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Social Movements as Democratic Actors

Introduction

Democracy is evolving and its dynamic configuration makes it difficult to pin down what is complementary, and, by contrast, what is central to it. Actually, much of the recent efforts of social movements can be interpreted as attempts to show that the most vital part of democratic life lies beyond minimalist conceptualization of democracy focusing on electoral accountability and comes from outside the realm of representative institutions. Indeed, activists denounce the political system as basically subservient to the values and interests of the neo-liberal economic system, unrepresentative of people and worth their trust. This chapter does not intend to engage in an assessment of these claims, nor do we suggest that representative institutions are losing their prominence in contemporary political systems. More simply, we believe that movements' critiques concur with broader trends in pointing to the erosion of the democratic credentials of the representative system. Like many other scholars, we think democracy needs renewal to fulfill its commitment to freedom and equality in the context of contemporary societies. Virtues of deliberation, such as deliberative listening, can surely help in this direction, though we see them as part of a wider set of behaviors that are needed in democracy. With this objective in mind, we illustrate some movement ideas and practices that could strengthen the democratic qualities of our democratic institutions and political life. ~~All these elements are emerging as more and more urgent to address in times of crisis; some of them~~ are already playing a role in democratic life, even entering institutions. We deem it important to strengthen these developments as democracy in its minimalist form is ~~not a workable solution to embed ideals in practice, as some would have it, but is~~ rather a specific and problematic way to intend democracy, especially at times of rising authoritarian tides and recurrent crises. The notion of complementarity might thus not be sufficient to capture the central role of social movements in democracy.

In what follows, we will ~~however~~ also specify that, even though in the context of a decline in the perceived legitimacy of representative institutions social movements are highly active, this, however, does not automatically translate into a greater democratic legitimacy for the system overall. As movements denounce and expose the limits of representative systems, their mobilizations at the same time reflect and can exacerbate the legitimacy crisis. Additionally, their ability to

effectively democratize political systems depends on a variety of factors, one of them being representative institutions' resistance to democratization. In this chapter, focusing on cases in which efforts to affirm democratic practices and ideas are consequential, we aim at learning from and about the challenges that movements meet and the contribution they make when acting in this direction.

In this endeavor, our chapter also provides insights on the notion of deliberative listening. Conceived of as the ability to listen without prejudice, deliberative listening captures part of what movements do as they strive to bring about change mostly by taking action.¹ This might fall squarely beyond the remit of deliberative listening or deliberation when, for instance, they are inspired by agonistic ideals, when they are uninterested or unable to engage in deliberation,² or when they oppose democracy altogether.³ When it comes to the more communicative side of their action, however, social movements might, and often do, promote deliberative listening within movement arenas or even deliberative and participatory spaces in societies at large. On other occasions they might, instead, try to affirm the views, beliefs, and interests they have come to develop, usually against those of more powerful actors.

Our discussion here draws from work we have been developing to understand the role that social movements can play to renew democracy in a deliberative and participatory sense.⁴ We set our analysis in the context of the political and socio-economic transformations triggered by the Great Recession⁵ that hit the world in 2008 and related political developments that have challenged social, political, and civil rights. This development, that Geiselberger has labeled the Great Regression,⁶ has been characterized by the spiraling of social inequalities, declining trust in democratic institutions, rising insecurity, and xenophobic reactions.⁶ The debate is on as to how many blows democracy can take without

1 Kim, Seongcheol (2020) 'Radical democracy and Left populism after the squares: "Social Movement" (Ukraine), Podemos (Spain), and the question of organization.' *Contemporary Political Theory* 19(2): 211–232: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-019-00343-x>.

2 Felicetti, A. (2016) *Deliberative Democracy and Social Movements: Transition Initiatives in the Public Sphere*. New York and London: Rowman & Littlefield International.

3 Castelli Gattinara, Pietro and Pirro, Andrea L. P. (2019) 'The Far Right as social movement.' *European Societies* 21(4): 447–462.

4 Della Porta, D. (2013) *Can Democracy be Saved? Participation, Deliberation and Social Movements*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

5 Geiselberger, H. (ed.) (2017) *The Great Regression*. Cambridge: Polity.

6 Streeck, W. (2017) 'The return of the repressed as the beginning of the end of neoliberal capitalism.' In H. Geiselberger (ed.) *The Great Regression*. Cambridge: Polity, pp. 157–172. See also

breaking down.⁷ Yet, mobilizations for ‘real democracy’ and social justice and, more generally, forms of resistance to the democratic backlash are multiplying.⁸

Democratic theory and social movement studies’ research on contemporary democratic life suggest that movements’ characterization as contentious actors, struggling in the streets for or against change, is reductive. Social movements have in fact the ability to generate new ideas, as they engage in creating and spreading counter-expertise, new knowledge, and innovative practices. Moreover, through different channels their ideas enter institutions and, depending on various conditions favoring (or hindering) their abilities to do so, they innovate democracy.

Progressive social movements, in particular, envisage innovative forms of democratic life that highlight participatory and deliberative elements, which are widely deemed important to renew democracy. This can be observed in different respects. First, by taking advantage of windows of opportunity offered by extant direct democracy institutions, activists have promoted referendums or turned referendums promoted by political elites in a top-down fashion into forms of direct democracy ‘from below’.⁹ Second, movement parties on the left have emerged (sometimes in reaction to right-wing populist ones), transforming party systems that were deeply shaken, given growing electoral volatility and the decay of mainstream parties.¹⁰ At the same time, candidates appealing to citizens’ participation and social justice have met with unexpected support in old-left parties such as, for instance, Labour in Britain and the US Democratic Party. Third, on several occasions from Iceland to Chile, social movements have engaged in ‘crowdsourced constitutionalism,’ in attempts to deeply transform the very basis of the social pact on which institutions are built.¹¹

Bauman, Z. (2017) ‘Symptoms in search of an object and a name.’ In H. Geiselberger (ed.) *The Great Regression*. Cambridge: Polity, pp. 13–26.

7 Della Porta, D. and Keating, M. (eds.) (2008) *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

8 Meyer, D. and Tarrow, S. (eds.) (2018) *The Resistance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

9 Della Porta, D., O’Connor, F., Portos, M., and Subirats, A. (2017) *Referendums from Below*. Bristol: Policy Press/Chicago University Press.

10 Della Porta, D., Fernandez, J., Kouki, H., and Mosca, L. (2017) *Movement Parties in Times of Austerity*. Cambridge: Polity.

11 Della Porta, D. (2020) *How Social Movements Can Save Democracy: Democratic Innovations from Below*. John Wiley & Sons.

Movements between Representative Institutions and Alternative Conceptions of Democracy

In the recent past, waves of protest, known as Indignados or Occupy movements, have been organized against austerity measures adopted in response to the financial crisis. These mobilizations reflected and exacerbated a legitimacy crisis and, at the same time, offered possible solutions to redress this situation. The austerity measures, activists claimed, displayed the political institutions' disinterest in the suffering of citizens.¹²

These elements compel us to reflect on what democratic qualities we deem important to democratic systems. As is well known, democracy is an essentially contested concept whose different qualities and practices are understood differently in various conceptions of democracy. As Robert Dahl noted, democracy "has meant different things to different people at different times and places."¹³ Over time, the view that has gained centrality is one that sees democracy as accountability through competitive and fair elections and with the political settings of Western polities.¹⁴

The crisis of democracy, however, has questioned this minimalistic understanding of democracy. A need has emerged to give attention to democratic qualities that include but cannot be limited to electoral accountability.¹⁵ As mainstream democratic conceptions and practices have been targets of contestation, others have gained ground. These include forms of participatory, deliberative, and welfare democracy.¹⁶ Two main features at the basis of representative democracy have seemed most in tension with qualities characteristic of other understandings of democracy. They are, delegation of power and majoritarian decision-making (even in its mitigated forms including degrees of protection of minorities). That movements for democracy find these aspects problematic is not surprising. As Bernard Manin famously argued, representative government embodied a normative commitment to mitigate democratic forms of participation with oligarchic ones.¹⁷

¹² Della Porta, D. (2015) *Social Movements in Times of Austerity: Bringing Capitalism back into Protest Analysis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

¹³ Dahl, R. A. (2000) *On Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 3.

¹⁴ Held, D. (2006) *Models of Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 166.

¹⁵ Rosanvallon, P. (2006) *La contre-démocratie: la politique à l'âge de la défiance*. Paris: Seuil.

¹⁶ Della Porta, *Can Democracy be Saved?*, ch. one.

¹⁷ Manin, B. (1997) *The Principles of Representative Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

By placing emphasis on elections, there is a risk of obfuscating the fact that electoral accountability, to be effective, requires critical citizens who hold representatives accountable. As Alessandro Pizzorno argued:

When the electoral institution is chosen as the institution characterizing democratic regimes the much more important presence of a sphere that is both public and distinct from the regimes is obscured. Deprived of this, deprived that is of open public discourse, and despite being governed by persons regularly elected, such a regime could only misleadingly be called democratic.¹⁸

Alternative views, participatory democracy in the first place, have long stressed the need for diverse opportunities for participation beyond elections.¹⁹ The latter is too rare, prone to manipulation, offering only a narrow set of choices. Participation, instead, helps foster good forms of citizenship and empowerment. It supports socialization of citizens to different visions of public goods and it also has potential to increase trust and support for institutions. Participatory democrats call for democracy beyond parliaments and governments, in societal organizations, from workplaces to neighborhoods, to public services.

Deliberative theorists, from their end, have highlighted the need for high-quality discursive spaces where citizens can exchange reasons and envisage shared understandings of the public good.²⁰ High-quality discursive processes are deemed key for legitimate and efficient decisions. Going beyond an aggregative understanding of legitimacy, what is central is the way in which preferences are formed, rather than counted. In deliberative spaces citizens treat each other as equals, seek to understand each other's views, and assess these views on the basis of emerging standards of fairness.

Some scholars at the crossroads between participatory and deliberative democracy have showed the important role that forms of democratic life beyond institutions play in democracy. Jane Mansbridge has discussed enclaves free from institutional power and usually populated by activists.²¹ Similarly, Iris Mar-

18 Pizzorno, A. (2010) 'Introduzione.' In A. Pizzorno (ed.) *La democrazia di fronte allo stato democratico*. Milan: Feltrinelli, pp. xi–xxvii, at p. xiii.

19 See: Arnstein, S. R. (1969) 'A ladder of citizen participation.' *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35(4): 216–224; Barber, B. R. (1984) *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press; and Pateman, C. (1970) *Participation and Democratic Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

20 Dryzek, J. S. (2000) *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

21 Mansbridge, J. (1996) 'Using power/fighting power: the polity'. In S. Benhabib (ed.) *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 46–66.

ion Young has highlighted the need for developing “processes of engaged and responsible democratic participation [which] include street demonstrations and sit-ins, musical works and cartoons, as much as parliamentary speeches and letters to the editor.”²² In particular, Fraser famously highlighted the importance of subaltern counter-publics (including workers, women, ethnic minorities, etc.) that form discursive arenas, parallel to the main one, where counter-discourses can be developed and identities, interests, and needs built and redefined.²³ Unlike minimalist conceptions of democracy that take identities, ideas, interests, and preferences to develop outside of the democratic process, participatory and deliberative understandings highlight the role democratic spaces ought to have in this regard.

Existing democracies, as they have evolved over time, have mitigated the overwhelming reliance on representative democratic ideas and practices and added elements linked to other democratic conceptions.²⁴ The recognition of the limits of delegation and majoritarianism has made room for participatory practices in schools, firms, and neighborhoods, and through the political recognition of social movement organizations. Further, referendums, once considered a vestige of direct democracy, are increasingly used, as are institutions in which the principle of delegation is rethought, as happens in institutions based on lottery and consensual decision-making. Finally, democratic innovations – from participatory budgeting to citizen assemblies – are spreading in an attempt to restore the connection between citizens and democracy.²⁵ It is against this background that social movements play their role of promoters of innovation and change in democracy.

Progressive Social Movements as Drivers of Change and Innovation

A quick look at the broad historical dynamics of social movement mobilization suggests that, contrary to the hypothesis of this book, social movement activism does not rise when legitimacy of representative government shrinks. Rather, ad-

²² Young, I. M. (2003) ‘Activist challenges to deliberative democracy’. In J. S. Fishkin and P. Laslett (eds.) *Debating Deliberative Democracy*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 102–201, at p. 119.

²³ Fraser, N. (1990) ‘Rethinking the public sphere.’ *Social Text* 25/26: 56–80.

²⁴ Della Porta, *Can Democracy be Saved?*

²⁵ Font, J., della Porta, D., and Sintomer, Y. (eds.) (2014) *Participatory Democracy in Southern Europe*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.

vances in democratization of institutions favored, and in turn were supported by, social movements. As Charles Tilly has argued:

A wide correspondence between democratization and social movements. The roots of social movements are found in the partial democratization that moved British subjects and the North-American colonies against those that governed them in the eighteenth century. Throughout the nineteenth century, social movements generally blossomed and developed wherever further democratization 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.²⁶

Also, the bulk of democratization, in which movements had a central role, as was the case with labor and women's movements of the past, was about struggle and contestation. Some research has suggested that participatory, mostly, and deliberative elements had a role in the civil rights movements, as well as other 'new' social movements later on.²⁷

Departing from a view of social movements as contentious actors, mainly taking to the streets to oppose or spur political change, research pointed at their capacity to forge new ideas, about democratic institutions, among other things. Furthermore, it indicated that social movements do not only stay 'at the gate' of the institutional system, but enter institutional arenas in different forms and follow various channels. Social movements have indeed the capacity to 'take the floor,' creating public spheres and participation.

Of course, not all movements have promoted democracy: some (particularly right-wing ones) are often openly anti-democratic; others (including left-wing ones) have triggered authoritarian turns. Here we focus on progressive social movements. Progressive movements have struggled for an inclusive and just society and for democratic deepening.²⁸ Following Claus Offe, we consider progressive views as characterized by:

the liberation (or 'emancipation') of collectivities (for example: citizens, classes, nations, minorities, income categories, even mankind), be it the liberation from want, ignorance, exploitative relations, or the freedom of such collectives to govern themselves autonomously, that is, without being dependent upon or controlled by others). Furthermore, the free-

²⁶ Tilly, C. (2004) *Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650–2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 125.

²⁷ See della Porta, D. (ed.) (2009) *Democracy in Social Movements*. Houndsmill: Palgrave; and Polletta, Francesca (2002) *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

²⁸ Allen, A. (2016) *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.

dom that results from liberation applies equally to all, with equality serving as a criterion to make sure that liberation does not in fact become a mere privilege of particular social categories.²⁹

Such movements have certainly been pivotal in pushing for some democratic innovation. In the early days of social movement studies, research on collective behavior by scholars close to the so-called Chicago School showed that collective phenomena do not simply reflect social crises. Rather, they produce new solidarities and norms which drive change, especially in value systems. Students of collective behavior developed these interpretations in looking at movements at times of intense social change.³⁰

Rooted in symbolic interactionism, these scholars gave prominence to the meanings actors attributed to social structures, and focused on how institutional behavior was transformed by new norms driving social action.³¹

Similarly, research on new social movements, which focused on macro-level transformations of society, saw movements as main actors of innovation. Alain Touraine, who inaugurated the debate on the emergence of new conflicts,³² considered social movements as representing the opposition to dominant powers in societies. In contemporary societies, social movements struggle for control of then-emerging programmed societies, in which knowledge plays a special role. Alberto Melucci paid particular attention to movements as norms producers within the context of societies defined by high differentiation, increasingly invested in the creation of individual and autonomous centers of action, but also extending their control over the motives for human action.³³ Thus, rather than focusing only on material gain, new social movements develop 'other codes' to resist state and market intrusion into the everyday lives of citizens. Traditionally associated with disruptive forms of participation, in the Habermasian

29 Offe, C. (2011) 'Rethinking progress and ensuring a secure future for all: what we can learn from the crisis.' *Trends in Social Cohesion* (no. 22): 79–92, at 79–80.

30 See e.g.: Blumer, H. (1951) 'Social movements.' In A. McClung Lee (ed.) *Principles of Sociology*. New York: Barnes & Noble, pp. 199–220; and Turner, Ralph, and Killian, Lewis (1987) [1974, 1957] *Collective Behavior*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

31 Della Porta, D. and Diani, M. (2020) *Social Movements: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.

32 Touraine, A. (1985) 'An introduction to the study of social movements.' *Social Research* 52: 749–788.

33 Melucci, A. (1982) *L'Invenzione del Presente: Movimenti, Identità, Bisogni Individuali*. Bologna: il Mulino; and Melucci, A. (1989) *Nomads of the Present*. London: Hutchinson Radius.

perspective, movements have a positive role in mobilizing against the invasion of the logics of the system.³⁴

More recently, social movements have been considered as ‘learning sites.’³⁵ They have been deemed capable of building knowledge through discursive processes consisting 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.”³⁶

Knowledge producers have identified three dimensions of cognitive praxis: a cosmological dimension concerning the “common worldview assumptions that give a social movement its utopian mission”; a technological dimension referring to “the specific technological issues that particular movements develop around”; and an organizational perspective as “a particular organizational paradigm, which means they have both ideals and modes of organizing the production and ... dissemination of knowledge.”³⁷

Research has found a broad range of knowledge practices of democracy within social movements. These span “from things we are more classically trained to define as knowledge, ... 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.”³⁸ Actually, 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.³⁹

34 Habermas, J. (1985) *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Boston: Beacon Press.

35 Welton, M. (1993) ‘Social revolutionary learning: the new social movements as learning sites.’ *Adult Education Quarterly* 43(3): 152–164.

36 Benford, R. D. and Snow, D. A. (2000) ‘Framing processes and social movements: an overview and assessment.’ *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 611–639, at 623.

37 Eyerman, R. and Jamison, A. (1991) *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 68–69.

38 Casas-Cortes, M. I., Osterweil, M., and Powell, D. E. (2008) ‘Blurring boundaries: recognizing knowledge-practices in the study of social movements.’ *Anthropological Quarterly* 81(1): 17–58, at 21.

39 Casas-Cortes, Osterweil, and Powell, ‘Blurring boundaries,’ p. 22.

Knowledge practices can be either formal or informal, and refer to concepts, theories and imaginaries, methodological aspects, or research tools.⁴⁰ As self-reflexive actors, progressive social movements acquire and develop knowledge as they move through their activities. Learning can occur during meetings, protest, organizing, and educational activities, as well as in self-reflection on their actions.⁴¹

Social movement knowledge is seen as situated instead of universal, committed rather than detached, aiming at radical systemic change instead of intervention in the symptoms of general malaise.⁴² It aims at providing useful skills; to develop a critical view of agency and power and to connect local and global levels.⁴³ Knowledge production is embodied⁴⁴ and oriented to articulate theory and praxis, starting from concrete realities.⁴⁵

Importantly, in social movements, knowledge emerges not only from abstract theorization but also from action. Movement theorizing is:

Grounded in the process of producing 'social movements' against opposition. It is always to some extent knowledge-in-struggle, and its survival and development is always contested and in process of formation. Its frequently partial, unsystematic and provisional character does not make it any the less worth our attention, though it may go some way towards explaining why academic social movements theory is too often content with taking the 'cream off the top,' and disregarding – or failing to notice – everything that has to happen before institutionalized social movement theorizing appears in forms that can be easily appropriated.⁴⁶

Furthermore, social movements continuously engage in democratic innovation. They experiment with new ideas internally, prefigure alternative forms of demo-

40 Casas-Cortes, Osterweil, and Powell, 'Blurring boundaries,' p. 28.

41 See: Mayo, P. and English, L. (2012) 'Adult education and social movements: perspectives from Freire and beyond.' *Educazione Democratica* 2(3): 170–208.

42 Lange, E., 2001. Mayo, Peter (1999) *Gramsci, Freire and Adult Education: Possibilities for Transformative Action*. London: Zed Books. *International Review of Education* 47(3): 395–403.

43 Crowther, J., Galloway, V., and Martin, I. (eds.) (2005) *Popular Education: Engaging the Academy: International Perspectives*. Leicester, NIACE; and Foley, G (ed.) (2004) *Dimensions of Adult Learning: Adult Education and Training in a Global Era*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

44 Casas-Cortes, Osterweil, and Powell, 'Blurring boundaries,' p. 43.

45 De Molina, M. M. (2004) 'Common notions, part 1: workers-inquiry, co-research, consciousness-raising,' trans. M. Casas-Cortés and S. Cobarrubias: <http://eicpc.net/transversal/0406/malo/en>.

46 Barker, C. and Cox, L. (2002) 'What have the Romans ever done for us? Academic and activist forms of movement theorizing.' In C. Barker and M. Tyldesley (eds.) *Alternative Futures and Popular Protest VIII: Conference Proceedings*. Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, pp. 1–27, at p. 11.

cratic life, and spread ideas within institutions. Besides policy change, they also address meta-political issues and experiment with participatory and deliberative ideas. In doing this, they have developed innovative ideas and alternative knowledge.

Since the 1970s the 'new social movements' have in fact sought new forms of participation in decision-making, spreading a sort of 'contagion from below.'⁴⁷ This change was spurred by dissatisfaction towards centralized and bureaucratic features of representative democracy. In the early 2000s, building upon reflexive practices and the building of deliberative spaces, the global justice movement paid specific attention to knowledge production. In the 2010s, protesters in Tahrir, Porta del Sol, Syntagma Square, or Zuccotti Park, and later in Gezi Park or Place de la République, criticized representative democracy as deeply corrupted but also experimented with other models of democracy featuring in particular participatory and deliberative qualities. As a main protest repertoire and an organizational form, the *acampadas* – long-term camps in squatted public spaces – have represented a democratic experiment adopted and adapted in a variety of contexts. Learning from past experiences, the *acampadas* were based on older practices of internal democracy, such as those of social forums.⁴⁸ In these activities, participation from below was combined with efforts to develop egalitarian and inclusive public spheres.⁴⁹

In addition, contemporary progressive movements consider transparency, equality, and inclusion as important values. In particular, open-air camps have meant to enhance the publicity and transparency of the process, as well as reclaiming public spaces. Open spaces being the main site of protest enabled activists to emphasize the inclusivity within processes ideally addressing the entire agora.

In effect, participants' heterogeneity is taken as a most positive aspect of the camps.⁵⁰ Within the camps, general assemblies strived to mobilize the common people, communities of citizens. The everyday management of camp activities was also run on the basis of alternative practices, including free kitchens, med-

⁴⁷ Rohrschneider, R. (1993) 'Impact of social movements on the European party system.' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 528(1): 157–170.

⁴⁸ Della Porta, D. (2015) *Social Movements in Times of Austerity: Bringing Capitalism back into Protest Analysis*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

⁴⁹ Della Porta, *Can Democracy be Saved?*

⁵⁰ Gerbaudo, P. (2012) *Tweet and the Street*. London: Pluto Press, p. 69.

ical tents, media centers, libraries, and information centers for new participants and visitors.⁵¹

Movements Impacting on Institutions

Some of the democratic ideas and practices mentioned above have been at the basis of institutional innovations seeking to foster participatory and deliberative ideas. Social movements perform their role as carriers of innovation in institutions in different ways and with a variety of results. Social movements do not only engage in claims-making on policy issues, but they also target the way political systems work: their procedures, recruitment, and the informal power configurations.⁵² Movements have often attained decentralization of power; opened up processes of consultation with citizens; appealed public administration decisions; allowed testimonies before representative and judicial institutions. Collective action repertoires, once stigmatized and addressed as public order matters, have progressively become legitimate,⁵³ while direct democracy has increasingly been acknowledged as an additional channel to access representative democracy.⁵⁴ Movements have also contributed to creating new arenas of public policy developments, including expert commissions or administrative and political branches, such as ministries or bureaus on women's and environmental issues.

Democratic innovations nowadays generally include participatory processes open to citizens. Particularly at the local scale, there has been the creation of high-quality communicative spaces to empower citizens. Graham Smith has distinguished two main frames: assembly democracy or forms oriented to the construction of a 'mini-public', usually selected by lot.⁵⁵ Social movements have been participating especially in the former, for instance in neighborhood or thematic assemblies, local councils, consultation committees, participatory budgeting, and the like. In particular, participatory budgeting has spread globally from Porto Alegre in Brazil, being recognized by the United Nations as

51 Graeber, D. (2013) *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement*. London: Allen Lane, p. 240.

52 Kitschelt, H. (1986) 'Political opportunity structures and political protest: anti-nuclear movements in four democracies.' *British Journal of Political Science* 16(1): 57–85.

53 Della Porta, D. and Reiter, H. (eds.) (1998) *The Policing of Protest*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

54 Della Porta et al., *Referendums from Below*.

55 Smith, G. (2009) *Democratic Innovations: Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also Chapter Nine of this volume by Gil Delannoi.

one of the ‘best practices’ globally.⁵⁶ Social equality and occasions for empowerment are sought by inviting citizens to decide distribution issues through a structured process of involvement in committees and assemblies.

Institutional outcomes of movements are visible in the ways in which participatory and deliberative conceptions and practices have been presented in constitutional processes, direct democracy, and party politics. Social movements’ experimenting with different forms of internal democracy and with institutions shows the porosity of the boundaries between institutional and non-institutional activities. They need to challenge existing institutions, in order to realize the social and political changes which are their aim. When intervening in institutional politics, social movements bring with them attention to policy change, but they also foster the development of participatory and deliberative decision-making processes. Under certain conditions, they might succeed in putting new topics on the agenda, influencing democratic transformations, and in spreading new democratic repertoires.

Crises can be triggers for change. As Altman noted,

elected representatives do not, by their own volition, give up their exclusive domain over the legislative agenda without a strong reason to do so. The adoption of citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy tends to occur in times of political instability: times when, for one reason or another, lawmakers believe that a new page in a nation’s history is being turned.⁵⁷

Social movements have the potential to intervene at different stages of a process of democratic innovation. As we argue elsewhere,

Social movements, together with other civil society actors, are at times co-producers of citizen-led democratic innovations. Unlike top-down democratic experiments, in which institutions and the interests they pursue are of primary importance, bottom-up ones, which give citizens the central stage, spring from protest and respond to the need for radical democratic reform.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Allegretti, G. (2003) *L’insegnamento di Porto Alegre: Autoprogettualità come paradigma urbano*. Firenze: Alinea, p. 173; and Greta Ríos in Chapter Three of this volume.

⁵⁷ Altman, D. (2019) *Citizenship and Contemporary Direct Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 22.

⁵⁸ Della Porta, D. and Felicetti, A. (2019) ‘Innovating democracy against democratic stress in Europe: social movements and democratic experiments.’ *Representation* 1–18, at 14.

Even when the results of bottom-up mechanisms of direct democracy fall short of promoters' expectations, there can be positive spillover effects on democracy, both on

the political game itself (by generating incentives for political consensus, moderating circumstantial majorities, and expanding the political playing field), and [on] the relationship between representative institutions and the citizenry (by augmenting policy congruence, women's empowerment, civic participation, satisfaction with democracy, and broadening the topics subject to popular consideration).⁵⁹

Crowdsourced constitutional processes, particularly in times of crisis, give social movements some capacity to exert constitutive powers. At times of democratic malaise, the direct participation of citizens in re-writing the constitution can restore collective identity. Challenging a vision of constitutional processes as a technical process, a participatory standpoint is oriented towards creating a founding moment. In fact, progressive social movements can trigger constitutional processes including citizens' participation in deliberative spaces to build funding normative agreements.

In Iceland and in Ireland, the initiatives of citizens have led to experiments in constitution-making through citizens' assemblies endowed with instruments to interact with the outside. These constitutional spaces were characterized by civility, inclusivity, mutual respect, publicity, and plurality of information. Movements acquired constituent power when claiming constitutional protection for public goods against privatization, and for recognition of the value of citizen participation in democratic life.⁶⁰ In doing so, movements have also created public spheres that, following Habermas, can be considered as public in a threefold way.⁶¹ First, by being open to the public. Second, by acting in public. Third, by being devoted to the discussion of public issues against the retrenchment of the public itself consequent to the privatization trend that dominates within liberal constitutionalism.

Referendums and other direct forms of democracy have also been increasingly used as a reaction to the growing mistrust in representative institutions. The uses of referendums have varied greatly, and so has their democratic quality. Still, social movements have at times stressed the advantages in terms of legitimacy and efficiency of handing the right to decide directly to citizens. In Scot-

⁵⁹ Altman, *Citizenship and Contemporary Direct Democracy*, p. 23.

⁶⁰ Bailey, S. and Mattei, U. (2013) 'Social movements as constituent power: the Italian struggle for the commons.' *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 20(2): 965–1013.

⁶¹ Habermas, J. (1989) [1962] *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: Polity.

land and Italy, or even in Catalonia, this has happened with respect to highly contested issues such as public services conceptions or national independence. Movements' participation in campaigns of the referendum process substantially increased the number of people involved and boosted the plurality of the arguments, since the public spaces in which the referendums' issues were discussed were multiplied.

In taking part in referendum processes, movements strengthen constitutional safeguards against elected representatives' excessive powers,⁶² and contribute to balancing delegation and participation.⁶³ Activists' mobilizations also help in the formation of the citizens' will, possibly improving the quality of public debate and citizens' considered judgments.⁶⁴ Beyond the referendums' results, movements' engagement has at times empowered progressive ideas by helping mainstream some topics that had been previously neglected. Actually, referendums from below, which involve a larger than usual degree of extra-institutional mobilization – either by means of citizen-initiated referendums or by the effective appropriation of state-endorsed ones – are particularly apt to foster participation and deliberation.

Finally, in moments of democratic malaise and in a very short time span, movement parties have emerged and attained vast support. The crisis of political legitimacy triggered within the context of late neoliberalism and the ensuing electoral earthquake opened up spaces for new parties. On the left, movements have contributed in developing parties that represented their claims and were influenced by their democratic conceptions and practices. As center-left parties became centrist and as calls for justice and against inequality spread among citizens, new parties emerged in fact on the left. Not without tension with their initial supporters basis, they developed some capacity to attract disappointed voters from the center-left parties. While increasing skepticism towards representative democracy, movement parties (for instance, in Spain or in Greece) attempted to bring participatory and deliberative ideas nurtured by social movements into representative institutions.

⁶² Qvortrup, M. (2014) 'Referendums on independence, 1860–2011.' *Political Quarterly* 85(1): 57–64. See also: Qvortrup, M. (2022) *Referendums and Ethnic Conflict*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Ch. One.

⁶³ Marxer, W. and Pällinger, Z.T. (2009) 'Stabilizing or destabilizing? Direct-democratic instruments in different political systems.' In M. Setälä and T. Schiller (eds.) *Referendums and Representative Democracy: Responsiveness, Accountability and Deliberation*. London: Routledge, pp. 34–55.

⁶⁴ Della Porta et al., *Referendums from Below*.

In several cases, at local or national level, activists of progressive social movements, even when critical of representative forms of democracy, took the chance to occupy an electoral space left empty by the fall of center-left parties. They built support for anti-austerity claims developed during the protest cycle. Through mechanisms of organizational appropriation institutional channels were occupied. Initial electoral victories galvanized activists given that street protests alone were insufficient in obtaining the changes demanded. The political opportunities which movements used were those they themselves contributed to generating, occupying, at the same time, what they perceived as empty spaces in institutional politics.

Having democracies capable of ‘self-regulating,’ as ideally supply-and-demand logic would do in a market economy, is an interesting idea. Injections of legitimacy from complementary sources – including the ability to generate deliberative listening – whenever that of representative government shrinks would be desirable. Yet, our discussion on social movements leads us to think that different and more complex mechanisms might be at play. As our illustration shows, positive developments can be found in different contexts but not necessarily the ones one would expect. One negative example could be useful here. For instance, Cini and Felicetti took Italy as an exemplary case of a political system with chronic legitimacy issues, only exacerbated by the Great Crisis, in high need of participatory and deliberative developments.⁶⁵ Today, the country remains a laggard in terms of deliberative experiments, which are spreading elsewhere across European countries, for instance to try to tackle climate change. Also, the national political system remains impermeable to democratic innovations and demands that movements articulate. There is no evidence of the representative system’s shortcomings being met with rising forms of complementary democracy or, for that matter, deliberative listening qualities.

Conclusions

Social movements are fully fledged actors of democratic systems. Their practices and ideas are all the more important and influential as extant representative democracy is challenged by several crises. Far from being only contentious actors, social movements have been carriers of participatory and deliberative views of

⁶⁵ Cini, L. and Felicetti, A. (2018) ‘Participatory deliberative democracy: toward a new standard for assessing democracy? Some insights into the Italian case.’ *Contemporary Italian Politics* 10(2), 151–169.

democracy that circulate in society and in institutions. Early scholarship recognized the innovation work taking place in movements. Later, attention was also given to their knowledge production properties. More recently, they have also been acknowledged as active contributors to democratic innovations. In particular, we have referred to three ways in which movements' ideas and practices have entered institutions: constitutional processes, referendums, and movement parties. The fact that movements can play these active roles does not mean that they will systematically do so or that they will always succeed. Movements might deliberately stay away from democratic life, organize against it, or be unable to impact upon it. In our view, the best way of thinking about movements is not as a complement to democracy, nor as contributors to virtuous behavior such as deliberative listening, nor as enemies. Rather, democratic movements are to be considered as among the most valuable and readily available sources of democratic renewal necessary for democracies to try to deliver as much as possible on their promises of freedom and equality in the contemporary context.

