

Section «Political sciences»

Revisiting constructivist approach in social movement studies

Tarasova Ekaterina

Postgraduate

Södertörn University, School of Social Sciences, Stockholm, Sweden

E-mail: ekaterina.tarasova@sh.se

The constructed nature of social and political processes has been broadly acknowledged [Snow, Rochford Worden Benford 1986, Snow Benford 2000, Johnston Klandermans 1995, Gamson Mayer 1996, Zald 1996, Kurzman 1996, Diani 1996, Koopmans Duyvendak 1995, Koopmans Olzak 2004, Bröer Duyvendak 2009].

The leading constructivist perspective in social movement studies is a framing approach [Snow Rochford Worden Benford 1986, Snow Benford 2000, Zald 1996]. Sometimes successful framing is described as one of the resources that the movement possesses and converts into the opportunity [McCarthy, McAdam, Zald 1996]. Benford and Snow employ Goffman's definition of frames in their approach that says that frames are "schemata of interpretation" [Benford Snow 2000:614]. They further develop the concept of frames by singling out the process of frame alignment. Frame alignment is the measuring unit for social movement studies that demonstrates whether the frames of activists and citizens coincide. Snow and Benford distinguish also several tasks of framing processes such as diagnostic, prognostic, motivational and alongside resonance. Each of them is responsible for particular aspect of framing processes. Diagnostic task accounts for problem identification and articulation, prognostic task stands for the strategies to solve named problems, motivational task is responsible for providing a reason and a impetus for action [Benford Snow 2000:615]. Benford and Snow denote the significance of frame resonance because "the more central or salient the espoused beliefs, ideas, and values of a movement to the target of mobilization, the greater the probability of their mobilization" [Benford Snow 2000:621]. The point in such conceptualization is to investigate whether the framing processes carrying out by activists find the audience, affect public opinion and cause, accordingly, mass mobilization.

However, this approach has certain analytical disadvantages. Although Benford and Snow agree that political opportunities structures and cultural opportunities and constrains matter for successful framing processes they do not specify exactly how the intertwinement between them could be accomplished. Framing approach responds to the key analytical problems related to the study of emergence and mobilization of social movements such as the factors inducing citizens to take part in the movements. This set of factors is targeted at revealing how the social construction leads citizens to perceive the issues at stake in a specific way and act upon it. Hence, this approach is movement-centered and leaves out the cultural contexts and other frames of the social movements antagonists. Even though the cultural context and constrains are named by Snow and Benford as influencing mobilization these issues are not rendered by the suggested frameworks. They put forward the concept of "master frames" that intend to cover the broader picture but as they depict this kind of frames it becomes clear that Snow and Benford broadly refer to the cultural settings and the analytical value of such concept occurs to be vague. Zald and McAdam [1996] argue that among others such topic as frame contests between the movement and other actors' frames has been blurred in previous discussion of the notion of framing processes. I consider this to be quite significant critique

to framing approach and its capacity to study how framing processes affect mobilization. Framing approach is targeted at analyzing frames developed by the movement but the notion of cultural context and also frames of movement antagonists remains underdeveloped, even though its importance has been noticed within this approach. Therefore, public discourses are not taken into account. To put it another way, frames are smaller entities and at certain point they constitute a particular discourse. But framing approach leaves aside the whole discourses narrowing down the cultural context for social movements.

The notion of discourse presupposes several groups of actors competing over the meanings construction. Hence, the notion of discourse will enlarge the social movement studies by comparing its framing activities with the performance of their antagonists. At the same time discourse is focused on power relations in the text while framing processes does not deal with the notion of power as such. Thus, discourse analysis as a theory and method seems to respond to the conceptual problems identified previously in the framing approach to social movement studies.

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