

Aide Esu

Manuel Castells, "Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age". Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012, 200 pp.

(doi: 10.2383/73716)

Sociologica (ISSN 1971-8853)

Fascicolo 1, gennaio-aprile 2013

Ente di afferenza:

()

Copyright © by Società editrice il Mulino, Bologna. Tutti i diritti sono riservati.

Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it>

Licenza d'uso

Questo articolo è reso disponibile con licenza CC BY NC ND. Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it/>

Book reviews

Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012, 200 pp.

doi: 10.2383/73716

The search for dignity is the guiding light of Manuel Castells' volume, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, which examines the movements that have crossed the Arab world and Western countries in 2012. Trust, dramatically eroded by social injustice, corruption, and autocratic power is no longer the social contract cement; in the author's view, it is rebellion and protest that helps to master fear frustration, and humiliation for the generations who no longer identify with the institutions. The anger that channels these emotions is ever-present, with differing degrees and shades, in the streets of Tunis, Cairo, and the anti-neoliberal gatherings at Puerta del Sol, Syntagma, and Zuccotti Park. Based on the fieldwork of Castells and his collaborators, the volume presents an analytical template and offers a rich documented database of information for further in-depth analysis. The book follows protest chronology to shed light on common features worthwhile in defining the "new paths of social change." In keeping with the key paradigm of his earlier work (see *Communication Power*), Castells reads those movements as a clear manifestation of "mass self-communication." Thus, the social networks, blogs, Wikis, tweets, and recent technologies supporting participation are transformed in a new platform that increases the "autonomy of the actor." Historically, social movements have been creators of new values and languages, separated and opposed to power. In the repertoire of action, public spaces have played a key role, creating noticeable places in the public sphere, later identified as a movement symbol. Castells stresses, often returning to the identity function and symbolic places, one of the characteristics of these movements: the creation of hybrid space consisting of virtual and real worlds, the online community and the offline community gathering in physical and symbolic squares. Issues like "Bread-Freedom-Social Justice," the key themes of Tahrir Square, were recurrent in the Arab protests and Western gatherings. Emphasis is put on emotions, and individual motivation, considered relevant to get involved in the action, and fear for the future is considered relevant to fuel people to mobilize. How is fear coped with? Castells sketches an explanation – despite that it is weakly argued – referring to affective intelligence theory in political communication. He describes the sharing of a communicative pattern as a way to overcome fear, in cyberspace and urban space as well, to sow the seeds of hope for change. The online and offline communities are crucial for viral diffusion, sharing views, practices, and strategies, creating a third space defined by the author as the space of autonomy to challenge the disciplinary power, which is most evident in the case of Tahrir Square movement. The first section looks at the revolution prelude, the Iceland Kitchenware Revolution, and the Tunisian Jasmine Revolution, which, with the shouting of "Dégage," addressed to the corrupt autocratic power of Ben Alì ignited social mobilization in Arab neighbours. What do they have in common? The thread is the outrage and disgust with political power. Looking at the practices and networking in

Tunisia, Castells pays attention to three significant convergences: an active group of unemployed college graduates, a strong cyber activism culture, and a high rate of Internet connections driven by Al Jazeera, in supporting the practice of citizen journalism. Both movements share a reaction against the economic crisis, the move of the action from cyberspace to urban protest, and the resulting new meaning of public space. The empowerment of the pre-existing offline communities' social capital was most evident in the Egyptian revolution, so the uprising was not a sudden event as portrayed by the world media. If Tunisia epitomizes the hope for change, the Tahrir Square movement takes it over, extending the character of digital communities as a new social and political actor organized in a public space. Castells emphasizes the multimodal communication platform set up in Egypt to overcome the State shutdown of Internet access and satellite connection, so mobile phones, Bluetooth, and old-fashioned technologies such as faxing, dial-up, and telephone landlines were used to sustain the rise in demand for social and political change. Women were truly visible and played a key role in the Egyptian Revolution, as the story of Asmaa Mahfouz shows by her posting of four extraordinarily influential vlogs. The Rhizomatic Revolution, as Castells defines the Indignadas movement in Spain, followed the Arab Spring, pioneering the Western path of democracy regeneration. The 15-M brings the need for a full deliberative democracy, anticipating the main profile of the Occupy movement – the sovereignty of the assemblies, the lack of a leader, and the key slogan “being again a 99% and change the world.” The fall ignited the Occupy movement, rapidly sparks in USA's main cities after Zuccotti Park. Remarkably, in California, 482 towns have public space occupied. The majority of the fully engaged were young professionals and students, women (a slight majority), educated people (half with a college degree), anarchists, and libertarians. A large majority came from the Democratic Party, with previous participation in social movements or non-governmental organizations. In fact, Occupy was born digitally by the online campaigns for critical consumption raised by Adbuster, which played a pivotal role in diffusing the hashtag #occupywallstreet in June. Occupy was less spontaneous than the previous cases analyzed. It capitalized on past backgrounds, like campaigns, and networking platforms set up by Adbuster and the World Social Forums. It also appraised the repertoire of action and communication forms of past social movements, and civil right disobedience, to experiment with direct democracy [Calhoun 2013, 28], which might remind social researchers that past social action knowledge does not end when the movement comes to an end. Castells' book attempts to draw a general picture of these networked social movements. He proposes an analytical template, including several forms of networking, the shift from cyberspace to urban space, simultaneous global and local action expressed in new forms, and the process of deliberation as a space of autonomy. This frame opens interpretation pathways, which deserve to be explored in depth with future research, in order to substantiate Castells' optimistic view of opening a dream box to reinvent democracy and reconstruct the public sphere.

Aide Esu

Università di Cagliari

References

Calhoun, C.

2013 "Occupy Wall Street in perspective." *The British Journal of Sociology* 64(1): 26-38.