

# UC Berkeley

## ISSI Project Reports and Working Papers

### Title

Is Spain a Statist Society? A Research Perspective on Organizations, Reflexivity and Collective Action

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1034d4wj>

### Author

Laraña, Enrique

### Publication Date

2009-01-21

## **Is Spain a Statist Society? A Research Perspective<sup>1</sup> on Organizations, Reflexivity and Collective Action**

Enrique Laraña  
Universidad Complutense de Madrid<sup>2</sup>  
ISSC Visiting Scholar, Fall 2008  
elarana@cps.ucm.es

DRAFT, NOT FOR QUOTATION OR REPRODUCTION

### **A Statist Society?**

What follows is a summary of the subject and the main assumptions of the book we are writing on voluntary organizations and social movements, which is grounded in my research on non-profit voluntary organizations. It questions the traditional characterization of Spain as a ‘statist society,’ in which the relevance of these organizations is very weak since the citizenry has its expectations focused on the State for solving its problems and does not participate in these kind of groups (Linz 1984; Wert 1996). While relevant surveys continue to hold this assumption, I claim that there has been a change in this subject, which is already promoting interesting developments in public controversies about relevant political issues concerning social justice, language use in education, and the political system of Spain. These changes are manifest in two different kinds of data that shed light on the issue of citizens’ participation in voluntary organizations.

I claim that there is a change in the public image of voluntary organizations for an increasing sector of the population, which accounts for a high dynamism and mobilization potential of the Spanish society at present and points to the emergence of a civic culture that plays a fundamental role in the social modernization of the country and was not present at the beginning of the political transition. This culture is not merely the result of time and socialization practices at school, but is being propelled by the social controversies and the mobilizations promoted by certain organizations which have acquired an increasing

---

<sup>1</sup> My acknowledgement to Aaron Cicourel and Christine Trost for their useful comments on the first versions of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Professor of Sociology, Facultad de Ciencias Economicas y Empresariales.

<sup>3</sup> This notion draws on Gusfield’s (1994) work on the reflexivity of social movements, and on my research (Laraña 2007) on social reflexivity, technological risks and collective action.

definitional power on important public issues. They are related to a new civic movement that is becoming a relevant collective actor in this process of social and political modernization.

This process of social change, which ought to have important consequences in politics and the economy, commenced in the mid 1990s. Elsewhere, I located its origins in the mobilizations of solidarity with the Third World, which performed innovative protest actions in the fall of 1994 (Laraña 1999). This change was consolidated during the present decade.

In order to analyze this process, I have published several papers that I am revising for a book based on two projects that I have conducted in recent years: one is a study that has been ongoing since 2005 on voluntary organizations, and the other is a previous study of an environmental controversy and mobilizations over the risk of new facilities for waste treatment that was done between 1997 and 2000. Both studies focus on a special kind of organization that I call *reflexive*, a term emphasizing their definitional power in public controversies, as explained below. They tend to be, or to become, as a consequence of their reflexive character, social movement organizations.<sup>3</sup> My interpretation is also grounded in data on collective mobilizations in Spain since 1996 and in my previous research on social movements in Spain and in the U.S. (Laraña 1974, 1978, 1994, 1999).

This book is a comparative analysis of two social movements in Spain that enable us to approach the mentioned change in terms of the dynamics of social participation and modernization of Spain. The first one we study is an environmental movement which promoted contention over the risk of new technologies for waste treatment (incinerators) during the last decade in several main Spanish cities, and became an active agency in framing their hazardous effects on health.<sup>1</sup> The second is a civic movement that has acquired considerable influence in current controversies on civil rights, social justice, nationalism and terrorism during recent years, and has promoted several large-scale demonstrations over these issues.

My previous remark on the social transformation in Spain stands in contrast with survey data on social participation that show lesser rates during the 1990s than in the previous decade. A rough 10% of Spaniards are members of voluntary organizations, and the cases with higher rates correspond to citizens' participation in cultural, sport and religious groups. In most social movement organizations, such as anti-globalization, peace and solidarity with the Third World, the participation rates are less than 7% of the Spanish

population, with environmental organizations showing a 3% rate.<sup>4</sup> The latter are central for our argument since they are the ones on which we have focused our attention in the study of an environmental movement.

Nevertheless, these data also stand in contrast to other surveys<sup>5</sup> and facts that have been witnessed by the citizenry and reported by the media, some of which have been the subject of observation for our research. I refer to the mass mobilizations that have been taking place in Spain since the second half of the 1990s. According to moderate sources,<sup>6</sup> between 1996 and 2004, in Madrid there have been a number of large-scale demonstrations in which citizens' participation ranged from 660,000 persons (against the war in Iraq, 15/02/03) and 2,300,000 persons (in protest of the Islamic terrorist genocide on March 11, 2004), as well as other demonstrations against ETA's assassinations of a politician (M. A. Blanco—2,000,000 persons, 14/07/97) and a university professor (Tomás y Valiente—850,000 persons, 19/02/96) (Adell 2004: 21-22). In more recent years there was an increasing process of collective mobilization: between 2004 and the 2008 general elections, there have been nine macro-demonstrations in Madrid, the main locus of collective action, most of them against the socialist Government's politics on terrorism. The rejection of terrorism has been the dominant cause in these large-scale demonstrations.

In sum, the last twelve years, since 1996, have been the most mobilized period in the recent history of Spain since Franco's death, including his long term dictatorship. The only large-scale demonstration that took place since his death (1975) was in response to an attempted coup d'état in 1981 (Adell 2004). These facts stand in contrast with the aforementioned surveys, pose an interesting puzzle for sociologists, and have epistemological and methodological implications.

## **Theoretical framework**

In our research, this contrast between facts and survey data on social participation is approached from a perspective that focuses on the cognitive dynamics of contention. We seek to shed light on this puzzle by combining four different theoretical approaches, which are

---

<sup>4</sup> Data from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (Ganuza y Robles 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Data from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas and the Social European Social Survey (López Nieto 2007: 123).

<sup>6</sup> Adell's data refers to this city and is grounded in very moderate estimates of a governmental agency in Madrid (Delegación del Gobierno) which has police functions.

described below, as well as a different methodology. The four approaches stem from the fields of social movements, organizations and modernization.

Our methodology involves different research techniques, from a telephonic survey and analysis of published news on this topic to an ethnographic research in a sample of relevant organizations that we studied.<sup>7</sup> Our analysis of two social movements in Spain shows the relevance of emotions in the framing activities performed by them (Laraña 2007, 2008).

### **1. Cognitive dynamics of contention**

This expression is grounded in the effort to relate two dimensions of social movements that until recently were not approached in this way in the literature on frame analysis. The idea is to integrate the focus on the rational factors accounting for participation in social movements, addressed as cognitive frames (Snow and Benford 1988, 1992; Hunt, Benford and Snow 1994), with the focus on emotions as their non-rational but decisive counterpart. Political opportunities for mobilization are included in the rational side of the picture. Thus, the notion of cognitive dynamics of contention implies that reflexive organizations are approached from an expanded conception of frame analysis in order to define the meaning of public issues and get citizens' support. It implies the need to examine how these dynamics relate to certain external social factors, from material and knowledge resources to political opportunities, in order to explain a movement's emergence. Analysing the relations between emotions, cognitive frames and public discourse employed by these organizations is the way we approach our research goal.

For that purpose, we focus on the framing of certain emotions--such as fear, trust and indignation--by certain organizations, and on the way they account for their recruitment and definitional powers. For instance, we emphasise the role of fear to the emotional reactions of the population in the political transformation of Spain, and its strong influence in the shaping of the main political parties and the historical evolution of social movements in Spain (Alvarez Junco 1994; Laraña 1994, 1999). I claimed that, within the oppositional organizations to Franco's dictatorship, the framing of what happened before and during the long civil war (1936-1939) was central to understand the form of the Spanish democratic transition.

---

<sup>7</sup> These techniques have already been applied, with the exception of newspaper analysis. Ethnographic research has been practiced in 8 organizations. I am grateful to Doug McAdam for suggesting newspaper analysis in personal communication.

In her research agenda, Flam suggests that movement organizations re-define dominant ‘feeling rules’ for their members, their opponents and other relevant aspects of reality in order to produce “an emotional re-framing of reality, which often predates and inevitably accompanies its cognitive-normative re-framing” (2000: 19). A useful distinction for understanding this is between ‘cementing emotions,’ which support the current status quo in society, and the subversive counter-emotions, “which movements have to generate in order to be persuasive and win new members” (op. cit: 19). This double focus is justified by the assertion that “every cognitive frame implies emotional framing” and the main rational framing operation (‘diagnostic framing’) “does not only involve that there is a problem and who is responsible for it but also that we should feel angry about it. Prognostic framing tells people what action they should take and what the future prospects are, but it also implies that hope for change or destructive hate are called for” ( op. cit: 24). Flam claims that her research agenda differs from the usual approach to social movements because the analyst’s primary focus has to be on these processes of cognitive and emotional reframing.

Our research also draws on several of Flam’s assumptions regarding the need to identify the relations between emotional and rational framing activities of the organizations we study. Due to its utility for our understanding of the organizations we call reflexive, we follow her proposal to identify the main emotions they promote in the public, and on the way they influence these organizations’ definitional power and capacity to recruit adherents.

Nevertheless, our research agenda differs from Flam’s view of the role of fear in collective action, as a cementing emotion that prevents it, since we do not have empirical evidence on what may be, or not be, an ubiquitous element in the study of emotions and collective action. In the mobilizations against risks of waste incinerators, fear appears to have played the opposite role and produced the motivation frame that environmental organizations needed to get non-partisan support. This ambiguous role of fear asks for a revision of the meaning attributed to certain categories in Flam’s research agenda. The civic movement provides further illustration of this by showing the relevance of a different kind of risk that maintains its traditional meaning. Terrorist organizations pose a traditional threat to the lives of those who are against nationalist ideas and nationalist politics (Laraña 2002).

In both movements, we claim that their definitional power has been, and will be, a source of change in relevant aspects of the kind of social change we envisage: everyday habits, individual consciousness and group interaction in different but related public realms that involve citizens’ relations with nature and among themselves.

## 2. A classic approach on organizations

Our perspective on voluntary organizations draws on the critique of mass society, which emphasized the central role of these organizations in the preservation of a democratic modern society (Kornhauser 1959; Gusfield 1962). The increase and strength of voluntary organizations was viewed as a central aspect of Western modernization. This literature approached the changes in the associational sphere from a typology of social relations which draws on Durkheim's theory of social solidarity and social change (1985).

For Durkheim (1985), the emergence of modern society is manifested in the transformation of the main form of solidarity and the substitution of its traditional mechanic forms for organic ones, which are grounded on *secondary groups* and enhance individual freedom. In mass society theory, the essence of modern society is both a system of civil liberties and a plurality of independent groups that channel the individual's participation and enable him to protect his values and interests (Kornhauser 1959). These groups also enable modern society to protect the system of liberties that constitutes its essence against the totalitarian forces that attempt to destroy it. For that purpose, the social relations that emerge within these organizations play a crucial role. The values of justice and freedom are socially constructed by these organizations and then channelled to the political institutions.

Kornhauser (1959) identified a typology of societies according to the role of an intermediate level of social relations in which secondary groups emerge and proliferate, and which is located between the primary social relations (families and peer groups) and those operating at national scale. Mass and democratic societies are characterised by opposite structures of social relations that are related to different roles of voluntary organizations. While these groups proliferate in democratic societies, and become central for the representation of values and interests of the population, they are very weak and do not play that role in mass societies. The latter open the path for the emergence of totalitarian societies in which the State controls all voluntary organizations, as happened in Germany during the Weimar Republic, Italy under Mussolini and the Soviet Union.

In our work, the critique of the mass society notion is expanded to the study of the relations between voluntary organizations, their cognitive and emotional framing, and the role they play in the social modernization of Spain. Our goal is to examine how some reflexive organizations promote trust in social institutions and, by doing so, contribute to producing the social order, often by talking about social change and acting to bring it about.

### 3. Reflexive organizations and unintended consequences

Our approach is also grounded in a theoretical perspective that highlights dynamics of *social reflexivity* in order to interpret the controversies and mobilizations these movements promoted since 1997. The meaning of this notion widely varies in contemporary sociology and I have proposed to ground it in the study of social organizations in order to ground it in the study of action (Laraña 2001). Thus, we focus on what I have called *reflexive organizations* drawing on Gusfield's work (1994) on the reflexivity of social movements, and on my research on technological risks and collective action (Laraña 2007). This notion is used to approach the relations between structure, action and modes of reasoning of certain organizations that have considerable power of definition on public issues through symbolic and physical activities.

This notion refers to two phenomena which ought to be related: 1) the unintended consequences of techno-scientific development and certain institutional arrangements promoted by local and national governments and by political organizations; and 2) the effects of certain organizations in the emergence and development of public controversies about the aforementioned consequences. The latter refers to the notion of reflexive organizations and is illustrated by the environmental and civic movements mentioned above. This notion is also applied to two new political parties that have emerged within the civic movement since 2005, as indicated later in this paper. Its utility lies in its relation to organizational theory on the unintended consequences of organizational patterns that are frequent in voluntary organizations, as discussed later in this paper.

Under different names, the notion of social reflexivity has a long tradition in sociology. Drawing on the Weberian tradition, Robert Michels' work (1974) on trade unions and the social democratic parties in Germany and Italy coined the concept 'iron law of oligarchy' to refer to a powerful trend that is still considered a main theme in the study of social movements (Flacks 1994). As the latter has indicated, the content of such law pushes for an extreme case in the production of unintended consequences of organizational arrangements:

"Michels was the first—but hardly the last—to observe that the representational character of the party, and the professionalization of its leadership, created an almost inescapable tendency toward 'oligarchy.' The more that party leaders became career politicians, the more stake they had in maintaining their control of the party and using it as a vehicle for their own well-being. The result: bureaucratic, top-down control, the



depoliticizing of the mass membership, the fostering of a privileged elite, corruptions of various kinds, and a growing tendency for the party to abandon its transformative goals” (Flacks 1994).

Merton’s (1964) well known analysis of the impact of bureaucratic organizations on the personality of their employees, and his critique of what Weber viewed as the most rationalized form of organization was another contribution to social theory on the unintended consequences of certain modes of organizing. More recent work by Randal Collins uses the provocative term *organizational drift* to refer to these phenomena (1994). Weber, Michels and Merton highlighted the theoretical relationship between organization and modes of reasoning, which we view as central to understanding how voluntary organizations work and how they are perceived by the citizens. This is related to Weber’s analysis of the strain between substantive and formal rationality, a tension that has been viewed as vanishing in contemporary Western societies, where economic reasoning prevails (Ritzer 1994).

A main point in Michels and Merton is the idea that the production of unintended consequences is a frequent tendency of relevant organizations representing the interests and values of their members, such as political parties and trade unions. In order to compare new and classic political organizations, research on both is needed. A central topic for our research is analyzing if this form of social reflexivity also applies to the voluntary organizations that we are investigating. This can be empirically observed because Michels’ law implies that a trend to goal displacement would be manifested in members’ behavior, especially in organizational leaders. That would be manifest as an inversion of the relation between organizational means and ends. This trend is at the heart of the credibility problems of political parties.

Although we do not have ethnographic data on the classic parties, this limitation might be partially overcome using mass media data about certain cases that show the validity of Michels’ theory. Illustrations of his iron law can be found in many events taking place within the main political parties in Spain, such as the recent political strife within the Popular Party after losing the last general elections in March 2008.<sup>8</sup>

I also emphasize the usefulness of this theory to understand the political modernization of Spain since Franco’s death in 1975. I focus on the relations between

---

<sup>8</sup> In the weeks preceding its main Congress, none of the Popular Party’s leading members dared to present himself as an alternative to its president, in spite of a widespread view that he could not win the next elections.

movements and parties as a main organizational aspect for investigating movements and identifying different periods in the historical evolution of social movements in Spain (Laraña 1994, 1999).

In the case of the mentioned environmental controversy, the unintended consequences of technological development and political action were framed as a threat to the health of the citizens living in the surrounding areas, and this frame resonated with a considerable amount of persons living in the vicinity of incinerators. A parallelism with the effects of nuclear plants was also part of this frame. In the case of the civic movement, certain arrangements promoted by the main political organizations in Spain are increasingly framed by civic organizations as a threat to the principles of equality and liberty established by the Constitution.

#### **4. The idea of the risk society**

The macro idea of the *risk society* also contributed to our research perspective. This idea provides a different and complementary point of view on the unintended consequences of certain social and political arrangements. The prevailing use of this notion views a new kind of risk as an outcome of (reflexive) modernization and emphasises the relevance of controversies on the negative effects of technological development. This is an influential topic in European sociology that remains at the level of theoretical essays that are widely diffused due to the increase of news and concerns on climate change (Beck 1992, 1997; Giddens 1990, 1994; Lash 1996). Some of these essays have provocative insights that contributed to our understanding of the aforementioned environmental controversies in Spain, although they do need empirical research to account for a useful analytical framework.

Highlighting the relevance of the social context in which risk experts work has been one of Beck's major contributions, which is grounded on Weber's analysis of the possibility of a value-free scientific activity, though this source is not acknowledged. Our research confirms that a central feature of environmental controversies is the increasing questioning of the authority of traditional experts on risk evaluation (Laraña 2000a, 2001). An interesting analogy can be made with the problems of credibility faced by professional politicians, as highlighted by the civic movement. Beck (1992, 1997) approaches this topic with two useful notions from his analysis of the social controversies in societies undergoing processes of reflexive modernization, the 'unchaining of politics' and the 'reactivation of the political realm,' with which I have worked elsewhere (Laraña 2005).

However, the theoretical essays on the risk society do not pay any attention to the cognitive dynamics of the contentions to which they attribute great relevance. Instead, they rely on broad assumptions, such as citizens' rationality and the nature of an information society where anyone can retrieve information about technological risks. These assumptions are used to explain the emergence of a 'risk consciousnesses.' These essays leave unexplored a central aspect for explaining risk perception by citizens: the framing of certain technologies as a threat to their lives which are promoted by certain organizations with a considerable definitional power, which we call "reflexive." Among their framing activities, a central one is fear, and this has a strong influence on the individual's motivation to participate in collective action. Hence, the literature on risk faces the same task confronting the field of social movements during the 1980s and 1990s, i.e., developing a consistent analytical framework. The growing concern on climate change reinforces the need for such framework.

Among the contributions of the idea of the risk society to this framework, I highlight approaching new technological hazards that are increasingly manifest in Western societies as both outcome and evidence of the reflexive modernization stage in which they are entering (Beck 1992, 1997; Giddens 1994). New risks are among the negative unintended consequences of this technological development, they also are its product. If we expand the source of reflexive modernization to political transitions we may apply that perspective to the Spanish case as well as others.

### **The unintended consequences of a praised transition**

At its initial period, the modern model of political transition in Spain became an international reference point for many countries due to its non-violent nature and the lack of mobilizations it produced. This political transformation was conducted by Francoist political elites and was characterized by the capitulation or submission of social movements to political parties (Alvarez Junco 1994; Laraña 1999). However, there is strong evidence of its unintended, negative effects twenty years later. Part of this evidence can be found in recent social conflicts about the politics of language use in primary and secondary education and in commercial advertising in some autonomous regions where nationalist parties and institutions play a powerful role in public affairs. The politics of language use that some regional governments are enacting in certain regions, such as the Basque, Catalonia and Galicia, are being framed by certain civic organizations as a threat to the constitutional principle of equality of rights.

Paradoxically, the enactment of nationalist politics reinforced the resonance of this movement's central claim, which affirms that, if nationalist governments achieve their goals, they will create two kinds of citizens with different civil rights. Those not speaking the autochthonous languages, and/or expressing dissent to what civic activists call 'imposed nationalism,' will be second class citizens.<sup>9</sup> These activists framed these politics as a rupture of the State of Law and they also attributed responsibility for this to the central Government due to its politics on nationalism and terrorism in the recent past.

In 2008, this controversy over language use has been expanded to other regions where nationalist parties were not relevant such as the Balearic Islands. This expansion was also due to the increasing mobilization of new civic organizations in the regions where nationalist parties are strong and by the public actions of well known intellectuals that are related to the civic movement.<sup>10</sup>

We approach these facts as the 'black holes' of the Spanish political transition. This term addresses its unintended consequences, such as the contentious political situation of the country in recent years, the strains in public life since the Islamic terrorist attacks of March 11<sup>th</sup> of 2004, and the persistence of Basque terrorism.

### **New politics and new parties**

Meanwhile, the debate over political parties and new forms of political representation has increased in some Spanish voluntary organizations. Although this is not usually expressed in theoretical terms, the ghost of Michels' iron law stays in the air.

In the specialized literature, a paper on American trade unions claimed that they are undergoing a process of revitalization that breaks Michels' law. Voss and Sherman (2000) emphasized new dispositions to collective action, a change in tactics of some unions and the will to circumvent institutional channels for the election process (op. cit: 304), in a similar trend to the one studied by Fantasia twenty years ago (1988). They also highlighted that this change in what they call the 'labor movement' is a paradox for social movement scholars.

In some organizations of the civic movement there are also significant developments in this direction. The expression 'new politics' is often used by their members in order to refer to a new conception of politics and to an alternative type of organization to implement

---

<sup>10</sup> Foro Ermua 4/13/2007, a message to their audience that is made up of members and opinion leaders receiving the organizations's emails ("Amigos del Foro").

<sup>10</sup> "Manifiesto por una lengua común" 7/3/2008.

them. This suggests that the creative power of contemporary movements has produced a set of ideas and events that may be approached as alternatives to Michels' law.

An interesting case is Citizens for Catalonia,<sup>11</sup> a political organization that arose in 2006 as a reaction against the nationalist politics in this region. For an important sector of their affiliates, 'new politics' refers to a primary reason for participating in politics through a new organizational form that enhances individual participation, and not merely the search for power which they viewed as the primary goal of the main political parties in Spain. Developing a horizontal structure, in which decisions arise from the party base, was a central factor to foster these persons' participation in Citizens who used to speak of it as a 'new type of political party.' And conversely, what this sector viewed as the lack of concern with this new party idea by Citizens' executive committee promoted an internal conflict within this party that ended in a split between two factions. Only one year after its foundation, this caused the party's rupture due to a massive abandonment of the critical sector, which presented an alternative list and had the support of 40% of delegates in that Congress.

## Meaning structures

We argue that the idea of horizontal organizations is central to a main motivation frame for participating in a political organization, and not merely a factor to understand this crisis. The search for new politics and new forms of organization is not an activist goal but a *meaning structure* (Cicourel 1964), a fundamental reason to invest time and money in a political party since it 'makes sense' for the individual to do it. The Spanish term for meaning structure —*estructura de sentido*— is more explicit since it addresses its wider meaning. This notion refers to cognitive and emotional frames that assign a positive meaning to participating in organizations representing values and interests, since they produce the motivation to do it (Laraña 1999). These frames entail the individual's identification with an organization, a central emotional element to support a movement. Focusing on this symbolic dynamic is central for explaining the emergence of social movements. Our research findings suggest a strong relation between these kinds of factors and the discourse and practices of individual actors in these organizations in reference to what they call 'new politics.'

The extent to which this assumption can also apply to other reflexive organizations remains plausible but needs further research. The idea of the new politics seems to be

---

<sup>11</sup> Although its official name at present is Citizens – the Party of Citizenship (*Ciudadanos- partido de la ciudadanía*), here I will use their short name since it is the one used by the media.

especially influential when core organizational values are the defence of civil rights and social justice. This is congruent with the original meaning of this term in American politics in the 1950s, when they became an ascending ideology in the Democratic Party that stressed strong support for civil rights legislation and a different approach to the cold war.<sup>12</sup> Also conceptualized as ‘an insurgent movement’ within the Democratic Party, the New Politics supported John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert in their presidential campaigns. The rise of the New Left produced its eclipse as the “purveyor of new ideas within the Democratic Party” (Wikipedia, op. cit.). “The insurgent movement in the Democratic Party that formed around the presidential candidacies of Eugene J. McCarthy and Robert F. Kennedy in the election year of 1968 was referenced as the ‘New Politics.’ The New Politics was supposedly characterized by a concern for the public interest and immune from the claims of specific interest groups” (Wikipedia, op. cit.).

Another reason for the diffusion of the notion new politics comes from the study of new social movements, and is related to a central characteristic of their organizations that Melucci (1989, 1985) called the *self-referential element*. It means that their discourse on social transformation tends to be reflected in its everyday life and in the social relations between their members which show the path to change. Together with the maintenance of an independent public image from political parties, this is also a *performative* aspect which we view as central for these organizations’ success in terms of their recruitment and definitional powers.

A strong reason for the current relevance of the self-referential element in contemporary organizations representing interests and values lies in the problems of credibility faced by political parties today in Western societies. This organizational feature promotes trust, an opposite cementing emotion, and illustrates our argument on the contribution of reflexive organizations to the construction of the social order by promoting changes in the status quo.

In earlier work, we emphasised the importance of this element as a frequent feature of new social movements (Johnston, Laraña and Gusfield 1994). However, we did not focus on the framing power of some organizations to promote certain emotions that are central for their definitional power, such as trust, fear and hope. “*In contrast to cadre-led and centralized bureaucracies of traditional mass parties, new social movement organizations tend to be segmented, diffuse, and decentralized.* While there is considerable variation

---

<sup>12</sup> “The New Politics”, Wikipedia.

according to movement type, the tendency is to considerable autonomy of local sections, where collective forms of debate and decision-making often limit linkages with regional and national organizations” (Johnston, Laraña and Gusfield 1994, emphasis in the original).

The notion of the new politics implies an organizational model grounded in the principles of organizational de-centralization, decreasing relevance of bureaucratic principles, and autonomy of the party’s local chapters. This is another characteristic feature of what we called new social movements in the 1990s, of which the American New Left was a predecessor. However, our data on these parties suggests that this kind of organization is very difficult to implement and to accept by the political party executive committee, even if one of them (Citizens) formally tried to put into practice its organizational implications.

It should come as no surprise that the notion of new politics informs the discourse of the two new political parties, Citizens and Union Progress and Democracy (UpyD), that emerged in Spain since 2005, as off-springs of the civic movement, as attempts to channel the political unrest shown by the aforementioned macro-demonstrations and to represent the unrest with nationalist politics in the regional and national Parliaments. Both arose from two civic movement organizations (!Basta Ya!, Ciutadans or Citizens) in the Basque and Catalan autochthonous regions, where nationalist parties have been in power, or remain powerful, for a long time, and where nationalist feelings are widespread.

There are strong similarities between the civic discourse on the new politics and the discourse of the American New Left, forty years before, which arose as a movement heavily influenced by the civil rights movement (McAdam 1988).<sup>13</sup> This comparison might also be applied to relevant facts in the evolution of these organizations. We refer to organizational conflicts which, as in the aforementioned Citizens’ congress, produced sharp discontinuity in different organizations, their split in two sections, as happened in the New Left’s main organization, Students for a Democratic Society in its 1969 national convention (Sale 1974). In the Catalan case, after having a stunning success in the first local elections they participated in (2006), Citizens’ second congress (July 2007) was characterized by internal strife and a process of de-legitimizing its executive committee which end up with a massive abandonment of the party due to a lack of trust in this committee, whose members were portrayed as mere ‘opportunists’ by the opposition to the official list. The official list was accused of lack of political action and absence of commitment to the new politics.

---

<sup>13</sup> The name of one of its most conspicuous and successful new left movement, the Free Speech Movement, illustrates this.

Three months later, a new party was created, stemming from !Basta Ya! and led by a former high-ranking official of the Socialist Party (Rosa Díez). Right after its creation, the Union Progreso y Democracia leadership promised to apply the organizational implications of the new politics after the 2007 presidential elections, but it still has not done so, a fact which is often justified in terms of avoiding a similar crisis as the one in Citizens. In a recent meeting, one of its leaders affirmed that only people with the will to serve society and the ideals of the party have a place in the party. *Opportunist* persons should refrain from becoming affiliates. This is reminiscent of the aforementioned characteristic of the New Politics in the Democratic Party, which in the Sixties were distinguished by “a concern for the public interest and immune from the claims of specific interest groups” (Wikipedia, op. cit.).

The frequent use of this derogatory word by the new Spanish parties suggests two comments. It is employed to frame the identity of certain individuals in terms of the absence of altruism, or as a breakdown in the relationship between these kinds of motives and those grounded in self-interests. Although viewing these as alternative motives or polar categories for participating in voluntary organizations is not consistent with our data (Laraña 2007), this conception seems to inform its current use in both parties.

At a micro level, this could be related with Michels’ analysis of the way leadership becomes transformed in political organizations. It buttresses his claim that the exercise of power produces a psychological transformation of the leader due to the narcissist traits he acquires, expressed in ‘an unjustified belief in his personal greatness’ and in the ‘will to dominate other people’—which he views as inherent to human beings. These social psychological bases of Michels’ theory have been viewed as grounded in the fundamental dilemma informing his work: the inescapable contradiction between democracy and organization (Linz 1984). This seems to persist in the mentioned attempts to articulate new political organization breaking with his iron law.

This contradiction resembles a similar contraposition of the basic categories which account for the widespread problem of distrust in politicians and parties, in the same way that the contraposition between altruism and egoism underlies the mentioned use of the word ‘opportunist’ in the new parties discussed above. However, both seem to be grounded in a classic and common view of the nature of social problems as integrated by two variables, one of which is the independent one. That view has been criticized as belonging to the past and considered an obstacle to approaching the complex nature of social problems (Melucci 1989;



Bell 1974). This criticism is consistent with our data on the reasons for participation in voluntary organizations, many of which cannot be explained according to one of these categories.

The expression 'new politics' has also been widely diffused by Barack Obama, in his political writings and in his successful presidential campaign in the U.S. His use of this notion focuses on the separation between current politics and citizens' daily lives, in his own eloquent words: "of millions of Americans who are in the job of looking for work, starting business, helping their kids with their homework," and who "understand that politics today is a business and not a mission, and what passes for debate is little more than spectacle" (Obama 2006: 24). This conception was the ground for his proposal of a different kind of politics that will reflect citizens' daily lives, which have to be reconstructed from the best of American political traditions, which "will have to account for the darker aspects of our past," and which has to be embodied in "a Government that truly represents these Americans" (2006: 25).

For Obama, implementing this idea of the new politics means going beyond the narrow ideological approaches of both of the parties and recognizing that a president has to be a 'bridge builder,' a man capable of producing consensus between opposed factions. This has been a main frame repeated in his campaign, a demand for unity of all Americans. This frame is consistent with the implementation of his electoral campaign and by the high level appointments to his administration that he has made of persons who were his opponents during the presidential campaign, or who had worked for the Clinton administration.

During the campaign, Obama's new politics also implied a strategy to create new coalitions that were energized by their links to his organization, which was separate from the Democratic Party establishment. These coalitions with *power brokers*, including leaders of local unions, community organizations and churches, played a crucial role in Obama's ability to secure his party's nomination, and ultimately to win the general election, since, at least initially, Obama did not have the backing of the party elite, who were largely behind his Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton.<sup>14</sup>

A power broker is a person who can influence people to vote towards a particular candidate "in exchange for political or financial benefits"; he can also "negotiate deals with other power brokers to meet their aims"; he can "play both sides" and "wield great influence over voters" (Wikipedia). In the free encyclopaedia, two features of this figure are relevant

---

<sup>14</sup> David Minkus in personal communication at the ISSC, 11/7/08.

for our analysis of reflexive organizations: 1) “brokers maintain their influence by denying loyalty to a political party or other political label”; and 2) the possibility to consider the mass media as a power broker “since it can influence many people on a national level. However, the media reports many conflicting opinions to influence poorly defined undecided voters without targeting their context such as socio-economic class and regional culture” (Wikipedia). We suggest that some reflexive organizations, as the ones we mention here, can play a similar role due to their definitional power.

Obama’s new politics and his unexpected electoral success also appear related to a recurrent prognostic frame, spelled as a discourse on unity and in his will to govern above both parties and to be a president for all citizens. This promise was presented in a self-referential way, since this unity discourse was exemplified during his campaign and he was able to bring back the mass articulation of the civil rights movements and to bring the masses to his rallies.<sup>15</sup> Thus the new politics recuperated their original meaning indicated before.

Part of the interest this campaign had for our research perspective lies in the fact that Obama is not a proper party man, but an outsider who had to come from the desert of the public with the mass of people pushing him to step onto the national political stage, but who at the same time, used the media in a very smart way to project his unifying image.<sup>16</sup> An intelligent combination of grass roots discourse and sophisticated media strategy was central for his success. This illustrates our claim that social movements become a platform of new political elites in complex societies, as happened in Spain right after Franco’s death (Melucci 1989; Laraña 1999).

## Conclusions

This paper presents a summary of our research perspective and the central notions informing our ongoing study of voluntary organizations that focuses on the definitional power of these organizations in current controversies in Spain. We emphasise the role these organizations play in the process of social change this country is undergoing since the approval of the 1978 Constitution. The empirical data to which this perspective applies are the subject of a future publication. Comments on this paper are welcome.

In order to be useful for our research perspective and our knowledge on voluntary organizations, the theories and notions I outlined here need revision and contextualization.

---

<sup>15</sup> David Minkus in personal communication at the ISSC, 11/07/08

<sup>16</sup> David Minkus in personal communication at the ISSC, 11/07/08

This is one of our research goals because theory should be a lighthouse illuminating the path for social scientists. It is customary in sociological theory to use broad and abstract structural categories to refer to the social world, but their relation to the latter is seldom clear. Often sociologists accept as self-evident conceptual categories coined by brilliant classical sociologists, like Durkheim and Weber, and contemporary ones like Beck and Giddens, without verifying their utility to understand the world in which we live.<sup>17</sup>

In the case of Durkheim and other analysts of mass society, their categories were coined decades ago and were adapted to the social context of an industrial society that is different from ours in many aspects. The classical theory of the mass society, and its typology of social relations, illustrates this argument. The focus on formal secondary groups does not enable the analyst to grasp the web of informal networks that can be mobilized in certain situations of collective empowerment by using non formal groups and the new information technologies. This informal organization becomes central to explaining the process of social change that is taking place in Spain during the last ten years.

The notion of ‘modernization risk’ is useful for identifying unanticipated consequences of political decisions and social arrangements, and for analysing the motives of those who participate in environmental organizations. However, this notion has only been developed in theoretical essays and needs to be grounded in empirical research to provide a useful analytical framework to study these collective phenomena.

The combination of assumptions and insights that inform our research perspective operates at three levels of analysis: the macro idea of the risk society, the meso level of voluntary organizations, and the micro level of social interaction within organizations that emerged out of the political sphere and have an increasing symbolic power in relevant public controversies. Analysing the relations between these three levels is a useful path for the development of an analytical framework with which to study these controversies and the role played by these reflexive organizations in their promotion and impacts.

---

<sup>17</sup> Aaron Cicourel in personal communication.

## References

- Adell, Ramón. 2005. "Manifestómetro: recuento de multitudes y significados de la movilización." *Empiria*, No. 9, January-June.
- Alvarez Junco, José. 1994. "Movimientos sociales en España: del modelo tradicional a la modernidad postfranquista." In *Los nuevos movimientos sociales: De la ideología a la identidad*, edited by Enrique Laraña and Joseph Gusfield. Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, Madrid.
- Beck, Ulrich. 1992. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1997. "La reinención de la política: hacia una teoría de la modernización reflexiva." In U. Beck, A. Giddens and S. Lash. *Modernización reflexiva: Política, tradición y estética en el orden social moderno*. Alianza Universidad, Madrid.
- Bell, Daniel. 1976. *El advenimiento de la sociedad postindustrial*. Alianza Universidad, Madrid.
- Cicourel, Aaron. 1982 [1964]. *El método y la medida en sociología*. Editora Nacional, Madrid. Originally published in English, *Method and Measurement in Sociology*.
- Collins, Randall. 1994. *Four Sociological Traditions*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Durkheim, Emilio. 1985. "La división del trabajo social." Planeta, Barcelona.
- Eyerman, Ron. 2005. "How Social Movements Move." In *Emotions and Social Movements*, edited by H. Flam and D. King. London: Routledge.
- Fantasia, Rick. 1988. *Cultures of Solidarity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Flacks, Richard. 1994. "The Party is Over- ¿Qué hacer ante la crisis de los partidos políticos?" In *Los nuevos movimientos sociales. De la ideología a la identidad*, edited by Enrique Laraña and Joseph Gusfield. Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, Madrid.
- Flam, Helena. 2005. "Emotions' map: a research agenda." In *Emotions and Social Movements*, edited by H. Flam and D. King. London: Routledge.
- Ganuzo E. and J. M. Robles. 2006. *Modelos de acción pública en una sociedad asimétrica*. REIS 113.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. London: Polity Press. Versión española en Alianza Universidad, Madrid, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. *Beyond Left and Right. The Future of Radical Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Traducido al español en Cátedra, 1996.

- Gusfield, Joseph. 1994. "The reflexivity of social movements: Collective behavior and mass society revisited." In *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, edited by Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston and Joseph Gusfield. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Hunt, Scott, Robert Benford, and David Snow. 1994. "Identity Fields: Framing Processes and the Social Construction of Movement Identities." In *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, edited by Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston and Joseph Gusfield. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Johnston, Hank, Enrique Laraña, and Joseph Gusfield. 1994. "Identities, Grievances and Ideologies of Everyday Life." In *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, edited by Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston and Joseph Gusfield. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Kornhauser, William. 1959. *The Politics of the Mass Society*. Glencoe: The Free Press. Traducción al castellano *Aspectos políticos de la sociedad de masas*. Amorrortu, Buenos Aires, 1969.
- Laraña, Enrique and Christopher Rootes. 2000. "Policy Making and Environmental Movements: A Comparative Research on Waste Management in the United Kingdom and Spain." Dirección General de Ciencia y Tecnología de la Comisión de las Comunidades Europeas.
- Laraña, Enrique and J. Gusfield, eds. 1994. *Los nuevos movimientos sociales: De la ideología a la identidad*. Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, Madrid.
- Laraña, Enrique. 1975. "A Study of Student Political Activism at the University of California, Berkeley." M.A. paper, University of California Santa Barbara.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1978. "El movimiento estudiantil en la sociedad industrial avanzada." Doctoral Dissertation, Universidad Complutense de Madrid.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994b. "Social Movements in Spain." *Tocqueville Revue*, Vol. 15, No. 1: 119-140.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. *La construcción de los movimientos sociales*. Alianza, Madrid.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999b. "Modernización, reflexividad y riesgo. Bases teóricas de un nuevo espacio para la sociología." In *Sociología y Medio Ambiente: el estado de la cuestión*, edited by M. Pardo. Ediciones de la Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000. "Waste Policy and Industry in a Contentious Environment." *GAIA*, No. 4.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000b. "Teoría y método en el estudio de la reflexividad social y los riesgos tecnológicos." In *La constitución social de la subjetividad*, edited by E. Crespo and C. Soldevilla. Entinema, Madrid.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 2001. "Reflexivity, Risk and Collective Action Over Waste Management: A Constructive Proposal." *Current Sociology* 49, 1.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. "La construcción social de discursos rivales sobre el riesgo. Modernización y acción colectiva." In *El reto de la participación. Movimientos sociales y organizaciones: una panorámica comparativa*, edited by José Manuel Robles Morales. Manuel Machado, Madrid.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2005. "Risks, frames and emotions in contemporary social movements." Paper presented at the 37th World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology, Stockholm, July 5-9.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2007. "Asociación y modernización social. La relevancia de un tema clásico." In *Lo que hacen los sociólogos. Homenaje a Carlos Moya*. Madrid, Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas.
- Lash, Scott, Bronislaw Szerszynski, Brian Wynne, eds. 1996. *Risk, Environment and Modernity: Towards a New Ecology*. London: Sage.
- Linz, Juan. 1984. "Pasado, presente y futuro de la sociedad española." In *España: un presente para el futuro*, edited by J. Linz. Instituto de Estudios Económicos, Madrid.
- Maintz, Renate. 2005. "Social Science Utilization of Natural Science Theories and Research Methods." Paper presented at the 37th World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology, Stockholm, July 5-9.
- Mannheim, Karl. 1987. "Ideología y utopía." Fondo de Cultura Económica, México.
- Melucci, Alberto. 1989. *Nomads of the Present*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. *Challenging Codes. Collective Action in the information age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Merton, Robert. 1964. *Teoría y estructura sociales*, Fondo de Cultura, México.
- Michels, Robert. 1984. *Los partidos políticos. Un estudio sociológico de las tendencias oligárquicas de la democracia moderna*. Amorrortu editores, Buenos Aires.
- Obama, Barack. 2006. *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Pérez-Díaz, Victor. 1993. *La primacía de la sociedad civil. El proceso de formación de la España democrática*. Alianza Editorial, Madrid.
- Ritzer, Georges. *La macdonalización de la sociedad. Una investigación sobre el carácter cambiante de la vida contemporánea*.
- Sale, Kinpatrick. 1974. "S.D.S." New York: Vintage Books.

Snow, David and Benford, Robert. 1988. "Ideology, Frame Resonance and Participant Mobilization." In Klandermans et al. *International Social Movement Research*, Vol. 1, JAI Press, Greenwich.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1992. "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest." In *The Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by Aldon Morris and Carol Mueller. London: Yale University Press.

Snow, David, Rochford Burke, Steven Worden, and Robert Benford. 1986. "Frame Alignment Process, Micromobilization and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review*, 5: 464-481.

Weber, Max. 1944. "Economía y sociedad." Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico.

Wert, Jorge. 1995. "Sobre la cultura política. Legitimidad, desafección y malestar." In *Culturas, Estados y Ciudadanos: una aproximación al multiculturalismo en Europa*, edited by Lamo de Espinosa. Alianza, Madrid.

---

### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> "Policy Making and Environmental Movements: a Comparative Research on Waste Management in the United Kingdom and Spain", Dirección General de Ciencia y Tecnología de la Comisión de las Comunidades Europeas (contrato ENV-CT96-0239); 1-6-1996 a 20-12-1999. IP: Enrique Laraña y Christopher Rootes.