation. For this, the Government proposes to: Reinforce citizenship education in personal and social aspects, the curricula of schools and to continue to enhance sexual education, thus promoting awareness and responsibility; Continue to promote and expand programmes of volunteer youth; Promote and support student and youth associations (Portuguese Constitutional Government, 2009).

Migrants

The dominant discourse in relation to migration has consistently focused on the defence of integration policies. The documents analysed here identify active citizenship organizations and education for citizenship as top priorities. Values such as human rights, solidarity, active citizenship, peace, freedom and equal rights were widely discussed, especially by NGOs. In this sense, the documents concentrated on the importance of immigration to the Portuguese economy, the rights of migrants in Portuguese society and their contribution to social and economic growth. In line with this approach, both public institutions and NGOs consider it essential to promote social policies that improve the civic and political participation of immigrants and, hence, social inclusion.

Integration policies seek to achieve a level of equality between immigrants and Portuguese citizens and to implement measures that ensure equal opportunities for minorities in general. In this context, the need to establish concrete plans to facilitate the process of integration into the national community is mentioned and linked with factors such as language and other skills considered necessary to ensure and strengthen this process. Additionally, the lack of concrete plans in areas such as unemployment, discrimination, and family policy is identified as particularly problematic and hindering the process of integration. It is in this context that the Plan for the Integration of Immigrants (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2007) sought to establish, over three years, a roadmap of concrete commitments that defined the state as the main ally of the integration of immigrants for a more inclusive Portugal. According to the report of the Portuguese High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (ACIDI, 2007), the position of Portugal followed the guidelines issued by the multi-annual activities plan of the European Commission. On the legislative and executive realm, 'amendments were made in favour of a more humane society, able to promote the meeting and the coexistence between people with different backgrounds and cultures, an opportunity for building a multicultural and cohesive society' (ACIDI, 2007, p. 9).

Concerning the European dimension, the discourses of the documents, mainly of PIs, focused primarily on pedagogical aspects of education for a European identity and citizenship. Particular attention was paid to the promotion of equal rights and anti-discrimination measures. The Plan for the Integration of Immigrants (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2007) argues, for instance, that the demand for higher levels of integration should be consistent, particularly in the areas of employment, social security, housing, health, education and justice, and in a cross-sectoral perspective regarding the issues of racism and discrimination, gender equality and citizenship. Moreover, participation was widely discussed in the context of European citizenship with a view to promote 'unity in diversity' in order to foster the development of a cultural and civic dimension (AIDGLOBAL, 2009). The European cultural identity, as the NGO Inter-cooperation and Development (2006) states, must be open to other cultures that enter the European space, fostering cultural coexistence and intercultural dialogue.

Regarding NGO-generated counter-discourse, the documents, in general, criticize European immigration policies for not providing sufficient scope for

immigrants' economic, social and cultural rights. More significantly perhaps, they claim that some of them are discriminatory and insufficiently effective. In this regard, the Immigrant Solidarity Association (2007) suggests adjustments in many national and European immigration policies, stating that the problems revealed by those policies should be made public and alternatives should be discussed. Moreover, the report criticizes that some policies imposed by the EU were not sufficiently debated. The EU is thus accused of being oppressive, concerned with secondary issues and unable to respond to real problems.

In fact, the documents state that integration policies proposed by the EU should be more effective and more equitable between migrant communities, and that the countries of origin of immigrants should be included in the development of European level programmes (Inter-cooperation and Development, 2006; Institute of Strategic and International Studies, 2009). Issues relating to equality, social exclusion and marginalization are raised as key problems with the current approach. In this context, policies are therefore seen as failing to provide an adequate framework to address the problems Europe is facing today, often associated with illegal immigration, such as drug trafficking and human trafficking, transnational organized crime, and even terrorism (Institute of Strategic and International Studies, 2009). African migrants are identified as a particularly marginal group. The issue of third-country nationals is discussed as an example of discrimination, since they cannot move freely in the European public space:

> The current immigration policies, guided by security concerns and the exploitation of human beings, criminalize migrants and threaten their human and social rights, both in Europe and Africa (...) The current racist immigration policies do not take into account the real needs of European and African societies and undermine the prospects of sustainable development, both in Europe and Africa (Immigrant Solidarity Association, 2007).

In general, documents of PIs and NGOs are concerned with the development of practices of active citizenship and the defence of integration policies for both youths and migrants. They are, therefore, in line with the research that points to the low levels of civic and political participation (e.g., Benedicto & Morán, 2002, Ferreira, 2006; Perliger, Canneti-Nisim & Pedahzur, 2006; Veiga, 2008; Azevedo, 2009), as well as to the limited access to political rights, especially in the case of immigrants (cf., Carvalhais, 2004, 2006; Zobel & Barbosa, 2009). However, they do not seem to place

much emphasis on the 'participatory revolution' that our society is undergoing as young people take on new and more horizontal forms of participation (Norris, 2002; Menezes *et al.*, 2012). This would enable a more critical examination of the current conditions of young people and migrants. On the whole, both PI and NGO documents seem to be aligned with EU political priorities. Notwithstanding, they suggested that integration policies of the EU should be more open to dialogue and debate, i.e. based on the participation of civil society, reinforcing, thus, the idea that EU has an important responsibility in the transformation of societies.

Interviews: Main Findings

NGO Leaders

The priorities mentioned by NGO leaders consist, generally speaking, in defending human rights and promoting the full integration of minority groups at risk of exclusion. To achieve these priorities, they emphasize the importance of: denouncing violations of human rights; confronting politicians with their commitments to integrate human rights in policy decisions; influencing people in everyday decisions regarding human rights; increasing people's autonomy and capacity for participation, especially those who are at risk of exclusion; making the relationship between the state and civil society more horizontal, having necessarily at its base public interest; and fighting for new forms of social organization. In addition to these general objectives, it is also important to note that the representative of SOS Racism argues, specifically, that it is a priority to press politicians to legislate on immigrant voting rights, both locally and nationally, as well as to extend adult education (i.e., the 'New Opportunities' programme, aimed at the recognition, validation and certification of skills) to immigrants:

> SOS will turn twenty and the largest initiative we will develop to mark our twentieth anniversary is a campaign on the voting rights of immigrants, because we understand that ... (t)o be a fully inclusive process, that has to be reflected in the ability of these social agents to be also political agents, to be able to monitor who governs. (SOS Racismo)

Reinforcing the legitimacy of the implementation of these measures, the same interviewee argued that rights are not discrete: if immigrants are citizens then they should have all the rights of a citizen. As he explains:

> The rights are not divisible, not stratified; otherwise the citizen is not a citizen ... To me, that's how I understand it. And the immigration policy has been this, the restriction of rights. (SOS Racismo)

In addition, the representative of Immigrant Solidarity Association also argued that policies should focus on the empowerment of immigrants through the promotion of their rights in order to take advantage of appropriate opportunities to participate: 'If people come in search of a better life, these opportunities should be provided to the people, give them documents to work with rights'.

In relation to European priorities, NGO leaders recognize that the EU has influenced the design of the agenda and the setting of policy priorities at national level. The representative of the International Solidarity Association stated that the Youth in Action Programme 'is one of the best initiatives at the level of youth that Europe is fostering [...] and had some quite positive effects because it gives youth a chance to rediscover their own citizenship, their own identity'. However, they consider that these policies need to be adapted to the specificities of each country: 'the EU should think in terms of individual countries and not of a one-fits-all program' (Rede ex aequo, 2009). They also recognize that there have been many European level initiatives targeting groups at risk of exclusion, supported by technical and financial resources that have allowed for higher levels of efficiency and sharing of best practices between international partners.

Yet, the assessment NGO leaders make of those initiatives is largely critical of the strategic approach adopted by European bodies, in particular regarding the gap between policy and practice. The representative of Amnesty International is particularly critical of European Commission initiatives on the basis that they are often contradictory, 'because specific policies in the area of cooperation for development indicate a given direction and, after, economic policies point to another'. Moreover, many projects and programmes draw on an artificial European frame in order to obtain European funds:

> (…) there is an increasing tendency for politicians thinking that the problem is solved from the time that there is a law to this effect (...) I also worked a bunch of years in (an NGO) and one of the guidelines that was always imposed was the obligation to give a European dimension to the projects (...) Sometimes these things are very artificial. I recognize the merit and need to give a European dimension to these actions to fight the

inconsistency of policies (...) so I think that it is important, but with consistency, with content and not exactly because of funding needs. (Amnesty International)

In a similar vein, the representative of the Immigrant Solidarity Association denounces the lack of political leadership at the European and national level. The interviewee shows clear opposition to the way that European and Portuguese policy continues to keep thousands of illegal immigrants living without the minimum rights, thus marginalizing these groups further:

Now, the lack of political courage is huge in European countries and perhaps among almost all political parties (...) The problem arises here because they would lose votes; there are no sincere immigration policies. That's why I say: the attitude of this paradigm has to change. (Solidariedade Imigrante)

Concerning European integration, NGOs are very critical of European political structures and leadership. There is agreement among interviewees that a strong focus on economic drivers undermines European democratic principles and process, and ultimately has a negative impact on the implementation of the human rights agenda (Amnesty International). In this context, the representative of SOS Racism denounces the EU for engaging in *realpolitik* in order to obtain social control, rather than striving to implement ideologically and ethically driven initiatives:

This is the political cynicism around this discourse because the EU is well aware that immigration is necessary for demographic and socio-economic reasons, but at the same time they have to do a bit of *realpolitik* to calm down the public opinion because there is a feeling of invasion. (SOS Racismo)

Given the criticisms, it is suggested that the EU should specifically revoke the 'Return Directive' and proceed to the legalization of all undocumented immigrants. As the representative of the Immigrant Solidarity Association points out, the European directive is the 'Directive of Shame', 'the Directive that criminalizes immigration'. Supporting this, the representative of SOS Racism argues that:

Europe does not have to chase hegemonic arrogance. Europe has to worry about creating a model that is an example for all (...) for the entire planet, which is a different social model, based on peace, dialogue, culture. Europe has always been a light and it's in this that Europe has to invest. (SOS Racismo)

On the whole, NGO leaders criticize the lack of political leadership at the European and national level in order to implement policies for the development of an effective active citizenship and for the integration of groups at risk of exclusion. At the same time, the interviewees reveal that NGOs have difficulty in being represented and in taking part in agenda-setting processes at the EU level, criticizing the vertical relationship between EU bodies and NGOs. In this context, the analysis of interviews suggests that the engagement and accessibility of national NGOs in the supranational arenas should be improved.

Policy Makers

Like NGO leaders, the priorities presented by policy makers focus primarily on the full integration of migrants and other minorities, based on an intercultural model that respects diversity. The following excerpt illustrates well what has been the priority for the Portuguese High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (ACIDI):

> No doubt that the priority is to do everything for migrants to be fully integrated (...) always respecting the culture of immigrants but also interacting with them and growing with this relationship of openness to the other. And, therefore, different strategies have been designed to make this happen through direct contact, including through national centres to support immigrants, local centres, network offices for employment and immigrant associations (...) also at the level of awareness-raising. In addition, our immigration observatory enables studying all the issues related to immigrants to help define public policies for their integration. (ACIDI)

In a similar vein, the representative of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (PNAI) emphasizes that discrimination, poverty and lack of access to education, training and qualifications must be overcome in order to strengthen the integration of specific groups at risk of exclusion. To achieve these priorities she suggested increasing social and political awareness as this will foster a sense of empowerment and ownership:

> First, distributing the right information and the right information is information that is accessible to people, which speaks the language that they speak, etc… Then, working also as a space of resonance regarding what people say and also as a place of influence. (PNAI)

The policy makers' discourses reveal that state institutions have an important role in the promotion of full integration of groups at risk of exclusion. However, they recognize that this task has not been always effectively implemented, suggesting the difficulty in matching the prescribed political discourses with real life.

Elected members of the Portuguese parliament can provide an interesting insight into the political priorities and the nature of debate that frames policy development within state institutions. The Member of Parliament interviewed for this project highlighted the hierarchical nature of agenda setting processes. The immediate problems arising from the current financial and economic crisis are deemed to be a higher political priority than any other social policy matters. The discourse about young people is framed in terms of their potential contribution to the economy. The focus is on providing this group with a set of tools that will enable them to become active members of the labour market. Political and civic participation are seen as deriving from participation in the economy.

Unfortunately, this is a highly commodified view of citizenship and participation, which ultimately limits the scope and quality of participation and engagement. It is, however, aligned with the European model of citizenship. The view that Portugal should align with European norms and guidelines is a common theme in all interviews. In particular, they point to the impact and importance of the EU's work to guide and standardize social policy frameworks in the member states.

The development of EU projects related to the integration of minorities is considered especially important in a time of crisis, as it contributes to the maintenance of European identity as a space that promotes human rights and equality. Although policy makers recognize a positive role of the EU in promoting civic and political participation and in the integration of groups at risk of exclusion, they, like the NGOs, also stress the diversity of national realities and point to the need to adapt these projects to the requirements of each Member State. Lack of adequate resources is identified as an obstacle to the delivery of the European project's stated objectives. The European social dimension comes to the forefront of this critique; this policy area is largely seen as losing out to higher economic imperatives framing the wider political agenda:

> We are in a situation, clearly, of a much more modest commitment to social issues which, interestingly, happens in coincidence with the arrival of Eastern countries (...) When the revision of (the Lisbon Treaty) was proposed in 2005, clearly the social

dimension was dropped and we began to identify the social dimension with employment, which is, in fact, an impoverishment of the social dimension. (PNAI)

Finally, those working at the European level highlight the failure of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005, arguing that weak negotiations culminated in a restrictive vision of the role of the EU in social affairs. The negotiations – and the ensuing Treaty – were too narrowly concentrated on economic issues. This focus consolidated the position of those opposing further integration. The rise of Euro-sceptic movements and the establishment of a dominant discourse about the EU's role in eroding national sovereignty and independence are perceived to be the result of the negotiations. In this context, policy makers also add that the EU used to be more democratic than it is today. They acknowledge that this is likely to be the result of the economic crisis and of a shift in political culture in many Member States. Increasing opposition to immigration is seen to be a direct result of this wider political and economic context:

> Europe has been more democratic than it is now, perhaps because of the crisis (...). In some countries there begin to emerge antidemocratic movements that concern me, and looking at our Europe, which always wanted to be humanist, democratic, concerned with the human person (...) (ACIDI)

Despite criticising the Treaties for adopting a rationale imposed by economic imperatives, policy makers view the Lisbon Treaty as an important step for the development of the EU. It is seen as an opportunity to build a more robust strategy in relation to the global competition that characterizes the world today. However, it is suggested that civil society should be more involved in the design of policies and that, accordingly, the Lisbon Treaty should have been subject to a referendum "because this way, this discussion, the involvement, and the creation of movements would have led to a more intense discussion and to an increasing assimilation of what is Europe" (Member of Parliament).

It is interesting to note the convergence in the position of government officials and civil society organizations on this particular issue. Both NGO leaders and policy makers are very critical of the ways that policies have been implemented at the EU level. In effect, they stress that it is important overcome the hegemony of economic factors and promote a greater involvement of civil society in policy decisions in order to enhance EU democracy.

Conclusion

Regarding perceptions of civil society, as seen in the document analysis, what stands out is the existence of a strong concern to align national policy priorities with those established by supranational entities coordinated by the EU. Moreover, this search for aligning political priorities contributes most probably to the positive evaluations that several international organizations have been making of immigration policies in Portugal. For instance, the report of the United Nations Development Programme (2009) gave Portugal the best score regarding immigrants' access to rights and services. The International Organization for Migration (2010) points out Portugal as a model in terms of the relationship with immigrants, who are actively involved in a dialogue concerning integration policy. Finally, the Migrant Integration Policy Index III (British Council and Migration Policy Group, 2011, p. 29) concludes that 'Portugal goes further than other new countries of immigration in the promotion of social integration in education'.

Despite the positive international assessments of Portuguese policies, NGO leaders and policy makers tend to criticize the ways they have been implemented. In this context, a crucial notion is that there is no consistent match between the policies' objectives and the effects that civil society believes they have or can have. Thus, it was stressed that there is the need to adopt a strategy that can bridge the gap between the prescribed and the real, as well as the importance of overcoming the hegemony of economic factors in policy decisions. This notion resonates with previous research emphasizing the importance of promoting access to political rights (cf., Carvalhais, 2004, 2006; Zobel & Barbosa, 2009) and the relationship between policy and practice, a phenomenon that is recurrent in research with immigrants and other groups at risk of exclusion (e.g., Loja, Costa & Menezes, 2011; Ribeiro *et al*., 2012): despite positive changes that have occurred in the last few years, there is still an important gap between policy and practice (Ribeiro *et al*., 2012).

Furthermore, NGO leaders criticize the lack of political courage because the EU continues to keep thousands of illegal immigrants living without the minimum rights, as well the cynicism of politicians and policies (*realpolitik*) grounded in demographic and economic reasons. In this respect, they propose the revocation of the 'Return Directive' and the implementation of policies focused on the empowerment of immigrants through the effective promotion of their rights. Regarding European identity and integration,

NGO leaders criticize the vertical relationship between the EU and the NGOs, which undermines civil society and the functioning of the democracy, arguing that Europe must be collectively constructed. In addition, policy makers highlight that the failure of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 resulted from a weak negotiation process.

Overall, both document analysis and interviews present as dominant discourses the need to increase the civic and political participation of youths and to achieve the full integration of migrants. In relation to youths, the discourses seem to focus on the social and civil rights level, emphasizing the importance of providing more and equal opportunities, especially in education and in the labour market, enhancing their autonomy and encouraging their active citizenship. Regarding immigrants, the discourses were mostly located in the realm of political rights, which resonates once again with what has been emphasized in the literature (e.g., Zobel & Barbosa, 2009). The implementation of less bureaucratic policies promoting the legalization of migrants is seen as a priority to be established in national and EU policy. The objective is to promote their effective participation towards full integration in society, in order to overcome the distance between official discourses and actual practices. Indeed, this concern was already pointed out in a previous study regarding the evaluation of the Portuguese legislation by civil society (e.g., NGOs, immigrant associations, churches, as well as political parties and governmental officials) and the political integration of non-national residents, stressing that the problem is not the law but its application. Furthermore, although the discourses are aligned with EU political priorities, they point to the need to improve the representation and participation of civil society in the agenda-setting at the EU level, and criticize the hegemony of economic factors over the social dimension in the political agenda.

Concluding, this article has sought to contribute to a better understanding of the factors that influence the active citizenship of youths and migrants. The analysis was focused on the interaction between state institutions and civil society actors, addressing the role of national and EU policies on the integration of youth and migrants. In line with the literature, the analysis reinforces the idea that political opportunity structures play an important role in civic and political participation (cf. Koopmans, 2004; Morales, 2009). Despite this important influence over active citizenship, especially for those groups at risk of exclusion, the analysis shows that some sectors of society have been ignored in the formulation of policies, which may indicate that there is a lack of capabilities and political courage both in national and European institutions to endorse

legal and political innovations to effectively improve their political integration (cf., Zobel & Barbosa, 2009). In this context, it is suggested that it is necessary to promote a greater involvement of civil society in the design and implementation of policies which, in turn, may contribute to the strengthening of the democratic principles in which Portugal and the European Community are grounded. In other words, and to use the metaphor of one of the interviewees, *Europe has always been a beacon pointing* towards the enlargement of citizenship rights and the inclusion of disenfranchised groups – and, more than ever, European institutions should recognize that the quality of democracy in the European Union also depends on their leadership in the creation and development of more inclusive and participatory ways of being a citizen.

Notes

1. Approved by the European Parliament (2008/115/EC) with the aim of being the first step towards a common immigration policy for the EU, establishing common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals.
2. As suggested by the notion of post-national citizenship by Carvalhais (2006, p. 118), the concept of integration is perceived in this article as a process by which the individuals became active participants in their economic, civic, political, cultural, and spiritual life for the exercise of their citizenship.
3. Law 50/1996 of 4 September (art. 1(b)).
4. See Barrett and Brunton-Smith (2014) in this issue.
5. Available at the website: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/eu-youth-strategy_en.htm

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