

Chapter Nine

Individual Surveys in Rallies (INSURA).

A New Tool for Exploring Transnational Activism?

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Introduction

Social movement understanding has been dominated for a long time by a legitimist bias that conceived of demonstrators and protest actions as the product of deprivation and abnormal conduct. With the emergence of resource mobilisation theory (RMT), these interpretations have been radically replaced by models that emphasise the costs and benefits of participation in collective action as well as the importance of social movement organisations in mobilising resources and distributing positive or negative incentives. RMT was further refined by the growing importance in explanatory models of the so-called 'political opportunity structure', which helped to stress contextual factors in collective action. To date, structural factors, political contexts, organisations and not the actors themselves, have been at the centre of social movement research for more than thirty years. That direction has been further reinforced by the quasi-exclusive recourse to methods such as organisational surveys or protest events analysis (PEA).

As a result, scholars have certainly gone too far in the rejection of the actors themselves, those who engage in collective action, their social and biological characteristics, their very motivations and their irreducible heterogeneity. Even the more recent developments of social movement theory, by taking into account the cultural turn and further hybridising between US and European research, has left unexplored the individual who actually participates in demonstrations, protest activities and, broadly speaking, social movements.

On the contrary, students of political participation, in addition to studying voting behaviour, have also investigated the so-called unconventional forms of social and political participation. Based on opinion polls conducted in many Western countries, researchers have tried to study political attitudes toward protest. The modes of actions investigated, ranging from signing petitions and lawful demonstrations to damaging property, have since become a permanent item