EUROPEAN CIVIC ACADEMY

2022

Discussion paper:

Social Movements' and Civil Society's Outcomes and Recent Success Cases

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Assessing the outcomes of civil society and social movements' mobilisations is not easy: not only several actors contribute to define such outcomes, but even these mobilisations themselves are composed of several actors, endowed with various types of resources and using different strategies of protest, persuasion and impact. Outcomes can moreover be planned and unplanned as well as being more or less favourable to the movements themselves. In this sense, a success is the positive 'outcome of a resolved challenge' (Gamson 1990) at procedural or substantive levels. Research on movements' outcomes has indeed considered dimensions both internal and external to these mobilisations. Internally, each mobilisation tends to change the material and symbolic resources available for specific movements and civil society at large. As for external impacts, these actors of social change can achieve acceptance and be recognized as legitimate counterparts from their opponents, i.e., procedural impacts, and/or they might obtain advantages and concessions according to their claims, i.e., substantial impacts (Kitschelt 1986). They might produce structural impacts by affecting the political institutions, and sensitizing impacts, by influencing

the political debate (Kriesi 2004). Also, culture, identity and subjectivity are influenced by waves of mobilisation as they contribute to socialize new generations of citizens (Giugni et al. 1999; della Porta 2018).

Indeed, the identification of a "strategy for success" is an arduous task for both activists and scholars as campaigns are characterized by multiple actors and forms of action: from marches to crowdsourced constitutional processes, such as in the Icelandic anti-austerity protests, to advocacy towards the institutions and political forces. The attribution of credit for obtaining substantive successes faces a series of obstacles, given the existence of such close relationships between a set of variables that it becomes impossible to identify cause and effect, for instance, socioeconomic, cultural, and political instances of globalization are the product of at the same time reactions to previous movements and adaptation to movement pressures, settling new resources and constraints for protest.

Most importantly, actors of social change are never alone in intervening in an issue. Rather, they do so in alliance with political

parties and, not infrequently, with public agencies—as the Icelandic examples illustrate, up to the president of the republic. Thus, "the outcome of bargaining is not the result of the characteristics of either party, but rather is the function of their resources relative to each other, their relationships with third parties, and other factors in the environment" (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995: 280). If the results obtained by civil society and social movements' mobilisations (or their failure to obtain them) have often been explained by environmental conditions, particularly the openness of political opportunities and the availability of allies, it is difficult nonetheless to identify which of the many actors involved in a given policy area are responsible for one reaction or another, establishing whether a given policy would have been enacted through other institutional actors anyway. Whether the results of mobilisations should be judged in the short or in the long term represents a further problem. Social movements and civil society frequently obtain successes in the early phases of mobilisation, but these triggers opposing interests and, sometimes, a backlash in public opinion. Thus, while it is true that there is a broad consensus on many of the issues raised by social movements and civil society organisations (peace, the defence of nature, improvements in the education system, equality), a mobilisation can nevertheless result in the polarisation of public opinion. This normally produces a growth in support for the cause but very often also a growth in opposition. Furthermore, mobilisation' success on specific demands frequently leads to the creation of countermobilisations: the development of neoliberalism as an ideology of the capitalist class has been explained as a reaction to the labour movement victories in terms of social rights (Sklair 1995). While the capacity of social movements to realise their general aims has been considered low, they have been seen as more effective in importing new issues into public debate. Particularly when one is comparing different mobilisa-

tions or countries, the problems outlined above hinder an evaluation of the relative effectiveness of particular strategies. Factors particular to social movements and civic organisations such as their distance from the levers of power, heterogeneous definition of their objectives, and organizational instability further complicate matters.

Changes in Public Policy

A main area for assessing the effects produced by social and civic mobilisations is that of actual policy. Generally, social movements are formed to express dissatisfaction with existing policies in a given area. Environmentalist groups have demanded intervention to protect the environment; pacifists have opposed the culture of war; students have criticised selection and authoritarianism in education; the feminist movement and organisations have fought discrimination against women; the world social forums criticised neoliberal globalisation; protests during the financial crisis targeted austerity measures; civil organisations call for the protection of rights for all and stand against backsliding democracy. Although it is usual to make a distinction between social and civic actors working on the political and cultural/social level – the first following a more instrumental logic, the second a more symbolic one -- all of them tend to make demands on the political system.

First of all, some specific claims acquire high symbolic relevance, becoming non-negotiable, as the basis for a movement's identity. For example, in many countries, the feminist movement has been constructed around the non-negotiable right of women to "choose" concerning childbirth; the halting of the installation of NATO nuclear missiles fulfilled a similar role for the peace movement. In the first case, the mobilisation was proactive, seeking to gain something new, the right to free abortion; in the second, it was reactive, seeking to block a decision (to install cruise

missiles) which had already been taken. One of the founding organisations of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, ATTAC, emerged around the demands of a tax on transnational transactions; also present in Porto Alegre, the debt relief campaign asked for the foreign debt of poor countries to be totally written off. The constitutional process in Iceland had the highly symbolic meaning of refounding the country. In all cases, considerable changes in public policy were being demanded. Characteristic of these non-negotiable objectives is their role in the social movements' definitions of themselves and of the external world (Pizzorno 1978). Demands whose symbolic value is very high, such as the Equal Rights Amendment in the case of the American feminist movement, remain central to a movement even when their potential effectiveness is questioned (Mansbridge 1986).

While non-negotiable demands are particularly important in the construction of collective identities, actors of social change rarely limit themselves to just these. In the case of the global justice movement, the general aim of "building another possible world" has been articulated in specific requests, from the opposition to privatisation of public services and public good (i.e., the campaign for free access to water) to the rights of national governments to organise the low-cost production of medicines in emergency cases; from the opposition to specific projects of dam construction to a democratic reform of the United Nations. Cooperating in global protest campaigns, ecological associations stressed the environmental unsustainability of neoliberal capitalism, trade unions the negative consequences of free trade on labour rights and levels of employment, feminist groups the suffering of women under cuts to the welfare state. Anti-austerity protests put forward claims on housing but also pensions and public services. Social movements and civil society organisations "struggle within and with welfare systems, variously rising to challenge existing arrangements, contributing to chang¬ing them, defending

existing provisions against attack, or seeking to implant their own direct means of solving welfare problems. But they do so discontinuously" (Barker and Levalette 2015: 715). From the global South to Europe, privatisation, liberalisation and deregulation have been resisted by social movements, civil society organisations and unions, especially of the public services.

Considering public policies, the changes brought about by social and civic mobilisations may be evaluated by looking at the various phases of the decision-making process (Kolb 2007): the emergence of new issues; the writing and applying of new legislation; the effects of public policies in alleviating the condition of those mobilised by collective action.

Social Movements and Procedural Changes

Actors of social change do not limit their interventions to single policies. They frequently influence the way in which the political system as a whole functions: its institutional and formal procedures, elite recruitment, the informal configuration of power (Kitschelt 1986; Rucht 1992). They demand, and often obtain, decentralisation of political power, consultation of interested citizens on particular decisions or appeals procedures against decisions of the public administration. They interact with the public administration, presenting themselves as institutions of "democracy from below" (Roth 1994): they ask to be allowed to testify before representative institutions and the judiciary, to be listened to as counter-experts, and to receive legal recognition and material incentives.

Protest, only a small part of overall social movement and civil society's activity, is undoubtedly considered important, but also ineffectual unless accompanied by other forms of political pressure and democratic

control. Although contacts with government ministries and the public bureaucracy may not be seen on their own as particularly effective in influencing policy, they are considered useful for information-gathering and for countering the influence of pressure groups—so, e.g., the environmental movement has been able to counter anti-environmentalists by building alliances within the European Commission bureaucracy (Ruzza 2004). As we shall see in what follows, social movements and civil society organisations increase the possibilities of access to the political system, both through ad hoc channels relating to certain issues and through institutions that are open to all noninstitutional actors.

Already the labour movement had pressured the nation-state towards increasing citizenship rights, at civil, political and social levels. In the late twentieth century, social movements have been able to introduce changes towards greater grassroots control over public institutions. In many European countries, administrative decentralisation has taken place since the 1970s, with the creation of new channels of access to decision-makers. Various forms of participation in decision-making have been tried within social movements and civil society organisations. If the rise of mass political parties has been defined as a "contagion from the left" and the democracy of the mass media as a "contagion from the right," the new social movements and civil society organisations have been acclaimed as a "contagion from below" (Rohrschneider 1993a). They have brought about a pluralisation of the ways in which political decisions are taken, pushed by cyclical dissatisfaction with centralised and bureaucratic representative democracy. In this sense, social movements and civil society organisations have produced a change in political culture, in the set of norms and reference schemes which define the issues and means of action that are politically legitimate. Repertoires of collective action, which were once condemned and dealt with simply as public order problems, have slowly

become acceptable (della Porta 1998b).

In many countries, direct democracy has been developed as a supplementary channel of access to those opened within representative democracy. On issues such as divorce, abortion, or gender discrimination, for example, the women's movement was in many cases able to appeal directly to the people using either popularly initiated legislation or referenda for the abrogation of existing laws or the implementation of transnational treaties. As in the Icelandic case, during the Great Recession, referenda have become an increasingly important instrument of direct expression for ordinary citizens, particularly on issues that are not directly related to the social cleavages around which political parties have formed. Referendum campaigns present social movements with an opportunity to publicise the issues that concern them, as well as the hope of being able to bypass the obstacle represented by governments hostile to their demands (della Porta, O'Connor, Portos and Subirats 2017).

Social movements and civil society organisations also contribute to the creation of new arenas for the development of public policy. Expert commissions are frequently formed on issues raised by protest, and activists may be allowed to participate, possibly as observers.

After Seattle, commissions of independent experts have been set to investigate the social effects of globalisation (such as a Parliamentary Commission in Germany) as well as the police behaviour during transnational protest events (see the Seattle City Council Commission on the Seattle events). In Greece, the Truth Committee on Public Debt was established on April 4, 2015, by a decision of the President of the Hellenic Parliament to investigate a debt which was considered odious and illegitimate. Common to them all is the recognition that the problems they address are in some way extraordinary and require extraordinary solutions. Although such expert commissions usually

have a limited mandate and consultative power only, they enter a dialogue with public opinion through press contact and the publication of reports.

Besides commissions of enquiry, other channels of access are opened by the creation of consultative institutions on issues related to social movements and civil society's demands. State ministries, local government bureaus, and other similar bodies now exist on women's or ecological issues in many countries, but also in international organisations. Such institutions, which are frequently set up on a permanent basis, have their own budgets and power to implement policies. Some regulatory administrative bodies have been established under the pressure of social and civic mobilisations and see activists as potential allies (Amenta 1998). New opportunities for a "conflictual cooperation" develop within regulatory agencies that are set to implement goals that are also supported by movement activists (Giugni and Passy 1998: 85). The public administrators working in these institutions mediate particular social movement demands through both formal and informal channels and frequently ally themselves with movement representatives in order to increase the amount of public resources available in the policy areas over which they have authority. They tend to have frequent contacts with representatives of the social movements and civil society organisations involved in their areas, the organizations taking on a consultancy role in many instances, and they sometimes develop common interests. Collaboration can take various forms: from consultation to incorporation in committees, to delegation of power (Giugni and Passy 1998: 86; Diani 2015: ch. 8).

Progressive social movements as sites for innovation

While social movements have been studied especially as contentious actors, mainly tak-

ing the streets to resist or promote political changes, some research has pointed toward their innovative capacity in terms of nurturing and spreading new ideas, among others about democratic institutions. Traditionally considered as actors 'at the gate' of the institutional system, social movements instead enter institutional arenas in various forms and through various channels.

Social movements and civil society organisations have been considered as important actors in terms of their capacity to 'take the floor,' building public spheres and participating in them. Clearly not all social movements and civil society organisations promoted democracy: some (particularly right-wing movements) have openly declared themselves anti-democratic; others (including left-wing movements) have produced authoritarian turns. There is, however, as Charles Tilly (2004, 125) has pointed out, "a wide correspondence between democratisation and social movements. The roots of social movements are found in the partial democratisation that moved British subjects and the North American colonies against those that governed them in the 18th century. Throughout the nineteenth century, social movements generally blossomed and developed wherever further democratisation took place, decreasing when authoritarian regimes impeded democracy. This path continued during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; the maps of the development of institutions and social movements widely overlap". If democratisation favoured social movements and civil society organisations, the majority of these supported the democratic reforms that promoted their development.

In research within the new social movement perspective, which paid attention to macro-level social transformations, social movements have been considered as main actors of innovation. Opening the scientific debate on the emergence of new conflicts, Alain Touraine (1985) has considered social movements as constituting the opposition

to dominant powers within different societies. In contemporary ones, social movements struggle for control of emerging programmed societies, in which knowledge is especially relevant. Within a resonant approach, Alberto Melucci (1982, 1989, 1996) has paid particular attention to movements as producers of norms in contemporary societies defined as highly differentiated and increasingly investing in the creation of individual autonomous centres of action, but also extending control over the motives for human action. In this perspective, rather than limiting themselves to seeking material gain, new social movements promote 'other codes' in order to resist the intrusion of the state and of the market into the everyday life of citizens. Conflicts have therefore been seen as oriented toward the control of meanings, the circulation of information, the production and the use of scientific knowledge, and the creation of cultural models for individual and collective identities. Traditionally associated with disruptive forms of political participation, in the Habermasian account of social life movements assume a positive role in mobilising to resist the invasion of the logics of the system (Habermas et al. 1985).

More recent social science literature has considered social movements as 'learning sites' (Welton 1993), capable of building knowledge through discursive processes which consist of the "talks and conversations – the speech acts – and written communications of movement members that occur in the context of, or in relation to, movement activities" (Benford and Snow 2000, 623). Addressing the importance of movements as producers of knowledge, Eyerman and Jamison (1991, 68-69) singled out three dimensions of their cognitive praxis: a cosmological dimension addressing the "common worldview assumptions that give a social movement its utopian mission"; a technological dimension which addresses "the specific technological issues that particular movements develop around"; an organisational dimension as "a particular organisational paradigm, which

means they have both ideals and modes of organising the production and… dissemination of knowledge."

Research on knowledge-practices within social movements and civil society organisations singled out a broad range moving "from things we are more classically trained to define as knowledge, such as practices that engage and run parallel to the knowledge of scientists or policy experts, to micro-political and cultural interventions that have more to do with 'know-how' or the 'cognitive praxis that informs all social activity' and which vie with the most basic social institutions that teach us how to be in the world" (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell 2008, 21). In fact, social movements are: "1) engaging in co-producing, challenging, and transforming expert scientific discourses; 2) creating critical subjects whose embodied discourse produces new notions of democracy; and 3) generating reflexive conjunctural theories and analyses that go against more dogmatic and orthodox approaches to social change, and as such contribute to ethical ways of knowing" (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell 2008, 22). Practices of knowledge are both formal and informal, as the activist knowledge is formed through different types of knowledge practices, including concepts, theories and imaginaries, as well as methodological devices and research tools. Moreover, they "entail practices less obviously associated with knowledge, including the generation of subjectivities/identities, discourses, common-sense, and projects of autonomy and livelihood" (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell 2008, 28).

Some recent cases of social movement success

Constitutional politics: Chile, Iceland

Social movements and civil society organisations' capacity to influence and shape constitutional reform includes both policy and procedural elements: citizens involved in

grassroots collective action are able to have an impact on both the content on national constitutions and the form of the process through which it is changed. The case of the so-called "Icelandic revolution" of 2009-2011, followed by the Constitutional Assembly, shows clear continuities between mass grassroots action and the goal of constitutional reform, although with ebbs and flows in the relationship with representative government. In the same vein, the "social explosion" that characterised Chile in 2019 had among its main outcomes the national referendum that sparked the Constitutional Convention, and both the composition of the Convention and the text it proposed strongly reflected the movement, or at least some sections of it. The recent defeat of the constitutional referendum calls for a further reflection on the relationship between movements' action and constitutional politics.

Referendums: Italy, Ireland

Instruments of direct democracy such as referendum once again provide a chance to intertwine policy and procedural influence by movements. In a context in which representative governments in Western democracies are increasingly less responsive to civil society demands (Mair 2013), referenda provide an effective channel through movements and civil society organisations aim to directly affect policy and legislation without the mediation of party organisations or representative institutions. The case of the Italian referendum on the re-nationalisation of water companies in 2011 is paradigmatic: grassroots mobilisation was able to reverse not only a piece of legislation approved by a vast parliamentary majority, but also a consensus about privatisations that included most of the party system. 11 years later, a reflection on the challenges of implementing the policy success and providing continuity to the anti-privatisation movement is needed. The Irish referendum on abortion of 2018 provides another interesting case, with a massive victory (66.40% of voters expressed a "Yes" vote) notwithstanding the lack of sup-

port among the main governmental and party actors, in a context in which abortion had long been considered a taboo.

Electoral politics at the national level: Spain, France, Colombia, Chile

Post-2008 politics has been characterised in several polities by the emergence of progressive movement parties, i.e., parties that draw inspiration and strength from social movements and civil society. The rise of movement parties challenges simplistic expectations of a growing separation between institutional and contentious politics and the decline of the left. Their comeback demands attention as a way of understanding both contemporary socio-political dynamics and the fundamentals of political parties and representation. In particular, four cases can be pointed out as particularly significant on this regard. In Spain, the emergence of Podemos, and then of Unidas Podemos, as one of the central political actors in the country, can easily be traced back to the 15-M movement that filled streets and squares in 2011 and to the "tides" that followed. Although Podemos is not an institutionalisation of the movement itself, it has drawn, especially in its earlier phases, both contents and frames from the movement, as well as some of its central figures. Similarly, although there is no systematic continuity between such movements as Nuit Debout or the Gilets Jaunes and the formation and partial electoral success of La France Insoumise and the Nouvelle Union Populaire Écologique et Sociale (NUPES), the convergence between different political forces would not have been possible without the convergence of social struggles. In Colombia, former guerrilla-member and mayor of Bogotà Gustavo Petro was elected president in 2022 on a left-wing platform that drew significantly on grassroots movements' discourse and mobilisation. Finally, in Chile, former student activist Gustavo Boric was elected president in 2021 in the culmination of a process that went through the Pingüino movement of 2006, the student protests of 2011 and the "social explosion"

of 2019. Each of these stories is different from the others, but they all represent cases of movement influence on national politics on the progressive side.

Electoral politics at the local level: Barcelona, Zagreb

Even more than national politics, city governments have represented in recent years fruitful contexts for the emergence of new progressive experiences that significantly draw on grassroots mobilisation. In particular, in Barcelona, former housing activist and leader of the PAH Ada Colau was twice elected as mayor (in 2015 and 2019) leading the citizen platform Barcelona en Comú. In Zagreb, in 2021, former environmental activist Tomislav Tomašević was elected as mayor leading the citizen platform Možemo. In both cases, although of course in different contexts, grassroots mobilisation was fundamental in shaping the electoral outcome: not only both mayors' political biographies are strongly rooted in movement milieus, but also movement discourse, frames, forms of organising and personnel were central in the processes. In these cases, we can observe both policy outcomes', though mediated by electoral actors, and the movements' capacity to innovate politics and favour the emergence of new political actors in the field of representation.

Public campaigns: Italy, USA, global level

Finally, a wide series of movement campaigns were able, in the last few years, to significantly influence the public discourse and the widespread perception of certain issues, contributing to setting the political agenda. In the field of climate, the way of climate strikes that has developed throughout the world since 2018, particularly among young people, under the Fridays For Future (FFF) label, has transformed the landscape of environmental campaigning, bringing new and diverse actors to the fore (Fisher 2019) and helping transform the framing of climate change into one of climate emergency (Almeida 2019) while envisioning alternative, post-carbon ways of life. Similarly, the Black Lives Matters movement, first emerged in 2013 in the US as a series of protests against police brutality on African Americans, has spread since 2020 in several European countries, reshaping the way race issues are represented and discussed in the public discourse, especially among young people. In the field of labour, Italy has seen the struggle conducted by the workers of the GKN factory in Florence since 2021: although the story is still developing, the impact of this struggle in terms of public identification and self-recognition of tens of thousands of workers and employees around the country cannot be denied. In the US, the "Fight for 15" campaign to raise the minimum wage, launched in 2012, has already impacted two presidential campaigns and, in general, contributed to the re-emergence of a certain labour-centred and union-centred discourse in American politics. ▲

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