

# UC Davis

## UC Davis Previously Published Works

### Title

Putting Social Movements in their Place: Explaining Opposition to Energy Projects in the United States, 2000–2005

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4fx5m6jb>

### Journal

Contemporary Sociology A Journal of Reviews, 43(2)

### ISSN

0094-3061

### Author

Beamish, Thomas D

### Publication Date

2014-03-01

### DOI

10.1177/0094306114522415bb

Peer reviewed

# Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews

<http://csx.sagepub.com/>

---

## Putting Social Movements in their Place: Explaining Opposition to Energy Projects in the United States, 2000–2005

Thomas D. Beamish

*Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 2014 43: 235

DOI: 10.1177/0094306114522415bb

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://csx.sagepub.com/content/43/2/235>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



American Sociological Association

Additional services and information for *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* can be found at:

**Email Alerts:** <http://csx.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://csx.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Feb 27, 2014

[What is This?](#)

seven different sites). The book is then organized around four empirical themes: the types of networks that characterize the daily life of the poor and the middle classes in contemporary metropolitan Brazil; the kinds of sociability these networks support and the effects that segregation has on both networks and sociability; the differential impact of diverse types of networks and forms of sociability in actual living conditions of the urban poor; and the mechanisms through which networks shape poverty. In exploring these four themes, Marques uses, in both skillful and critical ways, extant scholarship—sometimes to confirm existing findings (as when he shows, for example, that networks influence not only the type of work the poor access but also the job's more or less protected status, and the monetary earnings it produces), and other times to show how his findings either qualify or challenge established findings (as when he dissects the role homophilia and localism have in the network effects, and when he examines the impact of segregation on types of networks).

Although Marques mentions the recursive relationships between living conditions on the one hand, and networks and sociability on the other, most of the attention is focused on the effects of the latter on the former without much emphasis on the reverse—that is, on the ways in which poverty and marginality shape lived relations. After giving detailed empirical consideration to the diverse structures of the networks of the urban poor (and the way they either connect them to, or isolate them from, folks living in other areas) and to the forms of sociability they engender (based mostly on family and neighborhood or on work, church, or associations), the author concentrates his efforts on dissecting the manifold ways in which local and extra-local ties shape poor people's opportunities both in the labor market and in their access to state services. On this latter topic, the findings point to the absence of personalized exchanges between state agents or political brokers and citizens in granting access to welfare services (of the kind repeatedly highlighted in the literature on patronage or "clientelist" politics).

Scholars of poverty and marginality in the Americas, as well as those particularly interested in the effects of networks on the daily

lives of those at the bottom of the socio-symbolic order and, more generally, in a truly relational approach to social phenomena, will have a lot to learn and emulate from this book.

---

*Putting Social Movements in their Place: Explaining Opposition to Energy Projects in the United States, 2000–2005*, by **Doug McAdam** and **Hilary Schaffer Boudet**. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 266pp. \$27.99 paper. ISBN: 9781107650312.

THOMAS D. BEAMISH  
*University of California, Davis*  
 tdbeamish@ucdavis.edu

---

Why do communities respond so differently to the risks associated with the same industries, technologies, and development projects? If it were qualities intrinsic to the industry, technology, or proposed development the answer might be easier to answer. That is, if "objective" benefits or liabilities could be accurately assessed they might reliably predict public response. Rarely is it so simple. In *Putting Social Movements in their Place*, Doug McAdam and Hilary Schaffer Boudet seek to answer this and related questions. They contend that community response to the risk of energy siting proposals—including hydroelectric, wind, nuclear, cogeneration, and liquefied natural gas facilities (LNG)—reflects the distinctive conjuncture of civic, political, and socio-economic factors.

Through a comparative study of twenty communities "at risk for local energy projects," McAdam and Boudet share important findings: results that should spur further research in social movement studies (SMS) on emergent collective action as well as the reasons behind their most consistent finding: non-mobilization. Importantly, while non-mobilization was the most common community response, even modest contestation impacted the chances of project approval and installation. The short of it: while contention and social movement are uncommon, they powerfully influence project outcomes.

McAdam and Boudet's study and findings contrast with those of SMS where contentious politics, established movements, and

successful social change are both focal objects and presumed commonplace. At the outset, the authors make it clear they intend to put SMS and these and related assumptions to the test. They specifically focus on what they deem to be three shortcomings of SMS: the penchant to select cases on the dependent variable (i.e., contention, mobilization, social change); the consistent study of established movements; and the emphasis on regional and national movements rather than local and emergent collective action(s). These, the authors contend, have led to erroneous impressions and conclusions within SMS.

To put SMS to the test, the authors organize their efforts via four research questions. The questions also provide the pretext for their valuable insights regarding contentious politics, generally, and specifically what predicts localized and community based locally unwanted land uses (LULU) and not in my backyard (NIMBY) movements. The questions include: how much oppositional mobilization happens across the communities they study; what conditions explain mobilization; what impact does community mobilization have on the proposed projects; what predicts the spread of local resistance to broader regional movements in some but not other locales? Because these questions organize their effort, I will also use them to structure my review.

Before addressing these questions, however, a quick word on methods is in order. The book is an exemplar based on its comparative breadth and multi-methods application. McAdam and Boudet mobilize in-depth interviews, fieldwork, and archival data to generate variables for comparison and use of fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis and quantitative measures to draw conclusions. They specifically compare their cases by variables such as "classic mobilization factors" (i.e., object risks, political opportunity, and civic capacity) and "contextual factors" (i.e., familiarity with facility/industry, local oppositional experience, and economic hardship) on the presence or absence of local contentious politics. The authors account and compare the level of local contention through empirical tallies of op-ed letters, submitted comments to formal review processes (EIS), public protest events, and lawsuits. With these as independent and dependent variables they carefully mobilize their data,

compare their twenty cases (randomly selected from some forty-nine initially identified potential cases), and pursue a rigorous analysis.

Their first question, how much oppositional mobilization happens across the communities, goes to the heart of their effort and provides the fulcrum for their critique of contemporary SMS. Local political contention and social movement mobilization among the "at risk communities" was exceptionally low. Only half of the twenty communities showed any sign of opposition, only twenty-seven protest events and three lawsuits were catalogued across the cases, and only two of the twenty cases involved sustained mobilizations. Moreover, the two sustained mobilizations protested the same LNG proposal, in the same region, and both in California. Based on these findings, the authors are emphatic: SMS' penchant for selecting and studying cases of mobilization has led to a distorted representation of contentious politics and movements.

The second question regards what causal conditions explain and predict mobilization. In this, the authors develop a conjunctural model, reviving aspects developed in SMS, but that are currently deployed in ways that do not lend themselves to understanding emergent collective action(s). Specifically, they find that political opportunity and civic capacity play an important role in predicting the local potential for collective action(s) and context variables such as familiarity with the project/industry, economic hardship, and experience with past proposals to supply local populations the motivation to support or oppose them. It is therefore the conjuncture of political opportunity and civic capacity that explains the most frequent situation, non-mobilization, while the chance of contentious politics increases when important context variables are considered.

The third question McAdam and Boudet take up, the impact mobilization has on a proposed project, focuses on the effect that local mobilization has on outcomes such as project approval and installation. Treating local mobilization as the dependent variable, the authors find that low-to-absent levels of opposition are "more or less sufficient" to explain the approval of energy projects in ninety percent of the cases they studied.

The same cannot be said that when a locale resists, disapproval is assured. In this scenario, the authors find inter-governmental conflict when coupled with local opposition to be the best explanatory “path” toward disapproval of a given energy project. However, approval does not mean installed. The path toward project completion also reflects economic factors linked to commercial operators and therefore has little directly to do with issues of local mobilization per se.

Their final motivating question regards what predicts the spread of local resistance to a broader regional movement in what the authors term “scale shift.” In only two of twenty cases did such scale shift occur, reflecting the pivotal role that state regulators can play in providing political opportunities by “brokering” links among local groups and up-scaling them to regional movements. State regulators also helped “bridge” oppositional frames among the involved protest groups, specifically fishermen and environmentalists, who previously had not expressed aligned interest but who collectively opposed proposed LNG terminals on the Gulf and West Coasts.

Exercising a reviewer’s privilege, I will note that while there is power in pursuing many cases and operationalizing such large “N” comparisons, there is also of course a commensurate loss of depth: in this instance the role of culture and the overall style of the book are the collateral damage. On the culture and protest front, while *Putting Social Movements in their Place* provides a very important cut at community level mobilization that hints at the importance of variations in local and regional culture, comparing twenty cases means that capturing culture of this kind is nearly impossible (as the authors admit). Yet in reading the community cases, they obviously reflected variation that screamed of distinctive political and cultural “stuff” and the political-cultural repertoire relied on to locally interpret what was “at stake” with each energy proposal—whether they were passively accepted, supported, or actively opposed. Political culture and its play in emergent collective action is hidden in concepts like “civic capacity,” “familiarity with an industry,” and even in “economic hardship” as well as entirely missed when pursued as a “variable.”

Another issue regards a simple matter of style. The book frequently exited narrative in favor of serial lists, outlines, case summaries, and data tables—and therefore at times took on the ponderous feel of an extended peer-reviewed journal article or white paper. In this regard, the text erred in the direction of presenting the evidence, which for the reader at times can be off-putting but can hardly be judged as “in error”! That said, the rigor and findings make *Putting Social Movements in their Place* well worth the read and a place on one’s proverbial bookshelf. Therefore, notwithstanding these small criticisms, indeed criticisms that in some sense reflect conscious trade-offs rather than faults or failures, the book offers a compelling argument that will undoubtedly be influential in SMS.

---

*G.H. Mead: A Reader*, by **George Herbert Mead**, edited by Filipe Carreira da Silva. New York, NY: Routledge, 2011. 342pp. \$49.95 paper. ISBN: 9780415556262.

PRISCILLA DUNK-WEST  
 University of South Australia  
 priscilla.dunk-west@unisa.edu.au

---

The publication of *G.H. Mead: A Reader* has the welcome potential to incite a Meadian renaissance. This is because although George Herbert Mead is a prominent theorist, his publications can be difficult to access. Early writing about Mead is obfuscated by questions around authenticity and authorship of the source material cited and this volume is a welcome antidote to this problem. Mead is celebrated as one of the most significant figures in sociology and those who appreciate his work regularly lament his neglect in the sociological canon.

The editor, Filipe Carreira da Silva, notes that his selection of Mead’s work has been carefully considered in relation to what already exists in the literature. In what must have been a difficult task, he has skillfully selected “the most relevant of Mead’s contributions to contemporary social sciences” (p. xi). Thus, *G.H. Mead: A Reader* only contains work *directly* attributable to Mead. Previously published articles sit alongside newly transcribed text from Mead’s handwritten