

Fabio de Nardis

Comment on Loris Caruso/3. Political Opportunity Structures, Social Movements, and the De-Politicization of Contemporary Politics. Some Reflections Starting from Caruso's Article on the Political Process Approach to the Analysis of Local Mobilizations

(doi: 10.2383/82474)

Sociologica (ISSN 1971-8853)

Fascicolo 3, settembre-dicembre 2015

Ente di afferenza:

()

Copyright © by Società editrice il Mulino, Bologna. Tutti i diritti sono riservati.
Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it>

Licenza d'uso

L'articolo è messo a disposizione dell'utente in licenza per uso esclusivamente privato e personale, senza scopo di lucro e senza fini direttamente o indirettamente commerciali. Salvo quanto espressamente previsto dalla licenza d'uso Rivisteweb, è fatto divieto di riprodurre, trasmettere, distribuire o altrimenti utilizzare l'articolo, per qualsiasi scopo o fine. Tutti i diritti sono riservati.

Comment on Loris Caruso/3

Political Opportunity Structures, Social Movements, and the De-Politicization of Contemporary Politics. Some Reflections Starting from Caruso's Article on the Political Process Approach to the Analysis of Local Mobilizations

by Fabio de Nardis

doi: 10.2383/82474

1. Introduction

The effort to renew the theoretical toolbox of a scientific discipline deserves attention. Through the analysis of social mobilizations against some infrastructure works in Italy Caruso seeks to question the approach of the political process that for many years has been widely used by social movement scholars. In particular, Caruso focuses on the case of the social protest in Vicenza against the realization of the *Dal Molin* military base, comparing it then with other important local mobilizations in Italy, such as the protest against the high-speed railway in the Susa Valley, the one against the bridge across the Messina Straits, and the one against *Muos* (US Army satellite communication system) in Sicily. In almost all of these cases, empirical evidence shows dynamics that seem to contradict some certainties of the political process approach with regard to the theory of "Political Opportunity Structures" (POS). Before proceeding, we will try to retrace the fundamental steps of these theories and then see if they are still functional to the analysis of contemporary social movements.

The political process approach emphasizes the political and institutional context within which social movements operate. In particular, scholars who refer to this line of investigation are interested in the relationship between political-institutional actors and protest. By challenging a social and political order, social movements interact with all those actors which have a privileged position in that specific order.

The modalities of these interactions affect the dynamics, but also the effectiveness, of the movements' action. We talk about political opportunity structure, an expression adopted for the first time by Eisinger [1973] who in a study on the outcomes of the protest in some American cities focused on the level of openness or closure of the local political systems. Other relevant variables taken subsequently into consideration are "electoral instability" [Piven and Cloward 1977], "availability of influential allies" [Gamson 1975], and the "degree of tolerance" of the political elites towards the protest [Jenkins and Perrow 1977]. Sidney Tarrow gave added impetus to this approach by analyzing the cycles of protest in Italy, with particular reference to the wave of protest in the 1960s and 1970s. He identified four significant variables: 1) the degree of openness/closure of the formal channels of access to the political system; 2) the stability/instability of the political order; 3) the presence of potential allies; 4) the degree of division within the political elites [Tarrow 1989, 35; 1994, 85-89]. The merit of this approach is that it places the emphasis on the interaction between old and new actors of the unconventional action and the institutionalized system of mediation of interests, refusing to see in social movements only an anti-institutional phenomenon. We have to say that this perspective has often been accused of political reductionism [Melucci 1987 and 1989], losing sight of the strong element of "innovation culture" expressed by the new social movements (youth, women, GLTB, etc.).

2. Aspects and Limits of the Political Opportunity Structure

According to POS, social movements, being able to interact with the external environment, are strongly influenced by it. The dominant culture, the social and economic structure, the technological system and the structure of the media are all variables that affect the development of the collective action, often determining its direction. It is evident that social movements, especially during the protest, are an eminently political phenomenon. They interact constantly with the institutional system. It is from this awareness that the concept of political opportunity structures that Caruso is trying to criticize today develops and acquires relevance.

The structure of political institutions is a very important aspect for an analysis that considers the type of relations established between social movements and the political context in which they operate. In this regard, scholars have focused on a few elements that may affect these relations: the level of centralization of the state apparatus, whether or not judicial power is dependent on other powers (especially the executive branch), the role played by politics in controlling and planning market mechanisms [Rucht 1994], the level of territorial decentralization, the pres-

ence of mechanisms of direct democracy, the functional division of power [Kriesi 1995].

Almost all of these analyses tend to retrace the considerations of Alexis de Tocqueville on the relationship between civil society and the state and, in particular, on the role played by a weak state, on the American model, or a strong one, as in France [Kriesi 2004]. According to Tocqueville, in countries where there is not a centralized and pervasive state organization (as in the US), the civil society is better equipped to emerge as a significant player. Conversely, in situations where political institutions have developed on based on a strong bureaucracy and centralization of power (as in France), the civil society has more difficulty performing its role and there may be episodic violent riots which may develop in a revolutionary direction.

Sidney Tarrow [1994, 62-65] judged de Tocqueville's analysis inadequate in terms of the historical experience on which the French author focused. The experience of the American Civil War had already showed how the political institutions of a weak state were in fact unable to relate to a system of conflicting interests; while relatively recent studies on the experience in revolutionary France have shown that the country had a strong civil society, with considerable capacity for organization and mobilization.

As more accurate analyses have revealed the flaws in de Tocqueville's considerations, the relationship between the state and civil society has remained a central issue in the sociology of social movements. Instead the focus was on political institutions' level of openness, evaluated according to the degree of dispersion of power systems. In that sense, the greater the number of actors involved in the management of public power, the greater the opportunities to organize forms of collective action from below. In particular, the researchers focused on three elements considered essential to explain the dynamics of the development of social movements with respect to the organization of the political system [della Porta and Diani 1997, 230-231]:

a) The "decentralization of power:" the belief is that the greater the powers distributed to peripheral systems (local, regional or federal states), the greater the opportunities for social movements to access the decision-making system. This postulate refers to the theory of subsidiarity, according to which access will be facilitated as the administrative unit comes closer to the citizen.

b) The "functional dispersion of power:" in this case, the more the division between the legislative, executive and judicial powers is clearly defined, the more open the political system is considered to be. And even in individual powers, the more autonomy the actors have, the greater the possibility of access for civil society. As for the legislative power, a proportional electoral representation, emphasizing the representation of interests, is considered more open than a plurality system. Moreover, in

the context of executive power, a parliamentary system is considered more open than a presidential system, where much of the decision-making power is concentrated in the hands of the president. Finally, a strong and independent judiciary can intervene in both the legislative and the executive bodies; therefore, the more independent the judiciary is from the other two powers, presumably the greater the access is for social movements.

c) The “amount of power controlled by the state:” in this case the postulate concerns the amount of power held by the state compared to other actors of the political system, such as political parties, interest groups, citizens’ organizations and the media. In this sense, the public administration in the Anglo-Saxon system is more open than systems of Roman derivation which tend to avoid external contamination.

All these elements are certainly important in explaining the relationship between social movements and political structures, although thorough studies have already demonstrated that their role is not decisive. While great openness to the channels of access to the institutions offers on the one hand good opportunities to social movements, on the other it also facilitates access for the forces antagonistic to them. In addition, the institutional framework does not seem to have a significant weight in determining the levels of mobilization. Kriesi [1995]) conducted a thorough comparative research study on some European countries with different institutional arrangements. It was found that with regard to the levels of administrative decentralization (i.e. federal states, such as Germany and Switzerland, as opposed to unitary states, such as France and the Netherlands), and the level of dispersion of power (i.e. one strong centralized state, such as France, as opposed to other cases of weak states, such as Switzerland), the way protest develops is not clear and simple, demonstrating that these two variables are not sufficient to explain how lasting collective action can be triggered.

3. Repression Systems and Political Allies

The analysis of the dynamics of social movements in relation to the strategies adopted by the states when faced with more or less organized collective action is related to the theoretical articulations of the POS. Typically, each movement tends to be influenced and permeated by the prevailing political culture in the contexts in which it operates. The more egalitarian and liberal the dominant culture of a given society is, the less collective action takes the shape of strong social antagonism. The history of a country’s democracy can also affect the strategies of a social movement, in the sense that, especially in countries that have a relatively recent authoritarian

past, the reaction to the explosion of protest may be a severe crackdown, including the adoption of strategies of strong repression. The space available to social movements can therefore be conditioned by the attitudes of the political elites. Research experiences show that in countries whose governments traditionally take assimilative strategies, recognizing the legitimacy even of non-party actors, the dynamics of mobilization take less radical forms [Flam 1994].

Of course, considering the institutional arrangements for evaluating the political opportunity structure of a social movement is important but not sufficient. Institutions as well as culture change very slowly over time and for this reason activists tend to regard them as constant factors rather than as the object of transformation. Studies that focus on the more dynamic factors that strongly influence the strategies of social movements and the outcomes of protest are highly relevant. "Electoral variability" and the possible "divisions between elites" are factors to be taken into account. As pointed out by some scholars, institutional factors are mediated by two related variables: on the one hand, the behavior of the system of alliances; on the other, the behavior of the system of conflict [Kriesi 1989; Klandermans 1989 and 1990]. In the first case, we refer to the actors who are allies of the social movements; in the second case, we refer instead to those opposed to them. The system of alliances can provide important resources for mobilization, as well as key spaces of action. The conflict system tends to narrow the margins of collective action. The predominance of one of the two systems is determined by the configuration of power, i.e. its distribution among the main actors. Since the allies of the social movements may be some political parties, there is no doubt that the electoral success of such parties should extend the structure of political opportunities, creating social spaces where claims can be made without the risk of being crushed in the repressive stranglehold of the state.

The matter of "police control" becomes a very important variable that often determines the prevailing strategies of a social movement. States use the police to control the protest, calling "public policy" what activists usually see as "repression." In this sense, we agree with Lipsky when he asserts that the police with their actions contribute to defining the terms of the urban conflict [Lipsky 1965]. As G.T. Marx noted [1979], the repressive actions of the police can change depending on their objectives and may vary from the creation of an unfavorable public image of mobilizations to the reduction of the available resources, the collection of information, the discouragement of the activists, through to the explicit sabotage of some actions.

Since the 1970s, the intervention strategies of the security forces to contain social movements have sought to reduce the repressive violence to prevent the hardening of relations between protesters and the state that marked that period. Analysts speak in this case of de-escalation strategies. Even some forms of civil disobedience

and violation of the law are often tolerated to avoid the escalating violence that occurs every time the management of public order is presented with the hard face of repression. While on the one hand, the styles of drastic repression discourage protest, on the other hand they tend to inhibit the more politicized components of a social movement, strengthening the most radical ones. From a comparative research study conducted by Della Porta [1995, 2007] on the period of protest movements in Italy and Germany, this phenomenon is evident.

In addition to a more or less tolerant system of repression, it is essential for activists to be able to rely on a circuit of political allies and a pluralistic (and autonomous) media system allowing access for those challenging the power system. Potential allies can be of different types: groups, associations, other social movements, but scholarly attention focuses mainly on the political parties, particularly those on the left that usually tend to be more sensitive to demands for transformation. Typically, between leftist parties and social movements a system of inter-exchange is established, which changes according to the context. If these parties are in opposition, they are more likely to support the protest expressed by social movements, while relations are likely to break down when they are in government, where budget constraints and the respect of power compatibility lead party coalitions to reduce their openness towards the emerging demands [see de Nardis 2009]. In addition, the alliance between leftist parties and social movements affects the strategies of the social movements themselves, by reducing the need for repertoires of action that are too radical [della Porta 1995; Gate and Fillieule 2004]. In this sense isolation and radicalization are closely related.

4. The De-Politicization of Politics

Let's go back to Caruso's contribution. Through his study, the author comes to the conclusion that the political opportunity structures do not play a key role in the emergence or in the effectiveness of protest. Moreover, empirical evidence seems to show an additional element: the closure of political opportunities seems to be a positive factor for mobilization, "as it allows [we quote Caruso] movement actors to use the protest to express a widespread perception of lack of influence on decision making processes [...] a sense of subjection and non-real enjoyment of citizenship rights [Caruso 2015]." In this context, the impermeability of the political system and the substantial absence of party allies should encourage collective action. In this case we believe that the spirit of the time plays a strong influence.

As Goldstone noted, the POS was developed in the so-called "Golden Age" of representative democracy. The great mass parties were decisive in decision-making processes and at the same time they were able to intercept the social requests. Nowadays the gap between political parties and society is abysmal. The old theories about the relationship between parties and social movements are no longer sustainable. Social movements do not see the classic political actors as potential allies. Therefore the presence or absence of institutional allies is no longer a variable that affects the action of organized civil society. Social movements prefer, especially at local level, to make their own electoral lists and, sometimes, to create new political actors proposing interesting experiments of "movement party" that demonstrate a certain ability to produce organizational forms of hybridization. We believe that the key element for understanding these developments lies in the concept of de-politicization of classic institutional politics.

De-politicization has been defined in many ways, running the risk of concept stretching [Foster *et al.* 2014]. We consider it, in short, 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 2006; Hay 2007]. Politics appears 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 in turn has different facets, concerning the 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]: central banks, independent regulatory authorities, agencies of various types [Burnham 1999 ; Hay 2007; Kettel 2008], public utilities privatized and made dependent on the market rather than on the interference of politicians and their short term visions dictated by electoral rhythms [Flinders and Bullers 2006a]. These shifts define de-politicization as one of the effects of the meta-governance which re-regulates governance [Jessop 2011; Fawcett, Marsh 2014].

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 2006b], 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]. This mechanism also operates at the local and territorial level.

Another side of this phenomenon is the use of meta-decisions that make it impossible to make other decisions later, tying the hands of policymakers [Flinders and Buller 2006b]. 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 technologies such as evaluation, with the primacy it gives to “the numbers” [de Leonardis 2013; Giancola 2015], or technical procedures in support of political decision-making. Choices become evidence-based and free from ideologies and social pressures. Or, again, expert systems, algorithms, rating and benchmarking.

The “technicians” become the protagonists, sometimes called on to directly perform the function of “depoliticized politics,” as in the governments of national unity, legitimized in the name of emergencies and exceptional situations. For these governments, representation and consent have no value. They are chosen for their professional skills and their reliability for the markets and the supra-national institutions. The attempts to legitimize the investigation of public choices through deliberative arenas governed by non-political parameters, based on information and knowledge, are not external to this aspect of de-politicization. Again matters subject to public choice are excluded from the process of discussion, conflict and compromise between partisan points of view [de Leonardis 2013].

A discursive de-politicization determines the convergence of preferences [Flinders and Buller 2006b] 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” (There is no alternative) 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 (such as the Keynesian compromise), 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 (the influence of pre-rational emotional states involving individuals, political decision-makers and epistemic communities on the acceptance or rejection of an idea of policy) 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.

5. 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, and Swyngedouw 2014]. The actions are addressed through the setting of horizons and an indication of collective goals presented in the form of “public truth” (also) by non-political actors, reconfirming Gramsci’s lesson about the role played by civil society in state and politics [Jessop 2011, 2014]. 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 [Hay 2014, 302] and, in particular, corporations. They enjoy a more direct benefit from specific social de-politicization [Flinders and Wood 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. The market is the sphere in which firms and consultants (the champions of innovation) act.

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, which translates operationally into the framework of regulations underlying the reforms of metropolitan governance designed to shape accumulation-friendly urban environments, 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.

In the construction of the city as an environment and a strategic actor in the context of globalization and crisis, what is therefore crucial are the cognitive and normative models produced by knowledge and skills, nested within firms. 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, the market and politics that go beyond the old public governance.

Companies, in seeking and cultivating new markets, seek to drive collective action through a specific ideational ability. 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.

Messages are transmitted through seductive advertising representations of a desirable society (smart, sustainable, inclusive, happy ...). The hegemonic function of these images translates into preference-shaping where the interests of business permit the construction of general, environmental and social goals, sometimes presented in the form of common good or general interest, often reclassified as “community.” This enables the reformulation of rights bitterly championed in the past by the civil society to be brought within market horizons. The 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.

Reducing the complexity through these imaginary “win-win” situations is an original mediation between general and private interests, citizenship and profits. It will feed the de-politicization of government with new forms of de-politicization of market players. They are presented as being able to solve social problems. Companies are politicized, because they perform not only a supporting and complementary role for politics, but also a function of replacement. For example, in “Smart Cities,” companies not only provide ways to decide how to deal with individual and collective needs, but also managerial models of strategic management to coordinate the optimization of local resources and allocation of community funds.

6. Origins and 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; Flinders and Wood 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. Considering these effects, we can suggest an answer to the question of why contemporary forms of de-politicization have been successful. It would be hard to understand why it has become a dominant model, without putting it into relation with the concomitant neo-liberalization and with the hegemony achieved by economic elites through the belief system of the neoliberal paradigm [Foster et al. 2014].

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 neoliberalism, 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 what conditions can we 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.

7. Beyond Political Opportunity Structures?

Scientific knowledge of the process of de-politicization makes Caruso's reflections on the analytical ineffectiveness of traditional categories for analyzing social movements a theme which is currently a pressing issue. In particular, the political process approach starts from the assumption that the political classes are important in producing socially binding decisions. Nowadays such relevance is not obvious. If the political decisions are de facto determined by extra-political actors, the target of social movements also moves elsewhere, since the goal of social movements is still to influence the decision-making process. Political parties of the depoliticized politics are no longer promoters of policies, but rather translators of decisions taken outside the bodies of political representation. This condition makes them impervious to social issues and the relationship between parties and movements also changes. While in the past the alliance with a political party could be a good opportunity for social movements, today the activists tend to be very wary of the classical actors of participation and social mobilization itself tends to take on a more radical character with antagonism towards the institutional and political systems. In this sense Caruso's work undoubtedly has the merit of placing at the heart of the scientific debate an important issue whose goal is not only to demonstrate the effectiveness or otherwise of a theoretical apparatus, but also to open up new analytical horizons for the sociology of social movements.

References

Burnham, P.

1999 "The Politics of Economic Management in the 1990s." *New Political Economy* 1: 37-54.

2001 "New Labour and the Politics of Depoliticization." *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 2: 127-149.

Caruso, L.

2015 "Theories of the Political Process, Political Opportunities Structure and Local Mobilizations. The Case of Italy." *Sociologica* 3: [doi:10.2383/82471](https://doi.org/10.2383/82471).

de Leonardis, O.

2013 "Una Città Neoliberale. L'Argomentazione in Atto Pubblico tra Norma, Fatto e Finzione." Pp. 129-134 in *La Ragione Politica. Vol. II I Discorsi delle Politiche*, edited by V. Borghi, O. de Leonardis and G. Procacci. Liguori: Napoli.

della Porta, D.

1995 *Social Movements, Political Violence, and The State*. Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press.

- 2007 “Violenza Politica e Nuova Sinistra.” Pp. 159-188 in *La Società in Movimento*, edited by F. de Nardis. Roma: Editori Riuniti.
- della Porta D., Diani, M.
1997 *I Movimenti Sociali*. Roma: NIS.
- della Porta D., Fillieulle, O.
2004 “Policing Social Protest.” Pp. 217-241 in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, edited by D.A. Snow, S.A. Soule, and H. Kriesi. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Dey, P., Steyaert, C.
2010 “The Politics of Narrating Social Entrepreneurship.” *Journal of Enterprising Communities* 1: 85-108 .
- Eisinger, P.K.
1973 “The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities.” *American Political Science Review* 67: 11-28.
- Fawcett, P., Marsh, D.
2014 “Depoliticisation, Governance and Political Participation.” *Policy&Politics* 2: 171–188.
- Flam, H.
1994 “Political Responses and the Anti-nuclear Challenge, I, Standard Deliberative and Decision-making Settings.” Pp. 299-328 in *States and Anti-nuclear Movements*, edited by H. Flam. Edimburg: Edimburg University Press.
- Flinders, M.
2008 *Delegated Governance and the British State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Flinders, M., Buller, J.
2006a “Depoliticization: Principles, Tactics and Tools.” *British Politics* (1)3: 293-318.
2006b “Depoliticization, Democracy and Arena Shifting.” Pp. 53-80 in *Autonomy and Regulation. Coping with Agencies in the Modern State*, edited by T. Christensen and P. Lagraeid. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham.
- Flinders, M., Wood, M.
2014 “Depoliticization, Governance and the State.” *Policy&Politics* 2: 135–149.
- Foster, E.A., Kerr, P., Byrne, C.
2014 “Rolling Back to Roll Forward: Depoliticisation and the Extension of Government.” *Policy&Politics* 2: 225-241.
- Gamson, W.A.
1975 *The Strategy of Social Protest*. Homewood: Dorsey.
- Giancola, O.
2015 “Il Nuovo Scenario delle Politiche Educative: tra Valutazione, Quasi-mercato e l’Emergere di Nuovi Attori.” Pp. 129-146 in *Neoliberismi e Azione Pubblica: il Caso Italiano*, edited by G. Moini. Roma: Ediesse.
- Hay, C.
2007 *Why We Hate Politics*. The Policy Press: Cambridge.
2014 “Depoliticisation as Process, Governance as Practice: what did the ‘First Wave’ Get Wrong and do we Need a ‘Second Wave’ to Put it Right?.” *Policy&Politics* 2: 293-311.

- Jenkins, C.J., Perrow, C.
 1977 "Insurgency of the Powerless: The Farm Workers Movements 1946-1972." *American Sociological Review* 42: 249-268.
- Jessop, B.
 1997 "A Neo-Gramscian Approach to the Regulation of Urban Regimes." Pp. 51-73 in *Reconstructing Urban Regime Theory*, edited by M. Lauria. London: Sage.
 2009 "Cultural Political Economy and Critical Policy Studies." *Critical Policy Studies* 3-4: 336-356.
 2011 "Metagovernance." Pp. 106-123 in *Handbook of Governance*, edited by M. Bevir. Sage: London.
 2014 "Repolicitising Depoliticisation: Theoretical Preliminaries on Some Responses to the American Fiscal and Eurozone Debt Crises." *Policy&Politics* 2: 207-223.
- Kettel, S.
 2008 "Does Depoliticisation Work? Evidence from Britain's Membership of the Exchange Rate Mechanism, 1990-1992." *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 4: 630-648.
- Klandermans, B.
 1989 "Introduction: Social Movements Organizations and the Study of Social Movements." Pp. 1-17 in *Organizing for Change. Social Movements Organizations in Europe and United States*, edited by B. Klandermans. Greenwich: JAI Press.
 1990 "Linking the 'Old' and 'New:' Movement Networks in the Netherlands." Pp. 122-136 in *Challenging the Political Order: New Social and Political Movements in Western Democracies*, edited by R.J. Dalton and M. Kuechler. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Kriesi H.
 1989 "The Political Opportunity Structure of the Dutch Peace Movement." *West European Politics*, 12: 295-312.
 1995 "The Political Opportunity Structures of New Social Movements: Its Impact on Their Mobilization." Pp. 167-198 in *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements*, edited by C.J. Jenkins, B. Klandermans. Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press-UCL Press.
 2004 "Political Context and Opportunity." Pp. 67-90 in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, edited by D.A. Snow, S.A. Soule and H. Kriesi. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Lipsky, M.
 1965 *Protest and City Politics*. Chicago: Rand McNally & Co.
- Marx, G.T.
 1979 "External Efforts to Damage or Facilitate Social Movements: Some Patterns, Explanations, Outcomes and Complications." Pp. 94-125 in *The Dynamics of Social Movements*, edited by J.D. McCarthy and M.N. Zald. Cambridge: Winthrop.
- Melucci, A.
 1987 *Libertà che Cambia*. Milano: Unicopoli.
 1989 *Nomads of The Present. Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*. London: Century Hutchinson.

Moini G.

2015 “Capire il Neoliberalismo: Variegatura, Egemonia e (De)Politizzazione.” Pp. 17-50 in *Neoliberalismi e Azione Pubblica: il Caso Italiano*, edited by G. Moini. Roma: Ediesse.

Peck, J., Tickell, A.

2002 “Neoliberalizing Space.” *Antipode* 3-4: 380-404.

Piven, F.F., Cloward, R.

1977 *Poor People's Movements*. New York: Pantheon.

Rucht, D.

1994 *Modernisierung und Soziale Bewegungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus.

Sum, N.L, Jessop, B.

2013 *Towards a Cultural Political Economy. Putting Culture in its Place in Political Economy*. Cheltenham, UK - Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar publishing.

Swyngedouw, E.

2007 “Impossible ‘Sustainability’ and the Post-Political Condition.” PP. 185-205 in *The Sustainable Development Paradox*, edited by R. Krueger and D. Gibbs. New York: Guilford Press.

Tarrow, S.

1989 *Democracy and Disorder. Protest and Politics in Italy 1965-1975*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

1994 *Power in Movements. Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*. New York-Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, J., Swyngedouw, E.

2014 “Seed of Dystopia: Post-Politics and the Return of the Political.” Pp. 1-22 in *The Post-Political and its Discontents. Spaces of Depoliticisation. Spectres of Radical Politics*, edited by J. Wilson and E. Swyngedouw. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press.

Wood, M.

2015 “Puzzling and Powering in Policy Paradigm Shifts: Politicization, Depoliticization and Social Learning.” *Critical Policy Studies* 1: 2-21.

Wood, M., and Flinders, M.

2014 “Rethinking Depoliticisation: Beyond the Governmental.” *Policy&Politics* 2: 151–170.

Comment on Loris Caruso/3

Political Opportunity Structures, Social Movements, and the De-Politicization of Contemporary Politics. Some Reflections Starting from Caruso's Article on the Political Process Approach to the Analysis of Local Mobilizations

Abstract: Starting from Caruso's attempt to criticize the utility of the Political Opportunity Structures approach to the study of local mobilizations, in this paper we try to contextualize the discourse on the relationship between social movements and political institutions and actors within the broader phenomenon of the de-politicization of politics. With this concept we mean a set of changes in the ways power is exercised. These modes downgrade the political nature of decision-making and, through representation, give legitimacy to actors apparently less able to bear witness to the presence of the "political." In particular we focus on the various ways through which de-politicization has been consolidated. In the European context, a "government," a "discourse," and a "social" de-politicization have, for example, been observed. If the political decisions are determined by extra-political actors, the target of social movements also moves elsewhere, since the goal of social movements is still to influence the decision-making process. Political parties of the depoliticized politics are no longer promoters of policies, but rather translators of decisions taken outside the bodies of political representation. This condition makes them impervious to social issues and a good relationship between parties and movements become very difficult. In these context is normal that the basis on with POS approach has been elaborated are also changed.

Keywords: De-Politicization; Political Process; Social Movements; Political Opportunity Structures; Social Resilience.

Fabio de Nardis is Associate Professor of Political Sociology at the University of Salento (Italy) where he is also Director of the *Centre for the Study of Politics and Society* (CSPS) and Chair of the Graduate Program in Sociology. He is Editor-in-Chief of the International journal of socio-political studies *Partecipazione e Conflitto* [*Participation and Conflict*], and the author of 10 books and of about 80 publications in readers or peer review journals on political participation, social movements, democratization, socio-political theory, political cultures and identities.