

Some Theoretical Insights on Social Movements and Resistance Practices in the Era of De-Politicization of Representative Politics

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The global economic crisis of 2008 has fostered a new wave of de-politicization intended as the shifting of national policy making from the public political arena to the field of extra-political supranational and international actors. The public policy making has become tightly linked to criteria that are much more economic than political. This change has provoked a consequent mutation in the nature and behavior of social movements which has result in different kinds of crossbreeding. Traditional social movements with their State-addressed requests have given way to new forms of social conflict that do not directly address to the national government. These new forms of mobilization act primarily in the form of direct social actions aimed at impacting directly on the economy and the environment. The common element of such experiences can be identified in the mix of resilience and resistance that they express.

I. Some introductory remarks

The economic and financial crisis that has hit Europe since 2008, has initiated a new phase of activism on the part of social movements. They have experienced new forms of organization and a different way of interacting with the political classes. If social movements of the past, through action-oriented repertoires of protest, have identified a reference in the institutions, especially in order to influence decision-making, in recent years a different situation has emerged. The State is no longer the real target of social movements because the conflict moves at a supra-national and, in many cases, sub-national level, ushering in a new tradition in the relationship between organized civil society and territories. In this perspective, social scientists have focused on two related phenomena:

a) On the one hand, the many cases of social resilience, defined as the ability, usually promoted by social movement actors, to deal with critical situations in the absence of intervention by the government institutions. In some

cases, as we shall see further on, from simple resilient actions, these practices take on the characteristics of actual resistance.

b) On the other hand, if once social movements, as described by scholars who have made use of the “Political Opportunity Structures Approach” (POS), tried to find some allies within the political system (generally the left-wing parties), the distance from it has today prompted some movements to turn into political parties themselves, producing interesting organizational hybridization between parties and movements (see the case of Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece, and the Five Star movement in Italy).

These two research areas open several lines of investigation that allow shifting the focus from the identity dimension to the organizational one and, above all, to the outcomes or consequences of social movements. These transformations occur in a social context characterized by the de-politicization of the institutional politics in the Western countries, mainly determined by the processes of radical financialization of the economy and the subordination of the political processes to the economic actors.

De-politicization is a research field that certainly needs to be investigated in depth through a trans-disciplinary approach that requires us a virtuous integration of Political sociology, Economic sociology, Sociology of organizations, Sociology of public action, and Social Movements studies.

In this paper we try to produce some theoretical insights in order to understand some research areas towards which scholars may focus in this complex general context. Regarding this, we focus mainly on de-politicization as a general framework and on its consequences and, then, we try to propose some reflections about social movement theory with particular regard to their outcomes and to the need of an interdisciplinary approach for the studies of social movements’ outcomes. We introduce the theory of fields as a useful relational approach to the study of social movements and social resilience practices. At the end of the paper we try to offer some example such as the experience of the recovered factories, especially in Italy, as an interesting experience of social resilience/resistance in a context of political and economic crisis.

2. *The de-politicization of politics in western countries*

We believe that, nowadays, a key element for understanding the difficult relationships between politics and society lies in the concept of de-politicization of institutional politics. De-politicization has been defined in many ways (Foster *et al.* 2014). We consider it to be a set of changes in the ways power is exercised. These modes downgrade the political nature of decision-making

(Burnham 2001) and, through representation, give legitimacy to actors apparently less able to bear witness to the presence of the “political” (Wood and Flinders 2014; Hay 2007). Politics appear less responsible for the decisions that affect the regulation of society and the impact of their costs and failures on economic and cultural processes. Political choices conditioned by the market, acquire the character of necessity and inevitability. De-politicization has been consolidated in various ways. In the European context, a “government”, a “discourse”, and a “social” de-politicization have, in particular, been observed (Hay 2007).

The de-politicization of government has different facets, concerning polity (Jessop 2014) and the relationship between government and governance. It consists of the displacements of the decision-making powers from elective offices to arenas presented as neutral, objective as well as remote from – or “above” – institutional politics (Flinders 2008; Burnham 1999; Hay 2007; Kettel 2008).

Another shift of powers, implemented through decisions of governments and national parliaments, benefits non-elected and of higher scale actors, such as strong (intergovernmental) bodies and procedures of the European Union (e.g. the 2012 Fiscal Compact) and the so-called Troika (Council, European Commission, IMF, ECB), and produces various forms of compliance with the international agreements and rules, whose enforcement is handed over to actors and technical tools. To give some examples: the obligation for EU governments to have their public finance decisions approved by the Commission before presenting them to national parliaments; for other regions of the world, the conditionality of IMF and WB, the constraints coming from the WTO agreements (Flinders and Buller 2006), as well as from other sources of legal regulation arising from bi- and multi-lateral forms of international agreement, often implemented through expertise (Huggins 2015); the technocratic imposition of normative models of good governance on the states; sanctions imposed indirectly by rating agencies and operators of global financial speculation against public finance policies. These shifts accumulate powers outside of state policy, but also call for a de-accountability of political actors (Burnham 2001; Kettel 2008; Wood and Flinders 2014).

Another side of this phenomenon is the use of meta-decisions that make it impossible to make other decisions later (Flinders and Buller 2006). For example, constitutionalizing the obligation of a balanced budget depoliticizes the national economic policy. Its task is reduced to monitoring and adjusting the process with measures that fall within pre-set standards.

Technicization of processes is also an important part of de-politicization, with the assignment of regulatory effects and resources allocation to technolo-

gies such as evaluation, with the primacy it gives to “the numbers” (De Leonardi 2013; Giancola 2015), or technical procedures in support of political decision-making. Choices become evidence-based and free from ideologies and social pressures.

A discursive de-politicization determines the convergence of preferences (Flinders and Buller 2006) into a single, albeit diverse, cognitive construction of reality (frame for public actions). It is no coincidence that the prevailing paradigm in the contemporary liberal political economy has been narrated in the form of a “single thought” demonstrating a clear cultural hegemony of the trans-nationalized and financialized capitalism. Policies become inevitable responses lacking rational alternatives to the limits of development set by previous responses, with which contradictions and conflicts had previously been appeased. Especially in Europe the tarnishing of values and programmatic differences between left and right – both give priority to growth and the market – is a consequence and evidence of this kind of de-politicization. Convergence is helped by the communication of imagery and knowledge brands (Jessop 2009; Sum and Jessop 2013) of great power and by seductiveness, i.e. a specific normative force, which is exercised by indicating what to aspire to and how to strive for it. These are forms of communication and construction of meaning based on appeals or slogans (Wood 2015), referring to a shared sense imbued with moral values. The consensus is mobilized around the assumptions that social acceptance cannot be doubted and this therefore legitimizes unquestionable paradigms.

These paradigms highlight various aspects of the primacy of control by means of the market, for instance, everything that is narrated as efficient, flexible, innovative and “smart”. These reminders can guide, encourage and legitimize public actions as well as individual and social behavior, such as lifestyles and sustainable consumption, which are configured as social responses to depoliticized collective challenges of development (Hay 2007). Conversely, this also applies to what is unacceptable and subject to stigma: today primarily what is public: debt, spending, government, territorial social demands.

2.1. The actors in de-politicized politics

With de-politicization, the contradictions of regulation become policy problems managed by experts and by participatory processes with predefined outcomes (Swyngedouw 2011; Wilson, Swyngedouw 2014). The actions are addressed through the setting of horizons and an indication of collective goals presented in the form of “public truth” (often) by non-political actors. The emerging figures in de-politicization are not only creators and disseminators of

expert knowledge (gurus, international technical organizations, think tanks, consultants). In addition to them, and often in close connection with them, we find the beneficiaries of these changes: those who are favorably located in the contemporary distribution asymmetries and, in particular, corporations. They enjoy a more direct benefit from specific social de-politicization (Wood and Flinders 2014), from a redefinition of the boundary between the political and the non-political, in this case made by the states (Jessop 2014: 217). This consists of transferring the power to address issues of collective interest to the private sphere of individuals and/or the market. This shift not only reduces public budgets, but also political potential of demands and social conflicts (especially where rights are being claimed), labeled as traditionalist, old fashioned, ideological or fundamentalist (Swyngedouw 2011), through a reframing of what is at stake in terms of issues that can be solved through innovation.

Economic actors are concerned to influence the decisions which affect the characteristics of their environment – the extra-economic conditions of accumulation – and this is nothing new. Practices of consultation, lobbying, campaigning, funding policy have always been analyzed by sociology and political science, which have theorized – also with normative intentions – the concepts of neo-corporatism and governance.

The season of governance launched at the same time as the market orientation of public policies has seen the formal inclusion of enterprises in the cooperation and partnership between public and private sectors. These phenomena have produced both business friendly regulations and isomorphism of the de-politicized public action with the market and its actors. This can be clearly seen by looking at local situations. The representation of cities as actors having a system of collective decision-making, common interests perceived as such, integration mechanisms, an internal and external representation of the collective actor and ability to innovate is modeled on the firm. The city's strategic planning seeks vision and leadership that can calculate costs and benefits, assess risks and opportunities, strengths and weaknesses, in order to be guided towards competition and partnership.

The instruments of market-oriented policies since the 90s – city marketing, branding, strategic planning, etc. – have more recently been updated by reference to imaginary business scenarios that are already making the metamorphosis from innovative ground-breaking ideas to models in the initial phase of institutionalization. For example: the Smart City paradigm; the economy of the function or service, which aims to replace the sale of goods with the sale of their use, such as car sharing; in some ways even the narratives and practices of Social Investment, Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation (Dey and Steyaert 2010). These models – at the same time economic, cultural and

political – are implemented through the relationships between society, market and politics that go beyond the old public governance.

The pro-business regulations are aimed at acquiring consent and legitimacy by presenting themselves as able to use the market and technologies to determine patented solutions for collective problems (environment, quality of life, economic development, participation, mobility, social inclusion, etc.). These are placed within broader systems of meaning, often designed by world-renowned gurus and processed in transnational enterprises, adapted to the local retail markets and recognized and institutionalized through policies on a transnational and national scale. The inevitability of these technical solutions and their naturalization lies in their being rational and preferable to ineffective models that are sources of waste and of individual and collective malaise.

This scenario tends to overlap and mutually reinforce that on a European scale: the issues are of general interest as defined by factors such as productivity, competitiveness, social cohesion, and resilience in crisis.

2.2. Risks of de-politicization

With de-politicization, political functions and state intervention do not vanish. The processes of government, however, become less transparent (Foster *et al.* 2014) and at the same time faster and less expensive for the elite. If science or technology say that there are no alternatives, negotiations in parliaments and local governments no longer make sense. In this way, in the public sphere, the processes of de-politicization become naturalized, presented by many institutional actors as forms of rationalization partly inevitable and desirable (Hay 2007; Wood and Flinders 2014), especially in times of crisis, because they are associated with the reduction of political and social conflict.

Eliminating the political nature of actions does not mean reducing the need for regulation but producing it in new ways. The effects of actions do not cease to be political, because they involve the selective allocation of material and immaterial values. De-politicization is in fact the outcome of a meta-governance consistent and functional to a political strategy (Jessop 2014). The market-oriented public action uses it as a specific institutional and discursive resource that helps to create strategies of accumulation of wealth in the form of a hegemonic political project (Moini 2015: 37 *et seq.*). This process occurs especially in times of roll-out (Peck and Tickell 2002) and of consolidation of neo-liberalism, where the task is not just to cut and dismantle the public sector but to build and adapt the non-economic conditions of accumulation (Jessop 1997; Burnham 1999). As well as facilitating the functioning of markets, the

reduction of the “political” to the “economic” is a component of political rationality and neoliberal governmentality (Foster *et al.* 2014). De-politicization is useful for the elite, but finds consensus with the growing lack of interest, popular disaffection and distrust in institutional politics.

One may wonder, in particular, if an antidote does exist: in which conditions it is possible to reverse these processes (e.g. Fawcett and Marsh 2014)? In the current crisis, forms or moments of re-politicization can be powered and they in turn can help democratic processes, such as mobilizations, social conflicts and forms of resistance within non-institutional political participation practices. This discourse bring us to think about the outputs of social movements e the cross-fertilization between different theoretical approach.

3. *Cross-pollination between social movement studies and organizational studies*

As McAdam and Scott stated (2005), organization theory and social movement theory are two of the most active areas within the social sciences. Different scholars have focused on the connection between these fields, showing the importance of cross-pollination. We know that both organizations and social movements are forms of coordinated collective action and this is why they can be analyzed by using similar categories (Perrow 2000: 472–4744; Zald and Berger 1978).

Organizations and social movements’ literatures have already developed many parallelisms. Most of them have to do with study of social change mechanisms. For example, social movements’ scholars argue about how the existing repertoires and toolkits can contribute to the evolution of movement structures and strategies. Furthermore, the social movements’ literature stresses the importance of “framing” as crucial for movement success. On its turn, organization theory suggests that the regulatory, normative, and cognitive dimensions of institutions affect how organizations develop. The same cognitive structures also circumscribe the range of practices that social activists can prefigure; normative structures define what is seen as appropriate in movement practice; and regulatory structures delimit the variety of practices that movements pursue. Furthermore, social movements’ scholars have been concerned with how states influence movement activity in one direction or another. Finally, organization scholars have focused on the conditions under which different organizational forms (decentralized networks or centralized hierarchies) emerge. The same concern haunts social movements’ students. As Campbell (2004) argues, these two literatures have developed along parallel tracks that could provide the basis for mutually beneficial cross-fertilization.

For instance, the concept of *organizational field* developed by OS students is today an important new analytic lens also for movement scholars. As defined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 148), a *field* refers to those organizations that, consolidated, constitute a recognized area of institutional life. The concept of field thus identifies an arena that is a system of actors, actions, and relations where participants carry out interrelated activities and allow us to view the actors situated in a context.

An important difference pertains to the treatment of power in the two literatures. SM scholars have stressed the role of power and politics in social life. For their part, OS scholars also recognize that organizations are systems of domination, but, usually, they have attended less to the ways in which power in and among organizations operate in unintended ways to challenge or change existing structures. SM scholars have delimited their research subject to what McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) call “transgressive contention”. OS students have instead restricted their focus on the “prescribed politics” (McAdam 1999), with a particular regard to the activation and reproduction of institutionalized authority.

Despite differences, we think there are many opportunities to integrate the two fields. The organizational field level represents in fact a promising vantage point from which to view organization change. A field-level conception becomes indispensable to trace the complexities of contemporary changes. From an innovative organizational perspective, we need to differentiate at least among three components of institutions:

Institutional Actors – (both individual and collective) that “create (produce) and embody and enact (reproduce) the logics of the field” (Scott *et al.* 2000: 172). Actors serve both as *agents* and as *carriers*, who embody and reflect existing norms and beliefs.

Institutional Logics – the “belief systems and associated practices that predominate in an organizational field” (*ib.*, 170). As Friedland and Alford (1991: 248) note, institutional logics provide the “organizing principles” supplying practice guidelines for field participants.

Governance Structures – “all those arrangements by which field-level power and authority are exercised involving, variously, formal and informal systems, public and private auspices, regulative and normative mechanisms” (Scott *et al.* 2000: 173).

From the side of SM, McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996: 2) have identified three main factors in examining “the emergence and development of social movements”.

Mobilizing Structures – the “forms of organization (informal as well as formal), available to insurgents” (Idem: 2). The structures include all those

“meso-level groups, organizations, and informal networks that comprise the collective building blocks of social movements” (Idem: 3).

Political Opportunities – the “structure of political opportunities and constraints confronting the movement” (Idem: 2). We refer to the linkage between “institutionalized politics”, which define the structure of opportunities and constraints, and social movements that arise to challenge and reform existing systems.

Framing Processes – the “collective processes of interpretation, attribution, and social construction that mediate between opportunity and action” (idem: 3).

There is a strong affinity between these two conceptual schemas. The concept of “institutional actors” corresponds to the notion of “mobilizing structures”. When we speak of “institutional actors” we privilege established actors whereas the concept of “mobilizing structure” favors emergent actors. The concept of “institutional logics” is connected to that of “framing processes”. They refer to ideas and belief systems and the role they play in providing direction, motivation, meaning, and coherence. The former tends to emphasize the power of dominant ideologies and shared cognitive frameworks, whereas the latter refers to challenging ideologies and conflicting beliefs and values. Finally, the concept of “governance structures” relates to that of “political opportunities”. For example, in examining governance structures, OS scholars emphasize the constraints and supports provided by existing arrangements. SM theorists instead stress the presence of opportunities afforded by weaknesses, contradictions, or inattention by governing authorities (McAdam 1996; Tarrow 1996; Tilly 1978).

Collecting the areas of convergence and divergence, we think it is possible to build common framework by provisionally stressing the following seven analytic conventions (see McAdam and Scott 2005):

1. Following OS analyses, we may replace the individual organization or social movement with the *organization field* as the fundamental unit of analysis.

2. As the starting point for the analysis of any episode of field-level change, we have to identify the period of interest and to define the composition of the field in terms of three classes of actors: *Dominants* – those individuals, groups, and organizations around whose actions and interests the field tends to revolve; *Challengers* – those individuals, groups, and organizations seeking to challenge the advantaged position of dominants or fundamental structural-procedural features of the field; *Governance units* – those organizational units that exercise field level power and authority.

3. All fields exist within a wider social *environment* composed by: *External actors* – those individuals, groups, and organizations that are not recognized

to be participants in the field, but in some way influence the course of action; *External governance units* – the authority and power structures operating at broader societal levels.

4. Social actors and their behavior are constituted and guided by different *institutional logics* – values, norms, and beliefs regarding means-ends relations. They may be *primary* – ideas guiding and legitimating the actions of dominant actors – or *secondary* – ideas associated with emerging or suppressed actors. Events occurring in fields and their environments are differentially interpreted by actors, providing contrasting frames. The extent of *alignment* among these frames signifies possible sources of support or opposition.

5. Under normal circumstances, we believe that fields tend toward stability. Given this presumption, we think most periods of significant field contention/change begin with *destabilizing events or processes* that often have origin out of the boundaries of the field.

6. Generally it is not the destabilizing events/processes that set periods of field contention and change in motion. Rather it is a process of *reactive mobilization* defined by the following set of three contingent *mobilizing mechanisms*: a) *attribution of threat or opportunity* – do field actors respond to potentially destabilizing events/processes, interpreting those events as representing new threats or opportunities for the realization of their goals? b) *Social appropriation* – having fashioned a new more threatening (or opportunistic) understanding of the field or its environment, can the authors of this view establish it as the dominant institutional logic of the group in question? c) *New actors and innovative action* – once introduced as the institutional logic of a given group, do these new attributions of threat or opportunity lead to the emergence of new types of actors or to innovative action that can destabilize the *field*?

7. If the answer to all three questions is affirmative, we can expect that field dominants and challengers will act and interact in innovative and increasingly contentious ways. The outcome could be a significant *shift in the strategic alignment* that had previously structured and stabilized the field, leading to a new *institutional settlement*.

These seven dimensions may be analyzed in different contexts and sectors, and represent a reference grid in which SMS and OS integrate profitably. There are in fact strong similarities in terms of the mechanisms by which organizations and social movements develop and change. Doug McAdam and his colleagues (2001: 25–26) have identified three types of mechanisms that are relevant to the study of organizations and social movements: *environmental mechanisms* (Political Opportunity Structures), external factors that affect actors' capacities to engage in change; *cognitive mechanisms* (framing, but also diffusion, translation and bricolage of organizational innovations and pat-

tern) that alter how actors perceive their identities, interests, and possibilities for change; *relational mechanisms* (network mobilizing structures) that affect the connections among actors and their networks.

These are just some of the aspects in which studies on social movements can be well integrated with the main acquisitions of organization theory. The attention paid to the organizational dimension of social movements leads us to the important issue of the consequences (or outcomes) of the contentious collective action.

4. *The outcomes of the social movements*

We know that social movements can have several intended (and unintended) impacts on the establishment. The question is how to establish a real connection between movement actions and social, cultural, and political changes? Following Bosi's review on the literature on this topic (2012), we can assert that SM scholars have established useful classifications of movement outcomes. First of all, it is possible to distinguish among the political, biographical, and cultural impacts of social movements:

a) *Political impacts* are the effects of movement activities that alter the political environment. This dimension is associated to the SM access to states, focusing on the connections between states and social movement organizations or other organizations related to movements. From this point a view, a state-oriented challenger carries out a successful action to the extent it gets a legislation based on its program, influencing the political agenda and the decision-making (Gamson 1990). When we speak of political impact, we assume that the state is the "fulcrum" (Tarrow 1998) also for that groups that are not mainly state-oriented (such as in the case of those SMOs mainly engaged in transnational protests).

b) *Personal and biographical impacts* are effects on the lives of individuals who have participated in movement activities (Giugni 2004). Here the micro-sociological dimension of individual participation in social movements comes into play, with a particular regard to the relational and structural factors (social networks) that account for activism (Snow *et al.* 1980; Rosenthal *et al.* 1985; McAdam 1986; 1988; Fernandez and McAdam 1988; McAdam *et al.* 1988; Gould 1993; 1995; Kriesi 1993; McAdam and Paulsen 1993; McCarthy 1996; Kim and Bearman 1997), without neglecting a certain attention to the attitudinal or psychological determinants of activism (Hardin 1982; Opp 1989; Chong 1991; Sandler 1992) as well as the role of "biographical availability" (Wiltfang and McAdam 1991; Passy and Giugni 2000). With regard to this

kind of impact we can distinguish between the “biographical consequences” that follow from individual involvement in protest activities and the aggregate-level change in life-course patterns. Different studies have in fact shown that activism has an important effect on the social and cultural patterns of current societies.

c) *Cultural impacts*, finally, represent those changes on the movement’s broader environment, such as public opinion or the value orientations (or the life-course patterns) of a society. It is not easy to define what outcomes can be really considered cultural and there is not a broad consensus among scholars about this issue. SM scholars have in general addressed a number of potential SM outcomes over a broad area of social life (from value and opinion change, to changes in art, in collective identities and communities). By this way researches have mainly focused on the particular character of the social movements in producing knowledge by experiencing new and alternative life practices.

We can also distinguish between internal and external impacts. With *internal impacts* we refer to those changes that occur within the movement (or movement organizations); instead, with *external impacts* we refer to the effects that movements have on their external environment. Summarizing, we can combine these two dimensions getting a typology that includes six main domains where effects are possible.

Finally, it should be taken into account the theoretical and methodological obstacles associated with the following dimensions (Giugni and Bosi 2011):

- Goal adaptation: the reaction of social movements to changes in their environment as well as to the internal mechanisms of organizations and groups within the movement itself. When movements transform, they tend to adapt their aims accordingly. Thus, the goals of social movements are not immutable, but change over time.
- Time reference and effect stability: they are associated to the impact of movements on the establishment that can be delayed or temporary. In fact, the time-lag between collective action mobilization and the manifestation of its impacts can be substantial, ranging from a few days to years or even decades.
- Interrelated effects: we refer to the assumption that the outcomes of social movements are not independent from each other but mutually influential. They in fact are able to raise the public profile of some issues even introducing changes in cultural values, opinions, and beliefs in social and political public discourse. Clear changes in public opinion can indirectly influence the process of policy and in general the establishment.
- Unintended and perverse effects: major impacts of protest movements on the establishment often have nothing to do with a movement’s stated goals.

We can consider, for example, police repression or the long-term biographical consequences of protest action.

- Dilemma of causal attribution: It refers to the difficulty of recognizing a cause-and-effect relationship between an observed change and its potential causes. With regard to the study of social movements' outcomes, causal attribution is associated to the difficulty of determining whether or not a specific change is actually the result of protest activities.

In general we can say that the political impacts of protest movements on the establishment are contingent upon the presence of some facilitating external factors pertaining to their social and political environment. This assumption leads us to stress a specific theoretical approach that in our opinion can better focus on the contextual dimension. We refer to the so-called *theory of fields*.

5. For a relational approach: the theory of fields

The “Theory of Fields” represents an integrated theory that explains how stability and change are achieved by social actors in circumscribed social arenas. Fligstein and McAdam (2011; 2012) elaborated it by drawing upon the body of integrative scholarship produced by economic sociologists, institutional theorists in both political sociology and political science, and social movement scholars. Three main component of the theory can be identified:

1) The *strategic action fields* that are associated to the meso-level social orders, meant as the basic structural building block of modern political and organizational life in economy, civil society, and the state.

2) The *broader environment* within which any action field is embedded. They can be proximate or distal fields as well as states. They are themselves organized as complex systems of strategic action fields. Most of the sources of the opportunities and challenges in a given field have their origin in the relations with this broader environment.

3) The account of how embedded social actors try to build and keep a specific order in a given field. Important aspects are here the “existential functions of the social” and the specific conceptions of “social skill”, meant as the capacity for inter-subjective thought and action that shapes the provision interests and identity.

By this way it is possible to rethink the problems of the relationship between agency and structure and the connections between macro-social processes and micro-interactions. The main assumption of this meso-level theory is that action takes place *between* and *within* organized groups.

According to Fligstein and McAdam (2012), we can identify seven key components of the theory of fields: 1. strategic action fields; 2. incumbents, challengers, and governance units; 3. social skill and the existential functions of the social; 4. the broader field environment; 5. exogenous shocks, mobilization, and the onset of contention; 6. episodes of contention; 7. settlement.

1. *Strategic action fields*

By strategic action field we mean a meso-level social order in which individual or collective actors interact with one another on the basis of shared (not necessarily consensual) understandings on the aims of the field, on power relations and on the rules governing legitimate action within it. In a stable field the actors are able to reproduce themselves and the field over a relatively long period of time.

In the economic context, for example, *markets* can be thought of as a specific kind of constructed order. For their part, also SM scholars consider movements as emergent orders composed, in the most successful cases, of collections of formal social movement organizations (SMOs) and more informal groups of activists.

2. *Incumbents, challengers, and governance units*

All the strategic action fields are composed of *incumbents*, *challengers*, and often *governance units*. These governance units assist the incumbents in several ways, for example, by legitimating and “naturalizing” the logic and rules of the field, but also by producing standardized versions of the information that can serve to inform the actions of all parties in game. Furthermore, besides their “internal” functions, these units serve as the connective point between the strategic action field and the main external fields.

3. *Social Skill and the Existential Function of the Social*

By emphasizing the cognitive, empathetic, and communicative dimensions of social skill, it is possible to underscore the point that social actors who undertake strategic action need to be able to use whatever perspective developed in an inter-subjective fashion (Fligstein 2001a). In this way actors can transcend their own individual and narrow group interests, taking the role of the other as a prerequisite for creating a broader conception of the collective identity.

4. *Broader Field Environment*

All fields are embedded in complex webs of other fields. Fligstein and McAdam (ibidem) identify three sets of binary distinctions that characterize the nature of these “other fields” and their relationships with any strategic action field. The first distinction is between distant and proximate fields. Proximate fields are the strategic action fields with recurring ties to the field in question. Distant fields are those that lack direct ties and, virtually, have not the capacity to influence a given strategic action field. The second distinction is

between dependent and interdependent fields. When a field is subject to the influence of another is to be considered as dependent on it. When two connected fields exercise equal influence over each other, we say that they are linked in an interdependent relation to one another. The stability of any field is largely a function of its relations to other fields. The third distinction, lastly, implies that states themselves are dense collections of fields.

5. Exogenous Shocks, Mobilization, and the Onset of Contention

The theoretical implication of the interdependence of fields is that the broader field environment is a source of rolling turbulence in modern society. A change that occurs in any strategic action field tends to influence the stability of all proximate fields. In this context, the collective attribution of threat or opportunity is not enough to ensure the onset of contention. Two other things must happen. First, those who perceive the threat/opportunity have to command the organizational resources (social appropriation) necessary for mobilization. Second, the hallmark of an episode of contention is associated to the use of innovative and previously prohibited forms of collective action (innovative action).

6. Episodes of Contention

An episode of contention “can be defined as a period of emergent, sustained contentious interaction between ... [field] actors utilizing new and innovative forms of action vis-à-vis one another” (McAdam 2007: 253). Innovative action and contentious episodes contain a shared sense of uncertainty with regard to the rules and the power relations governing the field. In the case of fields characterized by established incumbents and challengers, the mobilization of both groups can take on unusual intensity.

7. Settlement

Through either oppositional mobilization or the reassertion of the status quo by incumbents and their state allies, the field begins to gravitate toward a new or renewed institutional settlement with regard to field rules and cultural norms. A field is not more in crisis when there is a general consensus about the sense of order and certainty. The proximate fields are not only the source of the destabilizing shocks that produce contentious episodes, but they also provide the models for the settlements that bring the crises to a close. When field rules are uncertain, actors tend to be more receptive to new perspectives trying to experiment some alternatives.

6. Organizational hybridizations and social resilience practices in the era of de-politicization

We believe that the *Theory of fields* provides an appropriate framework to analyze the different contexts of social resilience in a time of crisis like the one

we are living since 2008. A fruitful field of investigation is therefore that of selecting few empirical cases to demonstrate how social resilience will result in organized forms of collective action in which actors are able to produce new forms of social regulation. Think, for example, about the experience of organized political consumerism, in which the social activists relate to the contradictions of the free market, or about the interesting cases of *recovered factories* (from Argentina to Europe).

In particular, recovered factories are intended as a social and economic process that presupposes the existence of a prior enterprise that worked under the traditional model of a private capitalist enterprise whose bankruptcy process, emptying or unavailability prompted the workers to fight for a change and for the implementation of a process of self-management (Marchetti 2013; Ruggeri 2014). This definition seems to be shared by many authors and illustrates clearly that recovered factories are not a defined and stabilized model, but rather a dynamic field of experimentation. Though this general definition may be shared, different authors highlight specific dimensions of it. Some authors give more importance to the collective and community dimension of the experience (Echaide 2003; Bialakowsky *et al.* 2007; Fajn 2008); others focus on the cultural and symbolic meaning of the process (Santamarino 2005; Gracia and Cavaliere 2007); another perspective emphasizes the emancipatory aspect of the phenomenon as it generates new alternatives and new levels of freedom and autonomy (Rebón 2004); a last perspective focus on the outputs of the process in generating an alternative economy where the aim is not the production and re-production of capital, but the centrality of work in the reproduction of lives (Danani and Hintze 2011). But, essentially, we believe that what draws the attention on recovered factories is the ability of workers to be able to self-manage production units that responded to the laws of the market. The slogan adopted by the Argentinean National Movement of Recovered Factories, “occupy, resist, produce”, inspired by the words of the Brazilian movement *Sem Terra*, summarizes well the basic idea of the movement: occupying the plants and re-starting the production under a condition of self-management are, on the one hand, resilience practices, for the workers are firstly interested in maintaining their jobs, and, on the other hand, actual attempts to resist to the crushing mechanisms of neo-liberalist capitalism (Ruggeri 2014). In fact, many scholars seem to prefer the expression “recovery” to the expression “self-management” as it is more tightly connected to the contest of creative resistance of the workers against the neo-liberalist policies that has tried to throw them out of their working places and in general out of the productive process. In this context, self-management means that workers can take back in their hands the productive process towards the abolition of the

exploitation of work by the capital. But it means also that these organizational models should be profitable. As Ruggeri (2014) remarks, many times scholars are inclined to elude this aspect of economic efficiency in favor of the horizontality of the process. We believe that this dimension should not be underrated. Efficiency (at least sought) is the other side of an actual resistance to the neoliberalist exploitation. Without efficiency the horizontality of organizational processes is an empty box. In this sense, it is also important to highlight the difference between a recovered factory and the organizations that work in the field of the so called social economy. The former do not receive (usually) any economic aid from the central government nor work at the margin of the market, as said above. So, for a recovered factory, the main challenge is to develop the internal logic of self-management even when the product has to follow the rules of standard market competition.

The expression recovered factory is sometimes used ambiguously also to identify companies recovered through a purely negotiated process (negotiated WBOs) and former factories occupied by external actors and reconverted into social spaces. In these cases what counts is not the actual production of means, but much more the production of economic alternatives and the production of social and symbolic capital. All these phenomena are, in our opinion, part of the same process that has been defined as “democratization of the economy” (Barbera *et al.* 2014) in which authors such as Wolff (2012) see a concrete paradigm shift taking place in the world of production.

While WBOs origins may be more or less charged with contention (they may be *negotiated* or *conflictual*), recovered social spaces are, usually, contentious phenomena. However, it has to be considered that resistance and contention, considered in a broader way, goes far beyond the practice of occupation: recovered factories, wherever we speak of WBOs or recovered social spaces are contentious in their outcomes. What connects all the different recovering experiences is the attempt to deconstruct the dominant capitalist and neoliberalist approach to work and economy through an alternative work configuration, a new production model and through the meaning given to it by the workers.

In Italy, for example, we have identified, at present, 59 recovering experiences. We prefer here using the expression “recovering experiences” considered the fact that this total number includes WBOs, both negotiated and contentious, and recovered social spaces.

The positioning on the Italian territory is polarized mainly in the north-eastern area (25 experiences out of 59). As Vieta and Depedri (2015) have shown, the Italian WBOs born in the last 35 developed with a trend highly influenced by the national unemployment rate and by the guarantees provided

by the regulative national framework (Mancora Law I and II). There seems to be also a certain correlation with the political and civic background of an area. North-eastern and central Italy, indeed, show both the highest political participation index rate and the highest number of recovering experiences on their territory. This link deserves further investigation.

We have affirmed that while may not always be contentious in practices, all the recovering experiences have nevertheless contentious outcomes in the sense of opening a breach in an economic and social hegemony. In the words of the president of a cooperative, the mechanism of workers buyout can be very valuable because it puts an end to the dichotomy between ownership and employees, thus making stronger the ability to develop shared strategies¹.

Adopting Fligstein and McAdam's theory we can define a company as a contentious field itself, embedded in several other fields, such as the commercial sector, the national economy, the macro-economic system, the national state and so on. Company as a contentious field can be read of course adopting the classical Marxian contraposition of capitalists and workers where the first correspond to the incumbents and the latter to the challengers. The main aim of the field is the production and the trade of means and services and the regulatory meso-level correspond to the interests and scopes of the capitalists. Within neo-liberalism, the supremacy of maximizing the value of capital placed in the company entails that every time there is a friction between the shareholders-managers and other contracts that make up the firm (employees, citizens or suppliers), subordinated contracts are ignored, circumvented or weakened to maximize the return on shareholders' value (Barbera *et al.* 2014).

Exogenous shocks, such as wars, economic depressions and similar events have the capacity to destabilize such fields through destabilizing the macro-SAFs in which those are embedded. When a field becomes unstable, as we have seen, it becomes open to transformation. Every state of uncertainty within the field, derived from exogenous shocks or endogenous events, will be framed as constituting a significant threat to, or opportunity for, the realization of the group interests. The phase of instability within the SAFs opens up for collective action of challengers that aim at re-writing the field rules and its power relations

A recovered factory point out the breakdown of the former SAF and the emergence of a new one in which the relation between workers and capital is set on new rules. This process is catalyzed by governance units such as Legacoop (the Italian association of cooperatives) and CFI (the organization demanded at supporting workers buyouts) in the case of Italian WBOs. A

¹ VITA online Journal – May 2015 (<http://www.vita.it/it/>).

relevant issue regarding recovered factories as emergent SAFs is that, they are unstable unless they are able to embed in a wider range of other fields. In this perspective, the support provided by Legacoop and CFI is addressed also to stabilizing the field connecting it to the wider field of Italian cooperatives, to suppliers, buyers and so on.

Applying the theory of fields to the study of social movements can be particularly useful to understand, on the one hand, the articulation of public protest in a time of severe social and economic crisis; on the other hand, to understand the different manifestations of social resilience occurring throughout Europe. These social resilience practices are very traceable especially in Southern Europe (Spain, France, Italy, Portugal, Greece), which has been the area most affected by the crisis.

We think also about the social protests activated after the great crisis of 2008. They have been read as part of anti-austerity movements, mobilizing in the context of the crisis of neo-liberalism. In order to understand their characters in terms of social basis, identity and organizational structures and strategies, we should look at the specific characteristics of the socio-economic, cultural and political context in which these protests developed. In this task, the theory of fields may provide a useful analytical tool.

These protests react not only to economic crisis but also to a political situation in which institutions are perceived to be closed towards citizens' demands and interests. According to Donatella della Porta (2015), we suggest that we are living in a context of legitimacy crisis in a late neoliberal system which takes the form of a crisis of responsibility by the institutional politics. This influences the specific characteristics of the anti-austerity protests, especially on their political claims, frames and organizational forms. In order to understand social movements in times of socio-economic challenges, we need to bring capitalism back into the analysis by integrating categories from political sociology and economic sociology.

On the part of SM studies, the connection between socio-economic structure, organizations and values is characterized by continuous feedback. Within this perspective, our aim is also to look at how social cleavages develop as specific social conditions and are linked to a set of values and beliefs that lead to normative choices. Each social group is formed through processes of structuration and identification with specific normative systems. Organizational entrepreneurs create new codes, often politicizing the conflict, by connecting grievances and interests to broader visions of collective goods and bads. We need to move attention from static variables to the causal mechanisms and processes connecting them (McAdam *et al.* 2001). The theory of fields discussed above can help scholars in this task through a *relational* approach,

by locating movements within broader fields where different interactions of various actors, institutional and non-institutional occur.

7. Social resilience practices and the 'alternative' society in movement

The dimension of social resilience is also an important topic that we aim to study in a trans-disciplinary perspective. In fact, in the current economic crisis of industrialized society, social movements face two types of challenges: firstly, they are confronting institutions that are less capable of and have less propensity for mediating new socio-economic demands; secondly, they are experiencing difficulties in building strong and lasting bonds of solidarity and cooperation among people. The highly individualized structure of contemporary society makes the creation of social ties much more difficult.

Nonetheless, in response to the multidimensional crises, it is on the rise the development of grassroots mutualistic and cooperative experiences, within which new affiliations for collective action are experienced. It is a fact that social movements have continued to expand and promote community-led initiatives for social and economic sustainability. These activities often play a decisive role in the fight against poverty and in guaranteeing human livelihood. Solidarity-based exchanges and networks (time banks, barter groups, urban gardening, new consumer-producer networks and cooperatives, urban squatting, etc.) are typical cases of reactivation of people's propensity to be agents of their own destiny. As D'Alisa, Forno and Maurano stated (2015),

this combination of formal and informal networks are a testimony to an ability and an aspiration. Indeed, on one hand, they are indicative of citizens' capacity to self-organize in order to tolerate, absorb, cope with and adjust to the environmental and social threats posed by neoliberal policies. On the other hand, they are attempting to change an economic system, increasingly perceived as unfair and ecological disruptive, by building an alternative in the cracks of the former, based on greater mutual solidarity between individuals and more sustainable connections with the environment (331 ff.).

For example, Forno and Graziano (2014) investigated grassroots activities through the lens of both political consumerism and social movement theory, highlighting that Global Justice Movement activists identified the market as the main arena in which to implement their political activism, connecting this assumption with the individual's responsibility in the daily performative act of consumption. The authors integrating both frameworks "proposed to

define as *Sustainable Community Movement Organizations* (SCMOs) all those social movements that mobilize citizens, leveraging mainly on their purchasing power and encouraging them to behave in the market as politically concerned consumers". The common denominator of the SCMOs is their criticism of the productivism of modern industries and farms and, at the same time, the desire to re-articulate consumption and production on a smaller scale. They support a re-localization of economics activities to be re-embedded in social relations. These characteristics sound familiar to degrowth supporters (D'Alisa *et al.* 2014). In fact, it is possible to recognize groups promoting de-growth as a particular kind of SCMOs that act on global scale of action.

We can address this topic through different perspectives (Degrowth, Sustainable Community Organized Movement, Territorialization, Commons) and we can also use the analytic framework of social resilience. Social resilient systems are composed of three main dimensions: the "coping", the "adaptive" and the "transformative" capacity. These capacities are necessary to deal with the sources of stress and perturbation, which refers to rapid-onset hazards (for example political and financial crises on the side of society). Thus, social resilience is considered a dynamic process which describes the ability of embedded social actors to foster collective transformation through a process of social learning and participative decision-making (Keck and Sakdapolrak 2013). We think that social resilience practices should be analyze even integrating the main acquisitions from organizational and social movements studies.

8. Concluding remarks

The idea of social resilience basically implies that critical events can be seen as opportunities and elements of discontinuity that may lead to innovation and development (Bohle *et al.* 2009). The emphasis on the importance of internal change and on its unpredictability encourages an approach to the dynamics of social-ecological systems in terms of the ability of its members to enable change rather than control it or avoid it (Berkes *et al.* 2003).

If we look at resilience as the ability to support a system to strengthen adaptive capacity of individuals and institutions or to generate innovation and learning that allows transformation, the focus should be on social actors and action. A framework actor-oriented and based on the action reconfigures the resilience from a system-oriented to a subject-centered perspective. A framework based on action measures resilience in terms of how the vulnerability of the livelihoods of individuals can be reduced, or more generally, in terms

of human security. The mechanisms for building resilience, from this point of view, mainly concern the redistribution of resources and power in order to allow the most vulnerable to pursue options of subsistence that strengthen what they themselves consider to be their own resources (Bohle *et al.* 2009). Social resources of resilience are the social capital (including trust and social networks) and the social memory (including previous experience of change), which are essential to the ability of social systems to adapt and shape the change (Folke 2006). The theories on structure and action show that while the content of knowledge guides the decision-making practices, the context of knowledge production fits crucially the purpose of human action (Bourdieu 1977).

This brief explanation shows very clearly, in our opinion, how a social resilience based theoretical framework can be merged with the SAFs theory. In particular, there are major connections with Fligstein and McAdam's concept of social skill as defined above. Knowing how to live with uncertainty requires the activation of strategies for the dissemination of knowledge and information and the implementation of forms of participation, negotiation and cooperation (Colucci 2012). This implies framing of collective action and challenging existing power relations to rebuild a new meso-social order.

On the other hand, moving beyond the existing SAF entails also an active resistance behavior.

As Bosi and Zamponi (2015) observe, social movement scholars have noticed in the last years an increase in forms of participation that ignore or circumvent the traditional state-addressing repertoires of action, and that focus instead on a self-changing society as part of everyday politics. Boycotts, solidarity actions, political consumerism, alternative finance, collective purchasing groups, occupations, self-management, seem to be all part of the same broad phenomenon. The two scholars refer to these types of actions as direct social actions (DSAs), having in mind actions that do not primarily focus upon claiming something from the state or other power holders but that instead focus upon directly transforming some specific aspects of society by means of the very action itself. DSAs can therefore be considered a significant part of the repertoire of contention (although less visible than protest actions) in contemporary society. Furthermore, we can affirm that choosing markets as a space for political struggle implies "weakening the focus on the state as an addressee for political claims, and shifting the movement's energies towards a bid to change society directly" (Bosi and Zamponi 2015: 382). In this perspective, resilience is not pure persistence or adaptation (see Keck and Sankdapolrak 2013), but it is also resistance to de-politicization and actual transformation of society from the very inside.

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