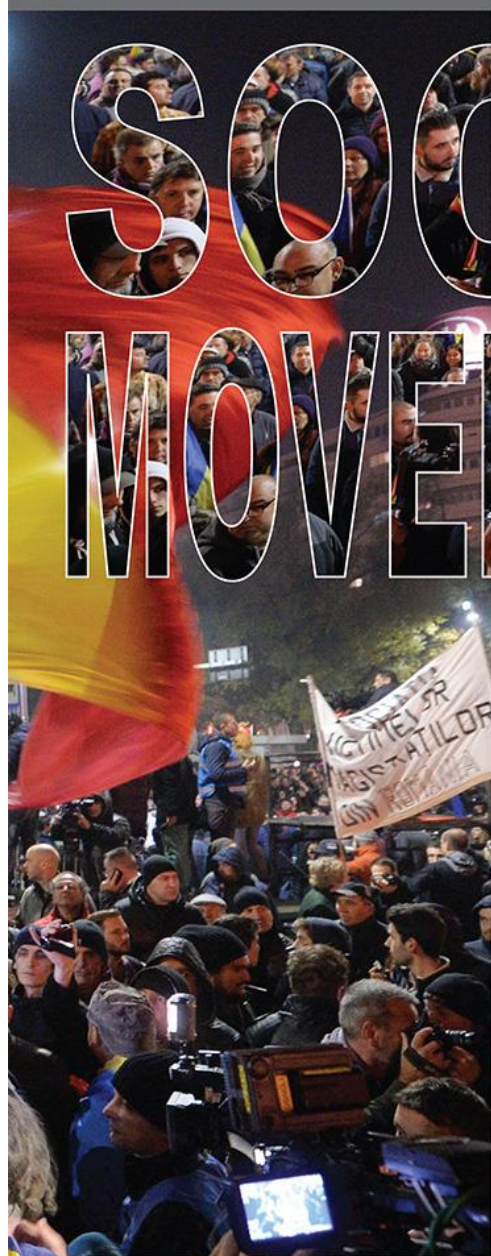




SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

*in Central and
Eastern Europe*

*A renewal of protests
and democracy*

Editors:
IONEL N. SAVA,
GEOFFREY PLEYERS

Second edition,
revised and updated



Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe

A renewal of protests and democracy

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Ionel Nicu Sava, Geoffrey Pleyers (eds.)

With an Introduction by James M. Jasper



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PREFACE

Geoffrey Pleyers

Social scientists from Europe, the US and Eurasia took part in the conference “Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe” organized by the University of Bucharest and the Research Committee 47 “Social classes and social movements” of the International Sociological (ISA47) on May 11-12, 2015.

Thanks to the mobilization of ISA 47 and of the local organizers, the conference was a success in at least three aspects. Firstly, its large audience and the 76 presented papers, mostly by young scholars, testify the renewed interest for social movement studies in the region. Secondly, the quality of most papers and discussions that followed in many panels were particularly insightful. Participants combined first hand empirical data and insightful analyses, drawing on case studies, surveys or interviews to provide thoughtful perspective on a wide range of social movements and protests but also on the challenges to democracy and society in the region. Thirdly, this conference was very timely. It addressed the emerging dynamics of protests and citizenship and became a forecast for a recent but otherwise vivid renewal of social movements and social movement studies in Central and Eastern Europe.

On a larger scale, a quarter of century after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Central and Eastern Europe is seldom the focus of the attention and research by international journalists and social movement scholars. With the exception of rare protests in Moscow and the preoccupying situation in Ukraine, scarce notice from protests and social movements in the region crosses the lines to Western Europe and global news. Likewise, until recently social movements have not been considered a major topic by most scholars, universities and research centers in the region.

The chapters gathered in this book show how mistaken they are. A closer look at protests and civil society in the region provides another panorama and empirical studies point to a renewal of social movements, protests and citizens’ initiatives that constitute a new wave of mobilization and a new generation of civil society actors, as Ionel N. Sava maintains in one of the chapters.

A third wave of social movements and citizens’ initiatives

In the 1970s and 1980s, various Central European countries were already the epicentre of innovative political thoughts and of social movements and cultures of resistance renewals. The ideas, concepts and practices of “anti-politics” (Elzbet Ciżewska-Martyńska, 2015) arose in the struggle against authoritarian regimes. The culture of activism and the project of anti-politics continue to resonate with the culture of politics and vision of the world of activists of the 21st century. In Poland, one of the most extraordinary

union of the 20th century opposed the authoritarian regime by combining social, national and cultural stakes (Touraine, Dubet, Wieviorka, Strzelecki, 1982).

Around the region, citizens, poets and intellectuals promoted a politics from below and played a leading role in the re-invention of civil society at the regional and global scale (Kaldor, 2003). While separated by the iron curtains, Central and Eastern European progressive intellectuals, social movements and popular protests were not only part of the emerging global civil society but forerunners of different ways to think and practice politics and democracy, bringing inspiration to committed intellectuals and progressive citizens worldwide.

This process concluded a quarter of century ago, when peaceful popular protests in Central and Eastern Europe brought down the Iron Curtain. Bringing to an end the long struggle against authoritarian pro-Soviet regimes, they opened a new hope, for a global era of peace and social progress.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Central European countries have quickly turned to market economies and, with few exceptions, to political democracy indeed. Most countries have joined the European Unions and even the NATO. Almost all run regular elections and have a significant NGO sector. The transition to a formal and institutional democracy appears as a wide success. The excitement with elections and institutional democracy however did not last for long in most countries. At the end of the 1990s, public participation rates quickly lowered across the region (Howard, 2003). Citizens seldom mobilize and civil society is rather institutionalized and run by professional NGOs. In the meanwhile, the “post-democracy” regime that Colin Crouch (2004) denounces in Western Europe looks however even more accurate in the Central and Eastern part of the continent. While formal democracy is now solidly established in most countries of the regions, the wealth and substance of democracy has been challenged by the collusion between economic and political elites and by series of corruption scandals.

As it happened in Latin America (Pearce, 2004), the NGOs that dominated the decades after the end of dictatorship have progressively been contested and replaced by social movements, more connected to the population and whose claims often had more social and political dimensions. A new generation of citizens has grown. Their claims and perspective progressively replace the ones of the first post-communism generation, developing protest movements rather than joining institutional NGOs (Jacobsson & Saxonberg, 2012; Sava, 2015).

In recent years, multiple signs of change in this landscape have grown. City square occupations in the region were ignored by regional and global media, in spite of the fact that they featured large and passionate crowds in some cities and countries. Citizens of Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania have mobilized to denounce corruption and to claim for more democratic and ethical regimes. In 2015, thousands of Poles went down to the streets to defend democracy, independent justice and the rule of law.

All over Europe, the *Indignados* and *Occupy* movements in Western Europe denounced the rising inequalities as a threat for democracy. A wide range of similar movements that stand for a deeper democracy also emerged in Central and Eastern Europe, testifying the rose of a “second generation” of democratic movements (Ionel Sava in this volume and Jacobsson, 2015) after the 1989 protest waves and in opposition to the “NGO-ization” of civil society in the region. As such, in 2013, young people took a

leading role in the creative protests reclaiming more democracy in Sofia (Baruh, 2015). There were also mass protests against the political corruption that led to the approval of a gold mining project in Romania as well against law projects that endanger the freedom of expression in Hungary. Youth have also reclaimed fair elections and more democracy in Moscow and St-Petersburg, and massively mobilized in Armenia (Ishkanian, 2015). Across Europe, these movements emerged partly as a “generation movement”, as it mobilized young citizens belonging to a generation that has grown up in a neoliberal environment of income insecurity and diminished welfare, where neither work nor public services can be taken for granted.

While deeply national, these movements also share some dimensions with the 2010’s global wave of protests, that saw activists all over the world coming to the streets to denounce the collusion between political, economic and media elites and claiming, asserting and implementing a more ethical and deeper democracy, social justice and dignity. After 1968, the concept of the “new social movement” (Touraine, 1978) was employed to distinguish actors mobilized on more cultural claims from the “old” workers’ movement. Later literature connected these “new social movements” to post-materialist values. This distinction is no longer relevant when it comes to post-2010 activism. They belong to a new generation of movements that combine and connect socio-economic and cultural claims, materialist and post-materialist demands. Each of the three core values (democracy, social justice and dignity) has to be understood both in its material and personal as well cultural dimensions (Glasius & Pleyers, 2013: 561-562).

From mass protests to change in daily life

This book addresses this current wave of social movements, protests and citizens’ initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe. The contributors analyse a wide range of movements, progressive and conservative. Some focus on mobilizations that reached mainstream media headlines in their country if not internationally, other on citizens initiatives that discreetly transform politics or daily life.

In Central Europe as in other regions of the world (Pleyers, 2011), a more active citizenship have often emerged from concerns in daily life. As a result, new urban movements have come out. They promote concrete forms of participation in daily life. Environmental issues have also recently mobilized thousands of citizens, notably against extractive industries. Rural resistances have risen against fracking in Poland and in various Central European countries. In Romania, the gold mine project in Rosia Montana became the epicentre of the largest citizen mobilization since the 1990 and was finally abandoned. Some citizens have taken over the streets and occupied city squares or rural areas to oppose policies or infrastructure projects, often combining specific claims with more general preoccupation for a more democratic society and a more transparent and less corrupt political arena.

Post-democracy is not the only threat to democracy. As in other regions of the world, racist, antisemitic and xenophobic movements are rising in Central and Eastern European countries as well. These movements refer to tradition and conservative values but they emerge in the same context as progressive movements, in an era of neoliberal globalization, inequalities, corruption scandals, high unemployment rates among young

people and new information and communications technologies. They combine personal dynamic of individualization with a call for a return to a mythicized national tradition and articulate subjective processes with social problems (economic crises, social exclusion, unemployment) and cultural dimensions and creativity (Di Nunzo & Toscano, 2012). These movements' call is based on dynamic of individuation while calling for the return to a mythical tradition (Wieviorka, 2015). The process of subjectivation and desubjectivation will hold a place of increasing importance for activists to the point of renewing the forms of commitment and action directories.

Studying social movements to rethink democracy

To rethink and renew democracy in Europe is thus an urgent task. Both social movements and scholars of Central and Eastern Europe have a fundamental role to play in order to cope with this collective challenge. Disappointment with liberal democracy and the neoliberal free market, low participation rates co-exist with the rise of a new generation of young citizens who claim a deeper, more accountable and more participatory democracy. In almost every Central and Eastern European country young citizens have organized massive protests and expressed their deep and strong attachment to democratic values. They consider democracy as a demand they address to their government, but also as a practice they seek to implement in campuses and in their social neighbourhood.

This book aims at providing critical and empirically-based outlooks on social movements and on new expressions of social and cultural transformations, as much the ones that strike mainstream media headlines as those that discreetly transform daily life and/or politics.

The different chapters forecast the contributions of social movements, citizens and researchers of the region, to a better understanding of the challenges to democracy and social movements in Central and Eastern Europe, but also beyond this region, as they point to global challenges. In this perspective, the Research Committee 47 "Social Movements" of the International Sociological Association aims at supporting efforts for a renewal of social movement studies in Central and Eastern Europe as well as at fostering a better inclusion of research conducted in this region in the European and global social movement studies and in social sciences field in general. The conference held in May 2015 and this kind of publications are thus both a successful outcome and the starting point of a new dynamic

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leading researchers of the region whose work is renewing the approach of social movements, protests and citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe. A group of well known scholars supervised these sessions. I also thank for their dedicated work to Professors Kerstin Jacobsson (Gothenburg University, Sweden), Armine Ishkanian (London School of Economics), Tova Benski (College for Academic Studies, Rishon, Israel and ISA RC 48 President), Carine Clement (Sankt Petersburg University, Russian Federation), Ioan Pânzaru (University of Bucharest, Romania) and Remus Crețan (Western University of Timișoara, Romania).

The Conference was opened by Professor Mircea Dumitru, the Rector of the University of Bucharest. The keynote speakers were the well-known French sociologists Alain Touraine and Michel Wieviorka.

I join the organizers that express their gratitude to the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Romania that supported these endeavours and made possible one of the most important social scientists' gatherings in Eastern Europe to take place in Bucharest.

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