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**Preface**

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# Preface

*Dieter Rucht*

From the mid-sixties onward, many advanced Western countries experienced waves of various protest activities and social movements. Among the most significant were the student movement, the women's movement, the antinuclear and environmental movement and the peace movement. Despite the diversity of issues around which these movements were organized, their followers shared certain common concerns. Chief among these were their quest for more political participation and autonomy, their critique of centralized and bureaucratized apparatuses, and their skepticism about a one-sided concept of progress which stressed economic growth while ignoring its negative side effects.

Social scientists, many of them sympathetic to these movements, soon began to analyze the growing protest activities. There is by now a large body of literature providing both new concepts and paradigms and a wealth of empirical findings. In the US particularly, conventional ideas about collective behavior have been challenged; the focus of interest shifted definitively from this broader field to that of social movements. During the 1970s a new approach, the so-called resource mobilization theory, took shape. In contrast to earlier mainstream perceptions of social movements, this approach stressed the rational and organized character of social movement activities. And in contrast to earlier assumptions, the followers of social movements were no longer perceived as consisting mainly of disparate and alienated masses. Also, the once constitutive, conceptual boundary between conventional and unconventional behavior became blurred and protest tended to be acknowledged as a rather normal phenomenon of social and political life. Concepts of rational choice and the sociology of organizations were established. As a consequence, social scientists perceived protest movements as similar or equal to conventional interest groups and voluntary associations,

although there was always an element of radical grassroots organization which did not fit the model of pressure group politics.

In Western Europe, the development of the study of social movements can hardly be described in terms of a major paradigmatic change. In line with its highly diverse cultural and scientific traditions, the study of social movements in various countries also followed very different courses and patterns. If one contrasts the situation in the USA with that in Europe, however, some features that are common to most heterogeneous European approaches become apparent, in particular the search for the relationship between social movements and broader social change as a central point of reference. But this aspect is by no means new; it was already prevalent in the 19th century. Connected to this is a more recent trend in Europe: the ideal that all these aforementioned heterogeneous movements are part of an overarching, though internally subdivided, phenomenon which has become known as »new social movements«. Although many observers stress the differences between and within the various movements, or emphasize the parallels to earlier movements, some analysts promote the idea that the new social movements herald a new societal type. In their most speculative forms, these concepts of new social movements theorize that these groupings will assume the central role that the labor movement and the liberal-bourgeois movement had in earlier societies.

As usual, behind such a crude sketch of a field of study we can expect a highly differentiated and complex world which can hardly be comprehensively surveyed by one person from a specific country. With particular regard to such social phenomena as movements which seem to be ubiquitous, but hard to grasp, it is difficult to keep informed about the state of knowledge and ongoing research. In that case, even specialists usually have only a selective knowledge of the field. In comparison to subdisciplines of, say, medicine or physics, which are well coordinated on the national and international levels and have their own established institutes, journals and congresses, the field of social movements is underdeveloped. This is due not only to a lack of organizational resources and coordination, but also to the specificities of the research object: its vague contours, its multi-faceted nature, and its dependency on temporal and spatial circumstances. Moreover, language barriers come into play. To be sure, within a given country those people working on social movements for a longer period of time usually have knowledge of the each other's work or even meet from time to time. But there may be fascinating studies written in Dutch or Italian unknown to a

French or English scholar. And from the standpoint of an American researcher, it may be still more difficult to have a close look at the debates in this broad range of Western European countries.

It was precisely the perception of a need for improved exchange and understanding of past and present research on social movements in various countries which was the driving motive for producing this volume. Some social scientists in Western Europe felt that need in the early 1980s when they launched a series of meetings of an autonomous study group on »new social movements«. This group was loosely affiliated with the *European Group for Organizational Studies*. Together with my German colleagues Wilfried Nelles and Dirk Gerdes I had the chance to organize the third workshop of that study group in the Summer of 1985 in Bonn. Becoming aware of how ignorant we were with regard to discussions and research in many countries which were or were not represented at the meeting, we came up with the idea to edit a volume designed to reduce this gap. The core of this volume was to be a collection of overviews of social movement research from various countries. But from the idea to its realization there was a long way.

The design for this book had taken shape already by the end of 1985. Though we decided to organize the book around these country reports, we did not want it to be limited to that aspect. In particular, we were also interested in a more general debate and assessment beyond national boundaries and particular schools of thought.

As for the selection of countries, it was clear that the integration of Third World regions would be beyond the scope of this book and our organizational capacities.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it was evident that by no means should one neglect the USA, the country where – certainly in quantitative and probably also in qualitative terms – the most significant research on social movements has been carried out. (This also explains why this country report occupies much more space than any other.) With respect to European countries, we made a deliberate choice to focus on the Western part of the continent. Of course, in the light of the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe since Summer 1989, we would have preferred not to exclude these countries. Meanwhile, as we learned, the interest in movements in Eastern European

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1 For a recent work on one Third World area, see Susan Eckstein (ed.), *Power and Popular Protest. Latin American Social Movements*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1989.

countries has exploded.<sup>2</sup> With regard to Western Europe, it was obvious that a selection had to be made. Although such a choice is arbitrary, and we admittedly had no hard criteria, a pragmatic selection was made along two lines: first, to integrate countries which, to our knowledge, are important both in terms of movement activities and corresponding studies; second, to include countries where we had or could establish contact with colleagues able to provide overview of the situation in their home countries. By and large, but with one major exception, our plans were realized. Regrettably, despite the long production phase, the report on France finally had to be dropped. The respective manuscript did not fulfill the requirements for this book, and it was too late to look for another author.

Several first drafts for the volume were written as early as 1986. For various reasons, however, some other drafts came in with a considerable delay. In two cases the original planned authorship was not held to; fortunately other authors took over the tasks. Moreover, Dirk Gerdes, who meanwhile has changed his professional field and became overburdened with other engagements, withdrew from the project.

Because this volume's first contribution, authored by Bert Klandermans, can be easily read as an introduction to the field and I share most of his observations and statements, I felt no need as an editor to write a separate introduction. Hence at this point I can limit my task to presenting only the outline of the book and to thank those who have contributed to it.

Apart from *Bert Klandermans'* introductory chapter, which presents an overview of recent European and American approaches to the study of social movements, the book consists of two parts. The first is devoted to the state of the art in nine selected countries. These include the USA (authored by *Margit Mayer*), Great Britain (*Wolfgang Rüdig*, *James Mitchell*, *Jenny Chapman*, and *Philip D. Lowe*), Italy (*Mario Diani* and *Alberto Melucci*), West Germany (*Dieter Rucht*), Switzerland (*Hanspeter Kriesi*), Austria (*Anton Pelinka*), Sweden (*Ron Eyerman* and *Andrew Jamison*), Denmark (*Peter Gundelach*) and The Netherlands (*Philip van Praag, Jr.*) As a service to those readers who might not be interested in all aspects of all selected countries, the authors of this part of the volume were urged to organize their chapters along a common framework, i.e. to refer to (1) theories, (2) meth-

2 For a collection of essays on Eastern movements before the »revolutionary« years, see Louis Kriesberg, Bronislaw Misztal with Janusz Mucha (eds.), *Social Movements as a Factor of Change in the Contemporary World*. Vol. 10 Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change, Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press 1988.

ods, (3) empirical findings, (4) institutional aspects of research, (5) debates and, (6) to present an annotated bibliography. Although some of the authors found it difficult, most of them have followed these guidelines closely.

The second part of the volume is not devoted to specific countries. Here the intention was rather to discuss relevant approaches under various perspectives. In some sense, the first four essays in this part can be grouped together. For both the USA and Europe one outstanding approach – resource mobilization theory and new social movement theory, respectively – was selected as an object of discussion. On the one hand, *Herbert Kitschelt* presents his critique of the resource mobilization approach; *Mayer N. Zald*, a prominent promoter of this approach, responds to that critique. On the other hand, *Dieter Rucht* criticizes *Touraine's* version of (new) social movement theory and the related method. *Alain Touraine* shortly replies to that critique. A further contribution authored by *Sidney Tarrow* discusses European and American approaches in a more integrative perspective. Although this essay is relatively close to the concern of *Klandermans's* article, it puts special emphasis on comparative research as a useful method for studying social movements. In the concluding chapter, *Friedhelm Neidhardt* and *Dieter Rucht* present a comprehensive assessments of the state of the art with regard both to various country reports and general trends in the field. Here, the emphasis lies on advances and unsolved questions of social movement research.

As usual, a book like this one cannot be published without the collaboration and assistance of many people. First of all, I owe thanks to the contributors and in particular to their patience with me. I am also grateful to *Dirk Gerdes* who, as already mentioned, was originally supposed to co-edit this book. He was engaged not only in the state of planning, but also, in commenting on some of the early drafts. Third, a number of people gave me valuable assistance, among them *Richard Rogers* and *Bruce Spear* who, as native American English speakers, revised most of the manuscripts, *Prinzessin zu Löwenstein* and *Katrin Haacke*, who were helpful in organizational and technical matters, and *Thomas Eller*, who contributed to standardizing most of the manuscripts. Finally, I wish to thank the institution to which I am affiliated. The *Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung*, and especially the research unit »*Öffentlichkeit und soziale Bewegung*,« headed by *Friedhelm Neidhardt*, provided generous financial and organizational support for publication.