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EDITORIAL

POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY AS A CONNECTIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE *Between old topics and new directions*

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ABSTRACT: Our aim is to identify the characters of a real political sociology as a «connective social science» that studies political phenomena by creating fruitful connections with other perspectives. Modern politics may be defined as the set of activities designed to regulate human coexistence in a given social context through a prearranged establishment of a certain order. Such an order can only be guaranteed if a social group is able to acquire the power guaranteed by the exclusive use of force. From this point of view, modern politics, to be explained, must be observed in its complexity. Reasoning on the relationship between social and political structures (and between sociology and political science) is not enough. Political analysts should also pay attention to other dimensions, aware that politics is not made only of social and political-institutional relations. It is also made of individuals, cultures, economic arrangements, territories. For this reason, political sociologists should also consider the typical explanatory variables of psychology, anthropology, economics and geography. The classic topics of political sociology are well known. It is a discipline that, through different approaches, has historically focused on the forms and relations of power within the territorial dimension of the nation state. The trans-nationalization of social processes, the frequent financial and economic crises, the explosion of new war zones, the crisis of classical political actors have led to new studies on the relationship between society and politics in a global society, redefining the boundaries of political sociology. The issues are always the same, but the lens through which they are investigated is different.

With this special issue of PACO we try to contribute to setting some new directions in political sociology. In particular, Virginie Guiradon focuses on the new frontiers of citizenship in a multicultural Europe, Donatella della Porta on the cycles of protest and the consolidation of democracy, Hans-Joerg Trez and Asimina Michailidou on European Integration, democracy and crisis in a mass media perspective, Carlo Ruzza on the ideology of New Public Management and associational representation in the context of the

global financial crisis, Ettore Recchi and Justyna Salamońska on the important topic of the European identity in the context of the Euro-Crisis, Juan Díez Medrano on the individual and collective responses to crisis by providing an analytical framework for the study of social resilience, Klaus Eder on the so-called paradox of political participation that can equally produce civil and uncivil outcomes. The issue will be concluded with my article on the logical structures of comparison in social and political research.

KEYWORDS: Political sociology, Modern politics, Political Power, Political Science, Political Psychology, Political Anthropology, Political Economy, Political geography

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1. The concept of modern politics

Political sociology is a relatively young discipline that, in recent decades, has gained increasing centrality through the identification of new research fields and the renewal of classic topics. Before considering the recent developments, which justify our intention to devote a special issue to the *New Directions in Political Sociology*, we need to spend a few words on defining politics. Seemingly easy to define, it is a term that, in order to acquire scientific relevance, needs serious conceptualization.

The term «politics» derives from the greek πολιτικός (politikos) which was meant to define everything related to the polis (the city). In general terms, it can be related to everything configured as civil, social, collective, public, as opposed to the individual and private dimension of life. The term «politics» has been handed down over the centuries thanks to the influence of the monumental works of Aristotle (383-322 BC). He intended to define the best constitution of the State, not so much through mere speculation, as Plato had done before him, but rather through a careful study of human nature. For Aristotle, the human being is by nature ζῷον πολιτικόν (zoon politikon: political animal) who can realize himself only within the political community.

Political constitution is, for Aristotle, a «life system» in which individuals operate as an integral part of an organic whole. He came to the conclusion that citizens, by participating in the political management of the city, achieve their full human characterization. A person who is not a citizen is cut off from the human community. The slaves, who are deprived of civil and political rights, for Aristotle are by nature mere «talking animals», unrelated to any ethical and community dimension (Aristotle 1981).

Under the influence of Aristotle, politics was for centuries the characterization of all the intellectual works focused on the study of a set of human activities for the organization of the state and the civil society within a delimited territory. So, as Bobbio stated (1990a, 800), «in this activity, polis is sometimes the subject, where acts such as to

control (or forbid), with binding effect on all members of a particular social group, and the exercise of an exclusive domination of a given territory, belong to politics». But the organization of human society is not based only on the exercise of power, but also on the production and distribution of (scarce) resources necessary for the maintenance of a particular social group. Moreover, as happens in every power system, even political structures generate their own historical antagonist, when next to any form of constituted power it is possible for some form of counter-power to take shape. Such a counter-power is made up of all those who oppose the dominant social arrangements becoming protagonists in conflict.

The concept of politics is therefore closely linked to that of «power», which essentially consists of all the means necessary to obtain some advantage (Hobbes 1982, 1994) or to produce desired effects (Russell 1938). Power thus presupposes a relationship between at least two actors. It is politically configured in different forms of authority and domination. Within each political relationship (power relation), the focus shifts to the specific means by which the particular form of political power (man over man) can be configured.

In this case, we refer to the different types of resources through which, historically, some social actors are able to secure the right to command. Prestige, wealth, ability to control information sources are crucial aspects, but in general political power is based on the ownership of the necessary tools to exert physical force. Political power is coercive power in the strict sense of the word. In any society, it is the supreme power because of its ability to subordinate any other form of power. This does not mean that political power results exclusively in the use of force and in the exercise of violence. If so, any social group that under certain historical conditions was able to exert violence over other groups could be considered an actor endowed with political power, and so obviously it is not. Power (and violence) is therefore a necessary but not sufficient condition. Also a certain amount of «exclusivity» of the use of force is required. In this case we speak of «monopoly» on the use of force which, in the case of Hobbes, would be the foundation of the modern theory of the state.

«Force» and «conflict» are thus two important features connoting the concept of politics, so much so that a scholar like Carl Schmitt (1927), taken up by Julien Freund (1965), stated that, in actual fact, politics coincides with the sphere of the friend-enemy relationship. For him, the highest application of politics lies in the nature of the antagonism between opposing groups that aim at mutual dissolution. As Bobbio noted (*ibid.*, 806), both Schmitt and Freund share the idea that politics has to do essentially with human conflict (and antagonistic conflict in particular) that does not involve a simple competition, as in the case of agonistic conflicts but a real opposition. According

to this view, any conflict between divergent interests become political insofar as it is translated into a struggle for power. The limitations of this approach are obvious. It rules out the possibility that (violent) conflict can be politically defused through cooperative and integrative strategies of socially conflicting interests. Moreover, politics, as a general concept, cannot be identified only by the means, in this case the force, of which it makes use. The definition must be enriched, for example by identifying its function.

Philosophers have tried for centuries to answer the question about the aim of politics, trying to find its essence. But thanks to the acquisitions of the modern social science, today we can say that there is no one absolutely valid aim. If political power can be partially identified with the exclusive use of force, it is clear that the aim of politics - that is the direction in which the potential or factual exercise of force is oriented - is determined by the dominant social group. From this point of view, there is not a universal aim but rather a set of historically defined aims. The history of political philosophy, however, is strongly influenced by a teleological perspective.

The greatest political thinkers were indeed quick to identify the ultimate goal of politics, assuming a prescriptive position. Aristotle argued that the goal of politics should be the «good life». But today we know that the parameters of a good life vary according to the subjective needs of individuals and interest groups that politically organize themselves. The absence of a socio-historical form of the ethical concept of good life makes it analytically ineffective. Other medieval thinkers have proposed «common good» or «justice» as the ultimate goal of politics, falling into the same ethical limitation. Good life, common good, justice, are in fact abstract (and a-historical) concepts. If they are not connected to the aspirations of the social (and political) groups that are subjectively (not universally) able to fill them with contents.

If the search for an ultimate goal of politics is likely to be a futile effort, it is still possible to identify a minimum goal that, in sociological language, we could define as the «function of politics». Scholars seem to converge on the idea that, while on the one hand, the resources of politics are related differently to the ability of certain social groups to secure the monopoly of force (and violence); on the other hand, these instruments are also aimed at the establishment of «order» within a specific social context. Therefore, the function (or minimum goal) of politics is to ensure a situation of «social order», the *conditio sine qua non* for the pursuit of any other goal. Even the most militant movements that aim to overthrow the established order in a particular socio-historical context, actually have the goal of building a new society based on a new order. Having identified the means and goals of politics, we can now hazard a general definition. Politics can be defined as «the set of activities designed to regulate human

coexistence in a given social context through a prearranged establishment of order. Such order can only be guaranteed if a social group can acquire the power given by the exclusive use of force».

Through this first general definition, we may assume the existence of an autonomous space for politics far from the classical Aristotelian conception that presupposed a substantial overlap between politics and society. The existence of such a distinction, which brings us closer to a modern conception of politics, has a specific historical derivation linked, in Europe, both to the spread of Christianity (which presupposed a certain gap between spiritual and temporal power) and to the development of the market economy, which deprived politics of control over economic relations, creating the distinction, then refined only in the modern era, between political society and civil society (that is, between the public and private sectors). According to this approach, politics has the task of organizing social life and, in particular, the orderly and peaceful coexistence within a delimited territory, but it did not go beyond the sphere of the private life of every individual living in that territory.

In this context, the first major theoretical fracture historically took shape. It created the conditions for the formation of modern politics. We are referring to the fundamental separation between politics and morals (and between political analysis and theology), whose boundary lines have been watered down for centuries due to the temporal power of the church institutions. In fact, political and religious morals compete for the domination over the same territory, the field of human practice, with the difference that while morals refers to individual action and consciousness, politics and its ethics instead refer to the social and collective dimension, with the result that what is obligatory in morals is not necessarily binding in politics, and what is licit in politics is not necessarily licit in morals. The parameters by which a political action and a purely individual one are judged as positive are different. This modern awareness refers to the Weberian distinction between «ethics of responsibility», which is typical of the good politician, and «ethics of belief», which is typical of the good Christian (Weber 2004).

2. Politics ... sociologically

In the previous section we outlined the features of modern politics. We were able to define politics as «that set of activities designed to regulate human coexistence in a given social context through a prearranged establishment of a certain order. Such an order can only be guaranteed if a social group is able to acquire the power guaranteed by the exclusive use of force». We therefore identified «order» as the minimum goal of

politics and «power» (coercive power in particular) as its main factual or potential resource. We then stated that modern politics is primarily configured through its separation from theology and morals as well as through its autonomous (but not independent) position in relation to society.

Politics and society are two distinct but related spheres of relationships. The task of social sciences has been to study their characters ever since sociology began to be a discipline independent of philosophy, with its own logic and methods (see de Nardis 2014).

The need for a «science of society» is determined by a sudden acceleration of social change. In fact, between the sixteenth and nineteenth century, European societies entered an era of accelerated social change that swept the economic, legal, political and cultural dimensions. Modernity was born. On the economic level, it was inaugurated by the industrial revolution and, in particular, by that specific form of accumulation of wealth called «capitalism». On the political level, it is characterized by the emergence and consolidation of the national states and, in particular, of the «rule of law», in which political power becomes «legitimate power», subject to a specific legal system.

Before modern society developed, the changes were very gradual and what each individual represented was largely due to his family origins. In modern times «individualism» and «rationalism» become the dominant cultural traits. Released from the social cage of an oppressive political power and a too pervasive ideological and religious system, humans began to develop ideas of freedom and transformation related to the legitimate aspiration to individual self-realization.

The combination of the new cultural acquisitions and the grandeur of the structural socio-economic and socio-political transformations justified the attempt to establish the features of a new science which, with innovative methods and logic, observe, before explaining, these great processes of change. In the twentieth century these methods and logic were perfected and sociology became an autonomous disciplinary field. Since the end of the seventeenth century and especially in the nineteenth, authors such as Tocqueville, Marx, Durkheim and Weber had laid the foundations of modern sociology and of political sociology as well.

As Montesquieu and Rousseau through their works had already greatly contributed to the development of future political sociology, the pre-sociological political thought was still at a speculative and normative level. Careful to develop the traits of good politics and the best form of organization of the state, only a few scholars posed the problem of observing politics in its relationship with the complex system of social relations directly attributable to the political sphere. In short, as Lipset noted (1969, 7), one of

the tasks of modern political sociology is to investigate whether and to what extent political events and institutions are affected differently by extra-political factors.

We can now define politics in the perspective of the social sciences. More specifically, we can state that from a sociological point of view, politics is configured as the specific sphere of social relations articulated from a delimited territory - which historically has been configured in the form of the state - within which and, sometimes, beyond which, more or less organized collective actors act. We refer to social movements, groups and parties that have the control of the resources considered essential for the organization of human existence and a certain social order as their ultimate (and not always explicit) reference point.

From this point of view, the significant cultural aspects are all those that, from the tradition, but also under the pressure of great ideological visions, motivate collective action in an asymmetric articulation of the forms of power. In such a context, the dimension of particular interests, often in conflict with each other, assumes importance. They are usually advanced by those collective actors that, in the words of Gallino, «form and deplete a territorial social system» and are not necessarily confined within the rigid boundaries of a State. The same model «is reproduced on an international scale: here the social actors are countries or groups of countries, the territory is that of the continents or the entire planet, the system is that of the international relations» (Gallino 1989, 166).

Since it began, sociology has shown a deep interest in political phenomena even though, for decades, it was not able to conceive of a space for politics autonomous from the rest of social relations, long influenced by a Marxist view that saw politics and institutional relations as an epiphenomenon of class relations within the economic structures and, at the same time, from a functionalist approach that, with Talcott Parsons, viewed politics as the connective tissue of society and thus the object of general sociology, thereby denying the urgency of a specialized branch that studied its features and structures. While, on the one hand, it is true that all social relations, being power relations, have a political component, on the other hand, it is also true that the dynamics of structuring and de-structuring of social relations and actions that are carried out in order to gain control of scarce resources deserve special attention that justifies the existence of political sociology.

Admitting the importance of political sociology as a separate discipline from general sociology (a consequence of the autonomy of politics from society) we need to define its analytical focus, which is the central subject of the discipline. The various schools of thought agree that political sociology is essentially the science of power and, in particular, of the institutionalized power within a political community (usually a state). Not

surprisingly, Max Weber defined politics as the aspiration for a participation in power or for an influence on its distribution, both between states and between the social actors within a single state (Weber 1978 vol . 2).

In the light of what has been written, we could say that: «Political sociology is the discipline that explores, through logic and methods of the empirical social sciences, the cooperative or conflictual relations between the system of multiple social relations that, starting from a delimited territory, has been historically articulated in the forms of society and the system of collectively binding decisions that, starting from the state and of the power relations that take place inside of it, but not limited to it, is universally recognized as the field of politics» (de Nardis 2013, 31).

This means that political sociology has many subjects but all revolve around the modes of production and organization of political power that provides the ability to produce socially binding decisions on the distribution of the scarce resources necessary for the construction of a specific social order (see Parsons *inter alia*). In political sociology, the analysis of domination and its main manifestations in the form of power, influence and authority is thus central. Equally important is the study of social stratification and mutually conflicting interests politically translated into various forms of conflict, or integrated with each other through the various consensus practices. In addition to institutionalized power in the state it becomes essential to study the political participation of the different actors (parties, movements and groups) and their ability to produce collective action, especially through the development of specific ideologies that often represent the vehicle of great social transformations that have sometimes assumed the character of major revolutionary upheavals.

Before political sociology began to operate as an autonomous discipline, the idea that the modern political process was configured according to the normative model proposed by Locke and his successors was commonly accepted (Cosser 1966, 6). By contrast, the social sciences have emphasized the asymmetric relationship between political elites and the people, and, in particular, between rulers and the ruled. In this way, political structures are considered to be constant in their relationship with social structures and the articulation of the interests expressed in society. Accepting the sociological postulate that all societies are characterized by unresolved tensions that include both social actors and the rules that govern efforts to resolve these tensions, we should also accept the idea that each society is characterized by social actors with different (and not necessarily reconcilable) interests.

As Bendix and Lipset asserted, political sociology has the specific task of analyzing these tensions and ruptures that take shape from the social and economic order. This analysis should be carried out through comparative actions designed to show the range

of theoretically available alternatives from which the main political decisions are made (Bendix and Lipset 1966, 25).

As we wrote, political sociology has been consolidated mainly since the first half of the twentieth century but during the nineteenth century some authors laid the foundation for a sociological analysis of politics. In particular, Tocqueville and Marx, from antithetical positions, posed the problem of conflict between social interests. Both emphasized the dimension of solidarity between social groups, even if Tocqueville identified it especially in the local communities and associations. Marx instead identified it in the class relations within a conflictual frame as part of the socio-economic structure and the relations of production. While Tocqueville started from the analysis of conflict to address the problem of social unity that would ensure both political struggle and political consensus in a shared institutional framework, Marx became the theorist of revolution against a non-reformable system of domination within the legal framework of the liberal state.

Other authors, such as Durkheim and Weber, tried instead to delineate the role of politics as a means of social integration within the parameters of a complex society. Durkheim identified the social links as part of a radical social differentiation and labor division, and Weber indeed tried to include it in a theory of power and its rational bureaucratic institutionalization within the boundaries of the modern state.

3. Political science and *real* political sociology

As a discipline that studies political processes, political sociology has often had to bear the comparison with the other social sciences which, from different approaches and points of view, deal with the same topics. The social science with which political sociology is most often compared is political science. To paraphrase Bobbio (1990b, 996), it can be defined as the discipline that studies and investigates the different aspects of political reality, adopting the typical methodology of empirical social sciences. After accepting this definition it would be very difficult to distinguish between political science and political sociology and, therefore, identify the possible connections between the two disciplines. Indeed, we believe that there are several converging and overlapping elements between political sociology and political science even though the two areas were born and developed on different assumptions, sometimes elaborating distinct theoretical models. In the short space available to us we will try to identify the elements that may clarify some aspects of the relationship between these two disciplines.

First of all we have identified political sociology as the science that deals with investigating social causes and consequences of the distribution of power within society (or between distinct societies), also by observing the social and political conflicts that can influence the allocation of power as a scarce resource. Actually, all the disciplines that study political processes do it starting from the state which, as Weber reminds us, is nothing more than the institutional system that has a monopoly of legitimate force within a given territory. It is thus the place of concentration of political power itself. This means that the mere propensity to study power and its institutional configurations does not help us to discriminate similar but distinct disciplines such as political sociology and political science.

For Lipset, the first distinction between the two disciplines lies in the historical tendency in which one (political sociology) has traditionally focused more on the dynamics of conflict while the other (political science) has dealt chiefly with the aspects related to the planning and reproduction of a specific political order through consensus practices. In particular, political science emerged as the discipline «of the state» and of the manifest functions of political institutions. Political sociology has instead set itself up as a “radical” discipline paying more attention to the conflict in social change and, in general, to latent political (and potentially dysfunctional) aspects (Lipset 1959, 83). Yet «conflict» and «consensus» are two sides of the same coin and, not by chance, political sociology, too, has long aimed to study the integrative and consensual aspects of politics with particular regard to the public administration and the functions of government.

In fact, as Coser noted, a discipline exclusively focused on order and consensus would be inadequate to explain the conflicting lines crossing each political process but, at the same time, exclusive attention to the dynamics of dissent prevent one from observing the adjustment mechanisms that a relatively stable political system can historically provide (Coser 1966, 2). In his view, while political science has always focused on the specificity of politics, political sociology represented the effort to understand political processes in their entirety. This requires an attention to the constant interplay between political and social structures.

Political Sociology cannot be limited to the study of political behavior or political-institutional organization of the state, but addresses the relationship between social behaviors and political institutions and some non-political elements such as the ideological structure, cultural conflicts, levels of social stratification. Political sociologists are interested in understanding whether and to what extent a particular political order or specific cases of political behavior are influenced by non-political factors. Our work on discrimination is still insufficient and requires an additional effort.

The author who most effectively sought to distinguish political sociology and political science from a position of criticism toward a sociological interpretation of political processes is Giovanni Sartori. He begins with the distinction between «sociology of politics» and «*real* political sociology». In the first case, it is meant as one of the several fields of specialization of sociology as a whole. In the second case, it is instead seen as a discipline capable of claiming its autonomy from both general sociology and political science (Sartori 1969).

Sartori is wary of those interpretations that see in sociology and political science two substantially overlapping disciplines (Pennati 1961; Runciman 1963; Duverger 1967). In his opinion they are anachronistic claims and do not consider the level of specialization of the contemporary social sciences. While agreeing with the criticism of an excessive splitting into rigid compartments of the various social sciences, he is convinced that scientific progress derives above all from their proliferation and, therefore, their specialization based on a specific labor division. What constitutes a “problem” for a particular social science, could be taken as “given” to an adjacent discipline.

Scientific specialization allows some variables to be treated as significant, and the others considered irrelevant. According to Sartori, «scientific progress of the social sciences follows from their proliferation and specialization». The development of any discipline depends on its ability to select and isolate a limited and manageable number of variables (ibid., 66). To identify the relevant variables it is necessary, however, to turn the other variables into «parameters», i.e. to keep them «constant». Just to quote Smelser, who is an important reference for Sartori’s reflections:

Parameters are determinants that are known or suspected to influence a dependent variable, but, in the investigation at hand are made or assumed not to vary. Operative variables are conditions that are known or suspected to influence a dependent variable and, in the investigation, are made or allowed to vary, so that the operation of one or a few conditions may be isolated and examined (Smelser 1967, 15).

Economists, for example, according to Sartori's approach, consider as “given” (ie as parameters) culture and institutions, sociologists political and institutional structures, and political scientists social structures. Following Smelser’s approach, taken up by Sartori, to identify the specific object of a discipline it is thus necessary to define the dependent and independent variables with which the various scholars are concerned. Sociology is the discipline that identifies its explanatory variables in the context of socio-structural conditions, while political science does so in the context of political-structural conditions. This is equivalent to saying that the independent variables (ie the determinants, causes or reference points) for a sociologist are social structures (social

stratification, ideological and cultural system, family organization, etc.). Instead, for a political scientist they are political structures (form of government, party system, political and institutional organization of the state, etc.).

The position of Bendix and Lipset is similar when they claim that political science starts from the state and looks at how it affects society, while political sociology starts from society and looks at how it exerts an influence on the state (Bendix and Lipset 1957, 87). According to Sartori's approach, to trace the differences between adjacent disciplines, such as sociology and political science, we do not need to look at the variety of research techniques, which are basically the same for all social sciences, but rather at the formal level of the discipline, that is, its theoretical and explanatory models which vary with the different scientific perspectives. From this point of view, Sartori wrote, «the formal theory of the social system leaves off when the formal theory of the political system begins» (Sartori 1969, 69).

After drawing the distinction between the formal pattern in sociology and political science, Sartori raises the question of how to build theoretical bridges between the two disciplines, because, on the one hand, it is not desirable to deny the specialization in the name of one "multi-centric" social science; on the other hand, it is useful to encourage forms of "cross-fertilization" between social sciences without denying their specialized natures. From this point of view, he speaks of systematic development of «interdisciplinary hybrids» through which to go beyond the disciplinary boundaries without erasing or denying them. At this point, the distinction between «sociology of politics» and «real political sociology» comes into play. In the first case, we mean a simple sociological reduction of politics; in the second case, however, we mean a hybrid discipline capable of simultaneously and profitably using social and political explanatory variables.

To support his thesis, Sartori uses the example of the sociology of political parties. He criticizes it in favor of a political approach. In his view, the limitation of sociologists is that they have identified political parties as a mere projection of the class stratification. According to this approach, the only way to investigate political parties lies in the analysis of voting behavior of social classes and the sociological composition of the elites. As per Sartori, it is precisely by the empirical evidence that emerges from this analysis that the classic sociological perspective is nullified. If we accepted the classical sociological approach, political parties would be a dependent variable of a complex system of social stratification (with a particular structure of solidarity) and, in general, of socio-economic ruptures. In this case, it would be sufficient to study these aspects to explain the organization of the party system. This sociological reductionism is also to be

found in the famous text by Lipset, *Political Man*, in which the American sociologist wrote:

In every modern democracy conflict among different groups is expressed through political parties which basically represent a “democratic translation of the class struggle”. Even though many parties renounce the principle of class conflict or loyalty, an analysis of their appeals and their support suggests that they do represent the interests of different classes. On a world scale, the principal generalization which can be made is that parties are primarily based on either the lower classes or the middle classes and upper classes (Lipset 1960, 220).

Class structure based on a class-type appeal by parties, on support to political parties based on class loyalty and on a need for representation of class interests, is at the core of Lipset’s argument. Sartori rightly states that, according to this approach, it becomes difficult to explain some phenomena, such as the presence in some democracies of weak class loyalty and of a weak correlation between the parties’ class line and the popular vote, as well as the presence of the so-called floating voters, who vote without any ideological affiliation, and the presence of political elites which, while using a classist rhetoric, betray their origin by urging inter-class practices and policies. Therefore, neither an analysis of the stratification of the interests in society, nor examining the sociological composition of the elites is sufficient to explain party organization and politics. The sticking point would lie on the concept of representation of class interests which implies, at the same time, a class cohesion, the presence in society of conflicting interests and a social consciousness of these interests. All these elements are far from being taken for granted.

Sometimes political parties, due to their autonomous position in relation to society and its stratification, are able to guarantee a certain electoral consensus through the exercise of their symbolic and communicative power, not necessarily attributable to the categories of the traditional class conflict theory. In all societies we can find bourgeois who vote for workers’ parties and workers or salaried employees drawn from liberal and conservative parties. We must also consider that, in addition to the class vote, even a non-voting class does exist. In fact, voting practice is a simple act, not an action. The electoral choice involves a level of behavior often based on attitudes of superficiality and discontinuity. While class action can therefore incorporate class voting within itself, we cannot say the opposite, unless we are satisfied with the tautological assertion that «class action» also corresponds to «class voting».

The objective class condition does not necessarily correspond to a definite perception of status. In fact the latter especially refers to a question of gradation, i.e. self-

placement of individuals along a stratification scale. Status consciousness is never equivalent to class consciousness. Regardless of the actual socio-economic status (class condition), different elements do exist, such as the level of education, type of employment and income, etc., whose semantic perception may vary according to the dominant culture in a given social context. Between «class condition» and «class action» a fuzzy area exists. It can find solidity only through reference to some intervening variables. These include the political and organizational variable. The presence of strong class unions and parties can have a positive effect on the process of construction of class consciousness translated into class action. At this point, the conditions of any sociological reductionism cease because political and institutional organizations change from being dependent variables to become independent variables. Rather than a mechanical political projection of social structure, we often witness a social projection of the political structure that becomes «shared ideology» through political and union work and the organizations at grassroots level. In fact, Sartori also realizes that the mistake is overestimating the concept of «projection» while what should be further enhanced is the process of political «translation» of social structures and, possibly, of social perception of political inputs.

Even Lipset and Rokkan (1967) focused their attention on the ways in which social ruptures and conflicts are translated into a political and party system. These conflicts and ruptures are not only socio-economic but also ethnic, linguistic, regional, religious, and ideological. If the problem lies in the translation, attention should be paid to the «translator» and, at the same time, to the «perceiver» and then on the relationships that constantly unfold between society and politics. Within this context, the integration of sociology and political science can give rise to a fully mature political sociology that considers both sociological and political explanatory variables.

Actually, Sartori developed his argument in the late sixties when sociology was still strongly influenced by a perspective which resulted in some kind of sociological reductionism that was not so radical even in the Marxist tradition. When Marx spoke of the transition from «class in itself» (objective class condition) to «class for itself» (subjective class condition) necessary for a conscious class action, he did not rely on any mechanism but had very clearly in mind the urgency of building an intermediate political body that would be able to develop a project based on the stratification of socially conflicting interests. Therefore, the intervening (and sometimes independent) political variable was also the core of Marxist thought which is wrongly considered to be the origin of some sociological reductionism.

Had Sartori tried to conceptualize a modern political sociology in a more recent era he would have considered that sociology has long identified the «autonomy of poli-

tics». In addition, while any sociological reductionism should be avoided, we have to say that political reductionism risks likely to be as ineffective. The effect is to focus on forms of political engineering aimed at the regulation of the institutional organization with no regard to the stratification and organization of social interests. The awareness of the autonomy of «the political» from «the social» cannot correspond to a scientifically legitimated detachment of politics from society. This would represent a political inattention to the system of interest that each society expresses.

It is in the dimension of politically organized and ideologically opposed interests that political sociology finds its disciplinary construction and the elements of its potential (and necessary) integration with political science. Social and political actors are constantly in touch and influence each other, just as political power and social counter-powers (which have political connotations) are in continuous relationship. The substance and dynamics of these relationships are the subject of political sociology and should also be the subject of political science.

From this point of view, we accept the definition of political sociology as a sort of «interdisciplinary hybrid», because we are aware that contemporary socio-political dynamics can be better analyzed through a fruitful convergence of different perspectives integrated into a modern political sociology. Moreover, this interdisciplinary cross-fertilization does not take place only among sociologists and political scientists, but also between these two disciplines and other scientific-disciplinary approaches that analyze political processes from other perspectives. Political sociology, rather than a «hybrid», therefore appears like a «connective social science», acting as the place of meeting and connection between different perspectives that we can relate to political science as well as to political psychology, political anthropology, political economy, and political geography.

4. Political Sociology as a «connective social science»

When we say that political sociology is a «connective social science», we admit that political processes, to be explained, must be observed in their complexity. From this point of view, reasoning on the relationship between social and political structures (and between sociology and political science) is not enough. Political analysts should pay attention to other dimensions, aware that politics is not only made of social and political-institutional relations. It is also made of individuals, cultures, economic arrangements, territories. For this reason, political sociologists should not consider only

the political explanatory variables, but also the typical categories of psychology, anthropology, economics, and geography.

- *Politics and the individual dimension*

Politics occurs within a social arena divided into structures and institutions, but it is also a tool in the hands of individuals who relate to each other. Political analysis cannot neglect the study of cognitive and motivational system of the individuals within a social environment. This is also the domain of the classical political psychology that is adjacent to sociology and political science. Following the logic stated by authors such as Hermann (1986), Larrue (1994) and Amerio (1996), we could define political psychology as the discipline that studies the representations and actions of the (potential or actual) political actors, i.e. any concrete subject like a citizen, leader or member of groups with public and collective aims. Individual action thus becomes central. Weber himself said that it is through the (individual) action that social actors come into contact with the outside environment. We can define the specific field of political psychology by identifying politics as one of the possible application fields of social psychology. In this regard, we refer to the distinction between “social psychology research extended to the political sphere” and “social psychology research on politics” (Catellani 1997, 14-15).

In the first case, the subject (political actor) acts as an actor of social reality in general; in this direction, for example, the cognitive processes activated in the formation of a political judgment are conceived as similar to those that involve individuals in other contexts and situations. Similarly, in the choice of being part of a specific political group it would be possible to identify cognitive dynamics similar to those present in the participation in any other social group. This approach is very popular among psychologists, but also among sociologists who study political communication. They look at the politician as an ordinary seller that puts in place specific marketing strategies.

In the second case, the emphasis is on the specificity of the political context. Although there are basic cognitive processes that involve individuals within a broader social context, forming personal judgments on their own colleagues or any other individual is a different thing from voting or not for them in a political competition. From this perspective, the political context determines the consequences in terms of aims, roles and rules which must be complied with. In the specific political domain, all of these elements influence the individual actions and representations.

These two perspectives established themselves as a specific area of study especially in the Anglo-Saxon context where the close attention to political subjects created a fertile ground for the birth of modern political psychology, but also of political sociology. Political analysis with a focus on individual actions went through several historical stages.

- a) Between the '40s and '50s, scholarly attention focused on «political personality». Even political scientists and sociologists had to admit that the specific personality of some political men has partly influenced the course of history. We cannot expect to fully understand political actions of men such as Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Gandhi, and the social consequences of their behavior, without considering the specific characteristics of their personality. Political psychology originated in this object, theoretically and methodologically developed in an attempt to reconstruct the life of some leaders. Think of the pioneering work of Lasswell (1930, 1948) who sought to reconstruct why some individuals choose to engage in politics. In his view, politicians are characterized by some unresolved anxieties, from self-esteem issues and needs for confirmation of the self that could be solved in the conflictual dimension of the political activity. In these approaches there is the clear influence of psychoanalytic theories and the so-called personological theories related to the motivational model of Maslow (1954). He explored both political elites and single activists, bringing out his idea (antithetical to the position of Lasswell) that political activity is undertaken only when individuals are more or less satisfied with primary (physiological) needs. Actually, as they are full of interesting ideas, both perspectives suffer from overlooking the situational aspects which make up the context in which the political personality takes shape.
- b) In the '60s and '70s, the focus shifted to «public opinion» with particular reference to its effects on electoral behavior. Now, the protagonists of politics were not only leaders and party activists but also ordinary citizens who influenced political dynamics through various forms of participation. This awareness has led many scholars to pay close attention to the issue of public and political attitudes. This was the main topic of Walter Lippman (1922) who can be considered the precursor of studies on public opinion. He started from the assumption that (individual) subjects do not react directly to political reality but are influenced in their political decisions by the spread of simplified and stereotyped representations. In addition to the concept of «opinion», that of «attitude» becomes central. It was applied for the first time to politics in the famous volume *The American Voter*, published in 1960 by Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes. According to them, voting is an irrational

act, substantially influenced by factors internal to the individuals and largely attributable to the socialization process. Voting in practice is therefore an impulsive act, only rarely connected to any actual political awareness and knowledge. Having poor cognitive powers, individuals are limited to the few details that they have to adapt to their preconceived ideas that represent the true cognitive filter of any new information.

- c) In the '80s, especially among psychologists, but with effects also imported into sociology, the so-called «cognitive approach» was born. From the examination of attitudes and behavior, it focused on the level of awareness in any political action. The focus then moves onto the mental processes activated to ensure that a person thinks and acts in a certain way (Lau, Sears, 1986). Political cognition is the approach that studies knowledge processes, i.e. the various stages of elaboration of political information. Individuals become actors who actively respond to the input they receive from the environment, cognitively building the surrounding reality. The human being is not only irrational and emotional, but a subject with a «limited rationality» (Simon, 1983) bound by the real limits of the mind. This new acquisition lays the foundation for the contemporary developments in political psychology in which the political actor is immersed in a complex social environment. Political psychologists pay increasing attention to the context, paving the way for new studies on the processes of group belonging and the dynamics of political participation and social identity, which are part of the image that an individual has of himself as a member of social groups, combined with the value and emotional significance associated with that of belonging (Taifel 1981; Catellani and Sensales 2011). This attention to the identification processes necessarily places psychologists in relation to political sociologists.
- d) Since the '90s, the cognitive perspective has been strengthened along with the focus on the issue of political knowledge. The absolutely individualistic perspective has been abandoned. Renewed attention to the specific social context in which political action is articulated seems to prevail. It is in this context that the connections between psychology and sociology have become more productive.

As Greenstein noted (1969, 163), both psychology and sociology aspire to advance general propositions about human behavior, with the difference that while psychologists are mainly concerned to identify behavioral determinants that emerge from within individuals acting in a social environment, sociologists are more concerned to observe the effects of the environment on individual behavior. The focus is always on the relationship between individuals, groups, and social context. Although the two approa-

ches seem theoretically mutually exclusive, actually sociologists often study individuals by making use of psychological variables (such as attitudes), just as psychologists are interested in group dynamics, collective action and social environment. The mechanisms of learning, perception, cognition, motivation and identification are research fields of both disciplines that often refer to the same literature.

Political behavior is produced by the interaction between psychological variables and three eminent classes of social variables: the «immediate situation» in which the behavior occurs; the «immediate social environment» that extends from birth to adulthood and within which the individual develops a unique personality and special talents; the «distal social environment» which the individual does not experience directly but which helps him to form the immediate context where his life develops. This formula is important because it reveals a mutual influence between psychological and sociological variables without proposing a single causal direction.

- *Politics and the cultural dimension*

Politics is closely connected to the cultural dimension which is a topic where sociologists and anthropologists may work together. While political psychology is a specialized field of social psychology, political anthropology may be considered as a specific field of social anthropology. It explores the power relations articulated in the elementary structures of a society, paying attention to the type of social stratification in which the mechanisms of influence and rituals of each political community occur, with particular reference to the relationship between forms of power and dimension of the sacred. This specific branch of anthropology is not confined to considering political societies in the modern forms of organization, articulated in the territorial dimension of the nation state, but investigates politics primarily as a set of cultural practices, strategies of influence and manipulation. From this point of view, political anthropology helps to enrich sociological knowledge, producing analysis of political structures, processes and typical representations of society that have not yet developed the features of the modern political organization. In this case the analytical focus shifts to non-western social and political contexts.

Anthropologists have often focused on symbolic systems and rituals in pre-modern societies where the modern centralization of political power was still absent. In these societies a segmental form of socio-political organization prevailed. As Balandier noted (1967), some issues suggest the main objects of political anthropology: First, anthropologists are interested in the determination of politics not necessarily related to the

design of complex societies nor the existence of a state. Second, they seek to produce analysis on transitional periods and societies in a primitive stage of development. Third, they avoid all ethnocentrism, producing comparative research on cases that extend as part of a broader historical-geographical arc than that contained in the Western and European tradition. This attention to socio-political dynamics within society in developing countries has often represented a fruitful meeting point between anthropologists and sociologists. Already with Marx, Durkheim and Weber, sociology, too, has always paid attention to the relationship between traditional and modern political forms of organization.

Since the twenties, works were published (Lowie 1927) in which the attempt was made to identify some intra-corporate (dynamics of differentiation) and extra-corporate processes (dynamics of conquest) as factors that contributed to the formation of the modern state. The real anthropological revolution took place in the thirties with the production of a series of investigations on the so-called segmentary societies, better known as non-state societies, or communities organized on kinship structures. Starting from the forties, studies of African micro-societies increased. These works brought to light the existence of forms of political organization among people who do not know the typical state configuration of the western society. Many of these studies were influenced by the Orientalist investigations on the processes of cultural development of Max Weber and, to a lesser extent, of Marx and Engels. Consider for example the book of Leslie White on *Cultural Evolution* (1959). Attention is paid to the sacred origins, sometimes magic, power, and processes of structuring the first forms of state from the political societies that gradually replaced the parental organization networks.

The convergence between anthropology and political sociology increased with the passing of time. In the first half of the sixties, Lucien Pye, in his study of democracy, modernization and the nation building (1964), borrowed several terms from the anthropological tradition. Concepts such as cultural relativism, acculturation, cultural diffusion and social evolution are now the common heritage of sociologists and anthropologists.

- *Politics and the economic dimension*

The relation between politics and economy is essential, as well as that between political sociology and economics. We now refer especially to *new political economy* (Mitchell 1969, 101-136). It is a discipline that has not developed a well-defined theoretical framework, but rather a series of questions that acquire great importance for

sociologists and political scientists. It focuses on the relation system and mutual interference between politics and economy (Panebianco 1989, 449). Especially since the seventies, major issues such as unemployment, inflation, international debt, control of public spending and, in general, all disputes related to the welfare state, have produced a debate among economists, political scientists, historians and sociologists. The fundamental object of political economy is to understand how, within different political systems, we make economic choices through not directly economic institutions.

On the basis of the economic approach, politics is intended as a phenomenon of exchange not particularly different from economic exchange. Political economists are therefore inclined to emphasize the dimension of «rational choice» by individuals and organizations involved in a system of relations and exchanges with the leading political actors. These relationships allow special interests to be pursued in a state of uncertainty where each actor has to deal with other people's interests. A number of strategies are put in place aimed at reducing costs and maximizing results. These strategies may assume cooperative or conflictual actions among various actors who choose the best action on the basis of a rational calculation of costs/benefits. Individuals choose allies and adversaries assuming as given the substantial uncertainty regarding the choices of others. It is the exchange game where the political class requires support, resources and loyalty, while citizens wish to enjoy the benefits of the choices on the part of political elites.

Political economists deal with all the components of the relational diagram, emphasizing the circular nature of the exchange model that includes resources, support, demands, benefits (income, status, opportunities), forms of control, services and public goods. The analysis therefore focuses on the conditions of equilibrium and disequilibrium, on the rules of the game, and on the variable weight of the different actors in the relational flow. There is no space for an idea of politics as a product of social forces and non-rational responses. Politics is otherwise conceived as a set of actions adapting to the conditions laid down by the system and, at the same time, aimed at controlling the environment by individual actors who take an active and negotiating role. The process of allocation of scarce resources, the distribution of benefits of status, income, opportunities, allocation of costs (as well as of honors), the division of political labor, processes of systemic adaptation and stabilization thus become the main issues.

Allocation of resources is another key issue for political analysis. In fact every state has its own budget with which the political class may implement the processes of allocation and distribution of resources. Decisions related to these dynamics are typically the subject of the discussions and social conflicts traditionally studied by sociology. In these disputes different actors come into play - social movements, individuals, political

parties, bureaucrats, lobbyists - and the social sciences study the relational dynamics and the competitive or bargaining strategies that everyone utilizes. Obviously, the distribution of resources is also linked to the allocation of some costs. The wealth of a nation is in fact zero-sum, i.e. the more you give someone, the more you will have to take from someone else. To decide how to proceed in this distribution of income, opportunities and services, usually ideological dimension comes into play. This is for example a typical aspect that political economists neglect while sociologists tend to underline.

On the basis of these considerations it would seem that our intention is to superimpose the «new political economy» on the theoretical and methodological approach of «rational choice». It would be a mistake. In fact, when we speak of political economy we refer to a research field that can be investigated by resorting to very different theories and approaches. Having severed all ties with the classic economic tradition, it is mostly due to two main strands of sociology and political science: the «neo-Marxist», long dominant especially among European sociologists, and the «institutionalist», primarily due to a branch of contemporary political science (Ferrera 1989, 454). While Marx is perhaps the first classical author to highlight the close connection between economic processes and politics, institutionalists, for their part, try to integrate the concept of power and that of institution (with particular reference to the State) within economic analysis, promoting a synthesis of politics, economics and law (Elliot 1978).

The tendency of mainstream economists to overlook non-economic factors led sociologists and political scientists to offer an essential contribution to economics, providing a mass of statistics and quantitative information and collecting empirical data on political and economic systems. The contribution of social sciences to economics has drawn attention both in terms of national politics and on the level of international politics. Sociological works have not been limited to the descriptive and thematic aspect, but have also provided important analysis on the mutual influence of politics and economics.

There are several contributions that shed light on the «economic constraints of politics», showing that economic developments often exert influence on individual voting choices and then on the political stability of democratic regimes. Scholars have shown that voters develop an overall assessment of the political-economic performance of a government influenced by factors related to the symbolic system of the media and the practice of political communication. The international economic system can itself be a decisive factor as regards the adoption of certain policies, showing how economic factors might influence or even determine political outputs.

Many socio-political works on economic issues are very interested in showing the reverse situation, i.e. how politics affects the economy, trying to isolate the impact of

ideologies, electoral outcomes and certain institutional and economic processes. Many studies have shown, for example, how the national political cultures determine response strategies to some international economic challenges (Dyson 1983). Other scholars have instead focused on the impact of ideological and programmatic platforms of political parties (Wilensky 1981; Schmidt 1983; Cameron 1985). Others have shown how, in general, the logic of the political market blends with that of the economic market.

Political sociologists have often paid attention to the interactions between social groups that, at national and international level, act as stakeholders, with an emphasis on the social bases of some macro-economic arrangements (Schmitter and Lehmburch 1979; Berger 1981; Gourevitch 1986). At international level, we are witnessing the articulation of different strands which, for Ferrera (1989, 462-465), are attributable to three addresses: neo-mercantilism, neo-liberalism and neo-Marxism. In the first case, international economic relations are considered as the result of an antagonism between states strong enough to impose its own national interests; in the second case, the driving force of the economy is emphasized; in the third case, the focus is on the articulation of a world capitalist system that prevails on international politics, hindering the autonomy of each people and preventing the political and economic development of some non-western countries.

- *Politics and the territorial dimension*

Sociologists, political scientists, philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists have historically defined the field of politics by subordinating it to a territorial dimension. This means that the relationship between political analysis and knowledge of a defined geographic space is critical. We are now speaking of political geography, a discipline that has built multiple points of connection with political sociology. As Kevin R. Cox wrote (2002, 1), political geography is the sum of geography and politics. The geographical dimension is treated to the extent that it illuminates politics as well as the political dimension is meaningful only in its geographical extension. The two concepts of «territory» and «territoriality» become central. Through them space and power are held together.

Territories are in fact «geographical areas» defended, contested, claimed on the basis of a sense of territoriality. With «territoriality» we mean the activities of defense, exclusion, inclusion and control of a specific territory. By considering the definitions taken from *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, we may define a «territory» as a general term used to indicate a segment of land or sea with respect to which countries

claim some form of control. We may instead define «territoriality» as the attempt by an individual or a group to influence or exert a form of control over a clearly demarcated territory.

Through these definitions, we can clearly understand the level of connection between political sociology and political geography, since the nation-state is an expression of a territorial power connected to a set of social (economic, political, legal, cultural, symbolic) processes. This territory would have no substance nor analytical importance if it did not become home to a variety of socio-political and economic activity and the object of some forms of conflict. The connection between territory, political community (specifically a state) and social processes is the focus of political geographers as well as of political sociologists.

The spatial dimension therefore becomes very important because territories are mostly spaces within which social and political processes, that are often the source of an intense symbolic and cultural production, are articulated. Consider concepts such as ethnicity, folklore, subcultures, all linked to a territorial dimension and all important issues for sociologists and anthropologists. Territory is also related to the concepts of «mobility» and «immobility» within a demarcated space, or through more territories (migration), as well as the construction of a set of social and economic activities that affect or are affected by politics. Peoples, economic companies and organizations are closely dependent on the distribution of resources within the specific area in which they are located.

States exercise their sovereignty within a defined territorial space by activating control procedures and distributing wealth. Spatial strategies, i.e. the set of internal relations in a given territory, or otherwise affected by a particular territoriality, are always articulated as power exercises of great interest for sociology. But what is it that gives energy to politics within a particular geographical context? The reference to an abstract set of interests and territorial projects is not enough. We must always refer to objects, practices and relationships with a certain content. Each of these objects and activities are socially mediated, that is connected to a symbolic system rooted in the materiality of social interests. Income, employment, labor division are undoubtedly some of the main social processes that affect politics in the modern national states. The need for recognition of specific identities and cultures not necessarily in line with the dominant cultural system are also important issues.

The concept of identity (and difference) linked to self-recognition and the social definition of the Other is connected to the development of a system of social relations that geographers teach us are spatial relations, i.e. tied to a place and to the primary

distinction between those who belong to it and those who are seen as outsiders, i.e. external to the community.

National identity is often energized in the social construction of the homeland and its "sacred" borders. This is also the object of analysis for sociologists but it would remain incomplete without an adequate geographical awareness. Suffice it to reflect, for example, on the political phenomenon represented by the Lega Nord in Italy which since the eighties has been demanding the autonomy (full independence sometimes) of the northern regions from the rest of the Peninsula. It would not be possible to understand the intense ritual and symbolic production by the leaders of the League and its activists without a knowledge of the geopolitical and economic specificities of Northern Italy (Biorcio 1991; Diamanti 1996; 2009).

Scholars often debate the role of territory as a source of identity creation which can be politically detected mainly through a careful analysis of electoral behavior. In front of the trans-nationalization of the economy and cultural processes, many scholars argue that territory has lost its relevance but, if so, the number of cases of affirmation of political actors who, all over the world, are mobilizing on the basis of an alleged ethnic-territorial membership would be inexplicable.

The decline of territorial membership is traced back, on the one hand, to processes of globalization; on the other hand, to the increasing personalization of politics that, especially in the West, is generally related to the importance of political communication and the use of techniques of electoral marketing. Indeed geographical structure and social stratification continue to be a source of political identification and mobilization, justifying the need to consolidate a cooperative relationship between political geographers and sociologists, especially through the intelligent use of the modern cartographic techniques.

5. Some new directions in political sociology

In the previous paragraphs we defined political sociology as a social science capable of creating fruitful connections with other disciplines that study political processes through different approaches and points of view. Political analysis cannot be compartmentalized. Political sociologists must therefore be able to use sociological, political, psychological, anthropological, economic, geographical categories, without giving up its own specificity.

Since its foundation in 2008, the journal *Partecipazione e conflitto* has sought to contribute to the development of the Italian and international political sociology through

in-depth analysis of relevant topics for socio-political studies, always adhering to an interdisciplinary perspective able to recognize the complexity of political phenomena. In particular, from 2014, with the new international series fully published in English on an open access platform, as PACO's Editorial Board we have requested special issues where the fruitful interdisciplinary integration could emerge with strength, always favoring topics in which the meeting between different analytical approaches might emerge in the logic of a modern political sociology such as described above (Giorgi and Polizzi 2014; Bruno, Didier and Vitale 2014).

The classical topics of political sociology are well known. It is a discipline that, through different approaches, has historically focused on the forms and relations of power within the territorial dimension of the nation state (among others, Tilly 1975; Poggi 2001). From this point of view, political sociologists have historically focused on the relationships of cooperation and conflict between social and political actors with particular reference to the analysis of democratic regimes. Political parties, social movements, interest groups and their role in defining the political space are the subjects that have attracted the attention of political scholars. Noteworthy the important contribution that sociologists have given to the analysis of public policy so as to create a modern sociology of public policy (a research field which, moreover, shows a fruitful cross-fertilization between sociology and political science).

The trans-nationalization of politics and economics, the frequent financial and economic crisis, the explosion of new war zones, the crisis of classical political actors have led to new studies on the relationship between society and politics in a global society, redefining the boundaries of political sociology. The topics are always the same, but the lens through which they are investigated is different. The same classical liberal conception of democracy is questioned in favor of a process-oriented approach that focuses on the contentious paths within current societies and the potential mechanisms of democratization or de-democratization (Tilly 2007). Through a deep criticism of the classic trends in (political) sociological literature, some authors also propose a kind of existential turnaround in political sociology in order to understand the way in which cultural and global complexity is experienced by individuals and social actors (Taylor 2010).

Although the institutional dynamics of modernity remain substantially intact, the old concept of scientific rationality has been challenged as well as the trust in the concept of social progress. Social and political power is increasingly located beyond the boundaries of the nation-state and new supra-national political systems attract sociological attention. State sovereignty is challenged in favor of new institutional structures, such as the European Union, which open new analytical horizons for political sociology

(Duchesne et al. 2013). In addition, the formation of new political identities and actors, new global challenges, such as those represented by international migrations, the emergence of new nationalisms and ethnic conflicts, the explosion of new forms of political violence are the new objects of political sociology. Obviously, it is not possible here to carry on an exhaustive discussion of the new potential issues, but with this special issue, we try to contribute to the definition of some new directions in political sociology through the reflections of some of the most brilliant European scholars of the discipline.

Donatella della Porta (2014, 447-468) in her paper written with the collaboration of Matteo Cernison tries to link the important matter of the outcomes of democratization with the social movement theory. According to Della Porta, the characteristics of social movements at the time of transition might have an impact on the quality of ensuing democracy. Looking especially at post-1989 Central-Eastern Europe, she singles out the different characteristics of contentious politics in countries that underwent eventful democratization, troubled democratization and participated pacts. The empirical basis for the analysis is founded on protest event analysis, a much used quantitative methodology to study the dynamics of protest in time and space, through which she shows that, as a trend, more and more protest is employed as a means of bringing forward demands for reforms and not challenging the legitimacy of the regime. Looking at effects of social movements in terms of democratization, Della Porta, at the same time, helps to broaden social movement and democratization studies.

Hans-Jörg Trez and Asimina Michailidou (2014, 469-489) discuss the matter of the mediatization of politics trying to go beyond a conception that confines it to a nation state dimension. The case in point is the European Union which operates under increasing legitimacy constraints and is exposed to the salience of media debates. The focus is on the question of the EU mediatization and its effects. Can the (new and old) media have an integration function beyond the national level and facilitate the building of the democratic legitimacy of the European Union? This is their fundamental curiosity. According to the authors, the mediatization framework offers theoretical and analytical tools necessary to understand how the interaction between the EU polity and the media unfolds and how it impacts on the process of the EU's public legitimation. Showing a very strong theoretical awareness on the topics of mediatization and the public sphere, Trez and Michailidou propose an analytical model for capturing this process empirically.

Carlo Ruzza (2014, 490-508) in his paper discusses the important relationship between global financial crisis, ideology of the New Public Management and the role of the organized civil society in the redefinition of the concept of social citizenship. He fo-

cuses on the mutual constitution of state and society as ongoing processes, and considers how the economic crisis contributed to alter institutional arrangements, ideologies and policy practices. He also discusses how these processes have contributed to redefine key features of European states. By contrasting both the ideology of the New Public Management – according to which state-society relations are mediated by a pervasive role of business – and the vision of participatory democracy - which focuses on the inclusion of civil society actors in a variety of roles and policy domains – Ruzza proposes to redefine the same role of civil society in its relationship with political institutions in a context of social change.

Ettore Recchi and Justyna Salamońska (2014, 509-531) propose an interesting paper on the thorny issue of European identity in the context of the Euro-crisis. Through an extensive use of the Eurobarometer data they try to test this actual contention. After having distinguished two dimensions of the collective identity («image» and «belonging»), they surmise that economic downturns can alter the superficial layer of identity (image-like assessments), but not its underlying substance (belonging-like assessments). Through data analysis, they demonstrate that the Euro-crisis damaged the EU image especially in the countries most affected by the economic downturn and among the unemployed, while declarations of ‘belonging’ remained relatively constant.

Juan Díez Medrano (2014, 532-550) proposes a sociological approach for the study of social resilience that emphasizes interpretation and the role of networks. After proposing an analytical framework that builds on Max Weber’s approach to social action, the author illustrates this approach through a discussion of the acquisition of transnational skills as a strategy of social resilience. Through a massive recourse to empirical evidence, Medrano shows that fluency in foreign languages may work both a resilience strategy and a vehicle toward the emergence of a strong European identification by the citizens. Medrano’s article allows us to understand that although we should not lose sight of the role that institutions and policies can play in securing a better life for the people, the focus on competence in foreign languages stresses that individual and social resilience results from both mobilizing against some aspects of neoliberal globalization and seizing on its opportunities.

Klaus Eder (2014, 551-575), in his masterly essay, proposes a reflection on the so-called «paradox» according to which participation in public debate equally produces civil and uncivil outcomes, thus taking up the classic thesis of the «fall of reason» formulated in the tradition of “critical theory” on the “dialectics of enlightenment”. Through an interesting reinterpretation of the main authors of modern socio-political thought, Eder states that civil society, praised by some as the outcome of the rule of law, by others as the outcome of free markets, and by others as the outcome of free spe-

ech, empirically does not stand up to these normative expectations. These fallacious arguments have historically produced some perverse effects cumulating in the emergence of uncivil society as the apotheosis of unreason. After identifying these «historical monsters», he puts forward the argument that the «forum» works not only as a mechanism of repairing the rule of law and the market, but also as a mechanism of self-repair of civil society.

The Special Issue will be concluded with my paper on the logic and styles of comparison in social and political research (de Nardis 2014, 576-615). After a general reflection on the research logic in the social sciences, I will focus on comparison with special attention to processes of conceptualization, classification and generalization. Comparison is dealt with as a specific activity, rather than a method, useful to observe and explain social and political phenomena. Social researchers have to be very precise in the definition of the unities of analysis, the spatial and temporal context in which the detected processes occur, and the definition of properties. By making extensive reference to the theoretical acquisitions of Charles Tilly, the paper is concluded with a deep reflection on the important relationship between history and social research.

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