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# COSMOS WORKING PAPERS

**Mobilizing for democracy:  
A research project**

Donatella della Porta

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COSMOS-Centre on social movement studies

Mobilizing for Democracy – ERC Project

Department of political and social sciences

European University Institute

Badia Fiesolana

Via dei Roccettini 9, 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole, Firenze • Tel. +39 055 4685 036 • Fax +39 055 4685 201 • [www.eui.eu](http://www.eui.eu)

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EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
COSMOS CENTRE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT STUDIES  
“MOBILIZING FOR DEMOCRACY:  
DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESSES AND THE MOBILIZATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY” PROJECT  
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## **Mobilizing for Democracy: Democratization Processes and the Mobilization of Civil Society**

The project addresses the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in democratization processes, bridging social science approaches to social movements and democracy. The project starts by revisiting the “transitology” approach to democratization and the political process approach to social movements, before moving towards more innovative approaches in both areas. From the theoretical point of view, a main innovation will be in addressing both structural preconditions as well as actors’ strategies, looking at the intersection of structure and agency. In an historical and comparative perspective, I aim to develop a description and an understanding of the conditions and effects of the participation of civil society organizations in the various stages of democratization processes. Different parts of the research will address different sub-questions linked to the broad question of CSOs’ participation in democratization processes: a) under which (external and internal) conditions and through which mechanisms do CSOs support democratization processes? b) Under which conditions and through which mechanisms do they play an important role in democratization processes? c) Under which conditions and through which mechanisms are they successful in triggering democratization processes? d) And, finally, what is the legacy of the participation of civil society during transitions to democracy on the quality of democracy during consolidation? The main empirical focus will be on recent democratization processes in EU member and associated states. The comparative research design will, however, also include selected comparisons with oppositional social movements in authoritarian regimes as well as democratization processes in other historical times and geopolitical regions. From an empirical point of view, a main innovation will lie in the development of mixed method strategies, combining large N and small N analyses, and qualitative comparative analysis with in-depth, structured narratives.



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# ***Mobilizing for democracy: A research project***

Donatella della Porta

Cosmos Working Paper 2012/1

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## **State-of-the-art and objectives**

The project addresses the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in democratization processes, bridging social science approaches to social movements and democracy. The project starts by revisiting the “transitology” approach to democratization and the political process approach to social movements, before moving towards more innovative approaches at the frontiers of those fields of studies, as well as trans-disciplinarily linking sociology and political science, more in general. From the theoretical point of view, a main innovation will be in addressing both structural preconditions as well as the actors’ strategies, looking at the intersection of structure and agency. In an historical and comparative perspective, I aim at developing a description and an understanding of the conditions and effects of the participation of civil society organizations in the various stages of democratization processes. Different parts of the research will address different sub-questions linked to the broad question of CSOs’ participation in democratization processes: a) under which (external and internal) conditions and through which mechanisms do CSOs support democratization processes? b) Under which conditions and through which mechanisms do they play an important role in democratization processes? c) Under which conditions and through which mechanisms are they successful in triggering democratization processes? d) And, finally, what is the legacy of the participation of civil society during transitions to democracy on the quality of democratic participation during consolidation? The main empirical focus will be on recent democratization processes in EU member and associated states. The comparative research design will, however, also include selected comparisons with oppositional social movements in authoritarian regimes as well as democratization processes in other historical times and geopolitical regions. From an empirical point of view, a main innovation will be, in fact, in the development of mixed method strategies, combining large N and small N analyses, and qualitative comparative analysis with in-depth, structured narratives.

### *1. The state of the art: An introduction*

As well as filling theoretical and empirical gaps in the social sciences, the

project addresses a paradox. In both normative and empirical literature, the importance of civil society (especially in the form of social movement organizations) in the construction of democracy is more and more emphasized. Yet, at the same time, the limitations of civil society organizations are frequently discussed.

Social movements and other civil society actors are increasingly considered as relevant actors in theorizations about democracy. In classical theories, institutional decision making is usually considered as democratic when power positions are assigned on the basis of free, competitive and frequent elections. In political science, this mainstream definition (see among others Dahl 1998) has been called minimalist, since it only ensures the minimal conditions for democracy; on the input side, in that it operationalises democracy on the basis of electoral procedures alone, irrespective of the way in which power is used; and on the procedural side, in that it focuses on the respect of formal procedures. Such electoral conceptions of democracy are increasingly challenged by evidence of citizen disaffection, and need to be supplemented by other conceptions (Rosanvallon 2006). In normative theory, balancing the understanding of democracy as representative institutions, *participatory* conceptions of democracy have long stressed the need for channels for citizen access to decision-making arenas (Pateman 1970). In more recent theorizations and practices, the conceptions of participatory (and direct) democracy have been linked with *deliberative* democracy, challenging the definition of democracy as majoritarian decision making and stressing instead its discursive quality, and the importance of building multiple public spheres where decisions on the public good can be made on the basis of reason (Habermas 1996). Democratic deliberation is capable of producing new preferences, rather than just counting or negotiating pre-existing ones (Elster 1986). Social movements and CSOs are central in participatory and deliberative conceptions of democracy: they nurture participation as well as construct free spaces where conceptions of the public good are discussed on the basis of an exchange of reasons (e.g. Cohen 1989; Mansbridge 1996; Dryzek 2000). Civil society is defined as “a solidarity sphere in which a certain kind of universalizing community comes gradually to be defined and to some degrees enforced” (Alexander 1998, 7). The importance assigned to civil society for democracy has however pushed the normative debate on the qualities of civil society organizations in terms of legitimacy, representativity, but also spread and efficacy (Macdonald 2008; Kohler Koch 2001).

An empirical linkage between social movements and democratization processes has also been established. Among others, Charles Tilly has observed, “a broad correspondence between democratization and social movements”. On the one hand, many of the processes that cause democratization also promote social movements and “democratization as such further encourages people to form social movements” (Tilly 2004, 131). On the other, “under some

conditions and in a more limited way, social movements themselves promote democratization” (Tilly 2004, 131). When looking at the impact of social movements on democracy, the empirical evidence is however mixed. First, some social movements support democracy, but some do not. Second, their relevance in democratization processes is discussed: while a ‘populist approach to democracy’, emphasizes participation from below, with social movements as important actors in the creation of democratic public spheres, the ‘elitist’ approach considers democratization as mainly a top-down process. Also, empirical research has noted the potentials but also the limitations of the development of civil society, during and after democratization processes (della Porta 2005). Research on the Global South, but also on transnational institutions, has addressed the inconsistent qualifications of civil society organizations and social movements in terms of their autonomy from the political system, civility as inclusive conceptions of citizenship, plurality as the capacity of representation of different groups in the population, as well as their legitimacy and internal accountability. In contemporary social movements, participatory and deliberative practices have indeed attracted some interest, but they have also been difficult to implement, as activists are the first to admit (della Porta 2009a, and 2009b). Considered as particularly relevant for a successful implementation of a democratic process, to which they can contribute important resources of knowledge and commitment, civil society organizations are often quite critical participants and/or observers of the institutional policies that aim at implementing these goals.

These theoretical paradoxes and empirical tensions can only be addressed through the kind of research at which this project aims. Social movements support democracy and contribute to democratization only under certain conditions. Collective mobilization has frequently contributed to a destabilization of authoritarian regimes, but it has also led to an intensification of repression or the collapse of weak democratic regimes, particularly when social movements do not stick to democratic conceptions. Labour, student and ethnic movements brought about a crisis in the Franco regime in Spain in the 1960s and 1970s, but the worker and peasant movements and the fascist counter-movements contributed to the failure of the process of democratization in Italy in the 1920s (Tarrow 1995). Beyond a social movement’s propensity to support democracy, democratization processes might follow different paths, being more or less influenced by the mobilization of social movements. As the relationship between social movements and democratization is not simple, a systematic cross-national comparison is needed in order to single out the conditions under which and mechanisms through which civil society organizations promote democratization and of the legacy of their participation during transition in the further stages of the democratization process.

I plan to address these issues by bridging social movement studies and democratization studies within an interdisciplinary approach that combines

insights from sociology and political science, but also history. This will address a gap in the social science literature as well as in the general understanding of important social processes. Notwithstanding the practical and theoretical relevance of the topic, the interactions between civil society and democratization have rarely been addressed in a systematic and comparative way. Additionally, even though social movements and civil society organizations are increasingly recognized, in political as well as scientific debates, as important actors in democracies, interactions between researchers in the two fields has been rare. On the one hand, social movements have been far from prominent in the literature on democratization, which has mainly focused on either socio-economic pre-conditions or elite behavior. On the other hand, social movement scholars, until recently, have paid little attention to democratization processes, mostly concentrating their interest on democratic countries (especially on the Western European and North-American experiences), where conditions for mobilization are more favorable.

Studies on democratization have traditionally assigned a limited role to social movements and protest. Democratization studies developed within a structuralist approach. Within *modernization* theory, Lipset's (1959) pioneering work associated the chances for the emergence of a democratic regime with economic development. Although powerful in explaining the survival of established democracies, modernization theory tended to ignore the role of social actors and movements in *crafting* democracy, leaving the timing and tempo of democratization processes unexplained. When they did examine the role of organized and mobilized actors in society, they tended—as in Huntington (1965; 1991)—to consider mobilization, in particular of the working class, as a risk more than an asset.

A different vision dominated some of the main works in *historical sociology*, that linked democratization to class relations. Barrington Moore Jr. (1966), R. Bendix (1964) and T. H. Marshall (1992) all recognized the impact of class struggles in early democratization. More recently, Rueschemeyer *et al.* (1992) have pointed to the role of the working class in promoting democratization in the last two waves of democratization in Southern Europe, South America and the Caribbean, and Collier (1999) confirmed their important impact in recent waves of democratization in Southern Europe and South America. Although recognizing a path of democratization from below, these studies still tended to explain it mainly on the basis of structural conditions.

The 'structuralist bias' is criticized by the '*transitologist*' approach, that stresses agency, as well as a dynamic and processual vision of democratization, focusing on elite strategies and behavior (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Higley and Gunther 1992). While civil society is supposed to play an important role in promoting the transition process, these 'resurrections of civil society' are seen as short disruptive moments when movements, unions, churches and the



society in general push for the initial liberalization of a non-democratic regime into a transition towards democracy. Although this is a moment of great expectations, ‘regardless of its intensity and of the background from which it emerges, this popular upsurge is always ephemeral’ (O’Donnell and Schmitter, 1986, 55-56). As in this wave of reflection the *‘reforma pactada/ ruptura pactada’* in Spain was considered (explicitly or implicitly) as the model for successful democratization, the ephemeral life of the civil society tended to be perceived as not only inevitable, given the re-channeling of participation through the political parties and the electoral system, but also desirable, in order to avoid frightening authoritarian soft-liners into abandoning the negotiation process with pro-democracy moderates. Within transitology, more systematic attention to civil society in democratization processes can be found in Linz and Stepan’s (1996) model of extended transition, which addresses Eastern European cases. Contrasting it with a ‘political society’ composed of elites and institutionalized actors, they suggested that ‘A robust civil society, with the capacity to generate political alternatives and to monitor government and state can help transitions get started, help resist reversals, help push transitions to their completion, help consolidate, and help deepen democracy. At all stages of the democratization process, therefore, a lively and independent civil society is invaluable’ (Linz and Stepan 1996, 9). Although they recognize its role in theory, these authors do not give however much empirical space to civil society. Rather, transitology tends to consider movements and protest actors as manipulated by elites and focusing on very instrumentally defined purposes (see Przeworski 1991, 57; for a critique, Baker 1999). Even though the dynamic, agency-focused approach of transitology allowed for some interest in the role played by movements in democratization to develop (Pagnucco 1995), it did not focus attention on them. Transitology stresses the contingent and dynamic nature of the democratization process, but tends to reduce it to bargaining among political elites in a context of uncertainty. In addition to their ‘elitist bias’, transitologists have been criticized for emphasizing the role of individuals over collective actors, thereby reducing the process to strategic instrumental thinking, for ignoring class-defined actors such as unions and labor/left-wing parties, and for being state-centric, subordinating social actors to state actors (Collier and Mahoney 1997, Collier 1999).

Within the social movement approach, attempts to look at social movements in democratization phases have been very rare (for a review, Rossi and della Porta 2009). Especially in Latin America, the *new social movement approach*, which addressed the emergence of a new actor in post-industrial society (Touraine 1981), was widely applied in the 1980-1990s to single out the cultural and social democratization produced by movements (Slater 1985; Jelin 1987; Escobar and Álvarez 1992). The *political process approach*--that highlights the interrelationship amid governmental actors, political parties, social movements and protest--was instead sometimes applied to explain regime

transformation in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Beissinger 2002). Yet this approach has also been criticized as overly structuralist (Goodwin and Jasper 2004; McAdam et al 2001). As for its implementation in research on democratization processes, as it was critically observed, even some research on popular movements ‘stops short of a systematic inquiry into the political principles of popular organizations and strategic choice, and so fails to pursue the connections between popular politics and processes of institutional change within political regimes’ (Foweraker 1994, 218).

## 2. Beyond the state of the art: bridging structures and agency

If the systematic analysis of processes of transition from below is lacking in both disciplines, there has been some recent convergence of attention to the questions of social movements and democratization. The emergence of the global justice movement pushed some social movement scholars to pay more attention to issues of democracy, as well as to social movements in the Global South. Some pioneering research aimed at applying social movement studies in authoritarian regimes, from the Middle East (Wiktorowicz 2004; Hafez 2003; Gunning 2008) to Asia (Boudreau 2004). More generally, recognizing the structuralist bias of the political process approach, a more dynamic vision of protest has been promoted, with attention paid to the social mechanisms that intervene between macro-causes and macro-effects (McAdam et al. 2001). Recently, some scholars within this approach proposed the reformulation of the transitology perspective, taking into account the role played by contentious politics (McAdam *et al.* 2001; Schock 2005; Tilly 2004). Similarly to the transitology approach, they have stressed agency as well as the importance of looking at democratization as dynamic processes.

In research on democratization, some reflections have pointed to the democratizing role of civil society, theoretically located between the state and the market, with diminishing confidence in the role played by political parties as carriers of the democratization process. The global civil society perspective (Kaldor 2003; Keane 2003) emphasizes the democratizing role played by a worldwide organized civil society in democratization on a supra-national scale. In some of these interpretations, civil society is conceptualized as almost synonymous with social movements (Cohen and Arato 1992; Kaldor 2003). Within this frame, several programs of civil society promotion began, sponsored by international governmental organizations as well as individual states.

Empirically, case studies have demonstrated the crucial role played by mobilized actors in the emergence of democracy, and in its preservation or expansion. Not even in the Spanish case can transition be considered a purely elite-controlled bargaining process as massive strike waves, terrorist attacks by nationalist movements, and an ascending cycle of protest characterized the

transition (see, among others, Foweraker 1989; Maravall 1978; 1982; McAdam *et al.* 2001: 171-186; Reinares 1987; Sánchez-Cuenca and Aguilar 2009; Tarrow 1995). This is better defined as a destabilization/extrication process (Collier 1999: 126-132) or as ‘... a cycle of protest intertwined with elite transaction’ (McAdam *et al.* 2001: 186). While none of these research findings have systematically addressed the question of the conditions under which social movements contribute to democratization processes, Ruth Collier (1999, 1) has undertaken comparative research on a parallel topic: ‘Is a democratic regime a result of a victory from below, in which subordinate or excluded groups wrest power from a reluctant elite, or a conquest from above, in which those in power or rising economic groups not holding power pursue their own political agendas and seek to strengthen their political positions?’. Comparing recent Latin American with older European experiences, she asked ‘whether a group of workers became part of the democratization process as a self-conscious collectivity and played an active role that affected the democratic outcome’ (*ibid.*, 15). I aim at broadening this question in time and space, as well as with reference to the types of social movements involved.

A first task in the project will be conceptual and theory-oriented. The debate mentioned above emerged around two fields of knowledge built around the concepts of social movements and civil society, that developed in isolation from each other, even though they addressed similar empirical actors with similar theoretical concerns (della Porta 2010). While social movements have been addressed especially in research on democracies, the term civil society is more widespread when looking at democratization processes. Like social movements, civil society is itself a contested term. In the social sciences, civil society has been defined as a sphere of action, separate from the state and the market (e.g. Cohen and Arato 1992). In an attempt to operationalize this concept, the European Commission has defined civil society organizations as ‘the principal structures of society outside of government and public administration, including economic operators not generally considered to be ‘third sector’ or NGOs’ (European Commission 2002). According to the general principles and minimum standards for consultation of interested parties by the Commission (2002) ‘there is no commonly accepted - let alone legal - definition of the term ‘civil society organisation’. It can nevertheless be used as shorthand to refer to a range of organisations which include: the labour-market players (i.e. trade unions and employers federations - the ‘social partners’); organisations representing social and economic players, which are not social partners in the strict sense of the term (for instance, consumer organisations); NGOs (non-governmental organisations), which bring people together in a common cause, such as environmental organisations, human rights organisations, charitable organisations, educational and training organisations, etc.; CBOs (community-based organisations), i.e. organisations set up within society at grassroots level which pursue member-oriented objectives, e.g. youth organisations, family

associations and all organisations through which citizens participate in local and municipal life; and religious communities’. In the present research, I will depart from this definition, discussing in particular the parallels between CSOs and social movement organizations (SMOs), with social movements defined as (1) informal networks of individuals and organizations, based on (2) shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about (3) conflictual issues, through (4) the frequent use of various forms of protest (della Porta 2006, chap. 1).

As for the theoretical model, I aim at filling the mentioned gaps by bridging the useful insights arising from existing research on democratization processes with those developed within social movement studies. From this point of view, a specific innovation is in addressing CSOs participation in democratization processes with the help of concepts and hypotheses from research on social movements. Drawing on this literature, I aim at bridging the transitologist attention to processes and agency with attention, taken from the political process approach, to the role of social movements in normal politics.

Building on the most recent developments in social movement studies as well as democratization studies, I will pay particular attention to the causal mechanisms that intervene between macro-causes and macro-effects, in order to look at the way in which social movements exercise, or do not exercise, agency within a certain structure. I consider agency as inherent in the development of structure, and structure as influencing action to a certain extent. As Beissinger observed in his illuminating analysis of the breakdown of the Soviet empire, ‘nationalism needs to be understood not only as a cause of action, but also as the product of action. This recursive quality of human action—the fact that action can function as both cause and effect—and the significance of this for the study of nationalism are the central theoretical issues’ (2002, 11). In parallel, I shall consider the influence of structures, including political opportunities, as well as the capacity for agency in CSO participation in the different stages of democratization processes (della Porta and Diani 2006; Rossi and della Porta 2008). Breaking with essentialist, deterministic and structuralist understandings, the project will in fact stress temporality, contextualization and agency (see Beissinger 2002).

Given the attention to complex contexts and agency, as well as the ‘context of discovery’ in which the project is framed, causal hypotheses (in the form of If... then) will not be presented at this stage. However, the figure below synthesizes the main dimensions the research plans to address.



## 2.1. *What to explain: social movements in transition and consolidation to democracy*

Case studies have indicated that democratization is often linked to two contentious dynamics: a) a pro-democratic cycle of protest, and b) an increasingly massive and non-syndical wave of strikes (cf. Foweraker and Landman 1997; Collier 1999; McAdam *et al.* 2001). They can affect different steps of the democratization process

### 2.1.1. *Liberalization, transition and the mobilization of CSOs.*

As mentioned, the research will look at the role played by CSOs in opposing authoritarian regimes, looking at the contextual conditions in which successful protests start liberalization and then transition processes. Analyzing these steps of the democratization processes, the research aims at addressing the following questions: *a) under which (external and internal) conditions and through which mechanisms do CSOs support democratization processes? b) Under which conditions and through which mechanisms do they play an important role in democratization processes? c) Under which conditions and through which mechanisms are they successful in triggering democratization processes?* Protests or strikes often constitute precipitating events that start *liberalization*, spreading the perception among the authoritarian elites that there is no choice other than opening the regime if they want to avoid an imminent or potential civil war or violent takeover of power by democratic and/or revolutionary actors (e.g. Bermeo 1997, Wood 2000). During liberalization, civil society organizations publicly (re)emerge in a much more visible fashion (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986): trade unions, left-wing parties and urban movements, mainly in shantytowns and industrial districts, have often pushed for democracy (Slater 1985; Collier 1999; Silver 2003; Schneider 1992; 1995; Hipsher 1998a), sometimes in alliance with transnational actors (e.g. in Latin America, as well as in Eastern Europe; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Glenn 2003). During the *transition* to democracy, old (labor, ethnic) movements and new (women's, urban) movements have often participated in large coalitions asking for democratic rights as well as social justice (Jelin 1987; Tarrow 1995; della Porta *et al.* forthcoming). The mobilization of a pro-democracy coalition of trade unions, political parties, churches and social movements has often been pivotal in supporting the movement towards democracy in the face of contending counter-movements pushing for the restoration of authoritarian/totalitarian regimes. The bargaining dynamic among elites and the increased intensity of protest intensifies the relationship between elites and movements (Casper and Taylor 1996: 9-10; Glenn 2003, 104).

### 2.1.2. Consolidation and the (re)mobilization of CSOs.

The research will also address the role of social movements during consolidation processes. Looking at consolidation, the research shall address the question: *d) what is the legacy of the participation of civil society during the transition to democracy on the quality of democratic participation during consolidation?* Two related subquestions will be asked: what effects have had previous paths of transition, and social movements' participation in them, on their development during consolidation; and what are the effects of their mobilization on the democratic regime? In the political science literature, *consolidation* is generally linked to the end of the democratization process as signaled by the first free and open elections, the end of the uncertainty period and/or the implementation of a minimum quality of substantive democracy (Linz and Stepan 1996; O'Donnell 1993, 1994; Rossi and della Porta 2009 for a review). In some cases, this is accompanied by a demobilization of civil society organizations as energies are channeled into party politics; in others, however, demobilization does not occur (e.g. on Argentina, Bolivia and the Andean region Canel 1992; Schneider 1992; Hipsher 1998a). In fact, social movement organizations mobilized during liberalization and transition rarely totally disband; on the contrary, democratization often facilitates the development of social movement organizations (for example the women's movement in Southern Europe, della Porta *et al* forthcoming). The presence of a tradition of mobilization, as well as movements that are supported by political parties, unions and religious institutions can facilitate the maintenance of a high level of protest, as in the Communist Party's promotion of shantytown dwellers' protests in Chile (Hipsher 1998b; Schneider 1992, 1995); the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT) and part of the Roman Catholic Church with the rural movements and unions in Brazil (Branford and Rocha 2002; Burdik 2004); or the environmental movements in Eastern Europe (Flam 2001). In this stage, movements might claim the rights of those who are excluded by 'low intensity democracies' and ask for a more inclusive democracy (i.e. peasants', employment, indigenous people and women's rights) and the end of authoritarian legacies (Eckstein 2001; della Porta *et al* forthcoming). Claims framed by movements in the name of 'rights', 'citizenship', and their political practices play a crucial role in creating citizenry (Foweraker and Landman 1997; Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2003), as 'The struggle for rights has more than a merely rhetorical impact. The insistence on the rights of free speech and assembly is a precondition of the kind of collective (and democratic) decision-making which educates citizens' (Foweraker 1995: 98). Movements' alternative practices and values help to sustain and expand democracy (Santos 2005). Furthermore, movements' networks play an important role in mobilizing against persistent exclusionary patterns and authoritarian legacies (Hapogian 1990; Yashar 2005). Keeping elites under continuous popular pressure after transition can facilitate a successful consolidation (Karatnycky and Ackerman

2005).

## 2.2. *Explaining civil society participation in democratization processes*

As democratic transitions display a wide variety of trajectories and outcomes, ‘The role of social movements within them is conditioned by the specific rhythm of the ‘protest cycle’, the shape of the political opportunity structure, and the contingency of strategic choice’ (Foweraker 1995, 90, n. 2). In Spain, Brazil and Peru, for instance, strike waves were very important during the whole or part of the democratization process (Maravall 1982; Sandoval 1998; Collier 1999; Mainwaring 1987). Sometimes cycles of protest and strike waves converge. On many other occasions strike waves are stronger in the first resistance stages, decline later, and then reemerge during liberalization and transition in coordination with the upsurge of a cycle of protest originating from underground resistance networks (Rossi and della Porta 2009 for a review).

This research project aims at understanding the different trajectories and outcomes of CSOs’ participation in democratization processes by exploring the causal mechanisms linking them to:

- *Endogenous, meso-level organizational conditions*: How do internal features of civil society, such as organizational structures, ideology, and repertoire of action, influence their participation in democratization processes?
- *Exogenous, macro-level contextual variables*: How do *domestic* and *international political opportunities* (institutional features and configuration of allies) influence CSOs’ participation in democratization processes?

### 2.2.1. *The endogenous dimension: CSOs mobilization of resources*

I expect that the relevance of opposition from below during democratization processes is influenced by some endogenous characteristics of the civil society actors that mobilize. *Underground networks of resistance* often undermine the legitimacy and the (national and international) support for authoritarian regimes (on the Latin American cases, see Jelin 1987; Corradi *et al.* 1992; Escobar and Álvarez 1992). Human rights movements, trade unions, and churches promote the delegitimation of the authoritarian regime in international forums such as the United Nations, and in clandestine or open resistance to the authoritarian regime at the national level. The resilience of resistance networks under the impact of repression can lead to splits in the ruling authoritarian elites (Schock 2005). Among CSOs that have played a pro-democratic role are church-related actors (see Lowden 1996 on Chile; Burdick 1992; Levine and Mainwaring 2001 on Brazil; della Porta and Mattina 1986 on Spain; Glenn 2003; Osa 2003 on

Poland), human rights networks, sometimes in transnational alliances (Brysk 1993; Brito 1997; Sikkink 1996; Keck and Sikkink 1998: ch. 3; Wright 2007); cultural groups (Glenn 2003 on Czechoslovakia), as well as, very often, the labour movement, sometimes in alliance with ‘new social movements’. Social networks of various types have emerged as fundamental, especially for some paths of mobilization under authoritarian regimes (Osa and Corduneanu-Huci 2003). Following social movement studies, we can assume that three sets of characteristics of these networks can affect their role in democratization processes: their frames on democratic issues, organizational structures and action repertoires (on these concepts, see della Porta and Diani 2006).

Frames are schemata of interpretation that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences within their life space as well as the world at large (Snow et al. 1986, 464). Social movement framings about democracy vary. Past research indicated that the labor movement was often divided in its positions about representative democracy. Even if it tended to support the various stages of (initial) democratization, cross-national differences were relevant (Marks, Mbaye and Kim 2009). Beyond support for democracy in general, specific conceptions of democracy change. In general, social movements tend to consider a representative conception of democracy as, at least, insufficient, focusing instead on democracy as a *process*, which is variously defined as participatory, direct, open and deliberative. Traditionally, social movements have emphasised a *participatory* conception of democracy, stressing the importance of increasing direct forms of participation. In this line, CSOs have been said to assert that direct democracy is closer to the interests of the people than liberal democracy, which is based on the delegation of power to representatives who can be controlled only at the moment of election and who have full authority to take decisions between one election and another (Kitschelt 1995). In the most recent wave of protest on global justice in particular, conceptions of deliberative democracy have appealed to many organizations and individuals, especially through a stress on consensual decision making and high quality discourse. In a previous project—the DEMOS project (Democracy in Europe and the Mobilization of the Society—Demos, European Commission, FP 6)—on the Global Justice Movement in six European countries as well as at the transnational level (della Porta 2007, 2009a and b), I constructed a fourfold typology of visions and practices of democracy. First, I distinguished between participatory conceptions that stress the inclusiveness of equals (high participation) and conceptions based upon the delegation of power to representatives (low participation). Second, I distinguished conceptions that pay little attention to deliberation and the transformation of preferences, and instead highlight the aggregation of conflicting interests (low deliberation) vis-à-vis conceptions that pay more attention to the quality of communication, stressing consensus building (high deliberation). This allowed me to single out four conceptions (meanings and practices) of democracy: an *associational model*,



with delegation of power and (often) decision-making by majority vote; a model of *deliberative representation*, with delegation and consensual decision-making an *assembleary model*, with no delegation and majority rule; and *deliberative participation*, with no delegation and consensual decision making. That project indicated that all these models are present in CSOs active in EU countries, with a tendency for organizational leaders to emphasize the consensual dimension and for rank-and-file participants to stress participatory visions. I expect that this typology has a heuristic capacity for research on CSO participation in democratization processes as well.

Figure 1. Typology of conceptions of democracy

		Participation	
		Low	High
Deliberation	Low	Associational model	Assembleary Model
	High	Deliberative representation	Deliberative participation

As found in the DEMOS project, I expect conceptions of democracy to interact with other organizational characteristics that also affect the role of civil society in democratization processes. Since an organization is also a ‘context for political conversation’ (Eliasoph 1998), organizational structure affects conceptions and practices of democracy, as well as mobilization capacity. Indeed, organizational forms have been analyzed in relation to the cultural meaning that activists give to them (see Breines 1989; Clemens 1993; Polletta 2002). Various pieces of research on social movements have confirmed that informal, decentralized groups tend to espouse more participatory and consensus-oriented conceptions of democracy (della Porta 2009a; della Porta 2009b; della Porta, Andretta, Mosca and Reiter 2006). Some research in non-EU countries has found a tension between rich NGOs, often funded by international actors, and grassroots organizations, as well as a dangerous dependence of local CSOs on rich sponsors (e.g. Chandoke 2003). Conceptions of democracy have also been linked to repertoires of action. An emphasis on protest brings about a ‘logic of membership’ that favors participatory democratic models. CSOs that embrace non-violent ideologies and practices tend to emphasize consensual internal decision-making, while vice-versa the use of violent forms of action tends to reduce both participation and deliberation (della Porta 1995). The DEMOS project also stressed the importance of organizational cultural characteristics, such as identification with the movement and belonging to the new social movements and the new-global areas, and the presence of certain types of values in explaining conceptions of democracy (della Porta 2009b). Organizational differences also depend on which movement traditions (Old Left

and New Left, new social movements and solidarity or peace movements as well as the newly emerged groups on global issues) the various CSOs hail from. Conceptions of democracy also varied however with their different ages, size and organizational types (e.g. grassroots groups, unions, co-operatives, and NGOs) (della Porta 2009b). More participatory and deliberative values should foster opposition, increasing participation and providing arenas for plural, inclusive coalitions during phases of liberalization and transition, as well as allowing for more civil society mobilization in the successive periods.

### 2.2.2. *The exogenous dimension: Attribution of opportunities*

I also expect political opportunities, especially as they are perceived by civil society actors, to influence the role they play in democratization processes. As mentioned, structuralist approaches have investigated external conditions that might explain paths of democratization. Democratization studies have looked at economic development and class structure, while social movement studies have focused attention on political dimensions, defined with reference to stable characteristics, such as the functional and territorial distribution of power, political culture and the cleavage structure, as well as more dynamic ones such as the positions of potential allies and opponents. The basic assumption in this approach is that the more opportunities a political system offers for social movements, the more moderate, single issue and open-structured they will be. Drawing on previous research, I expect political as well as social and cultural opportunities to influence mobilization levels (Kriesi 1991; Tarrow 1989; Kriesi et al. 1995), strategies (Eisinger 1973; Kitschelt 1986), ideologies/framing and behavior (della Porta and Rucht 1995; Kriesi et al. 1995) and the organizational structures of CSOs (Rucht 1996; Kriesi 1996).

In looking at political opportunities, the research will first of all address the *characteristics of the authoritarian regime*. Linz and Stepan (1996) hypothesize that the type of non-democratic regime influences the potential for the emergence of movements, protests, strikes and underground resistance networks that precede liberalization, and accompany democratization. *Totalitarian* regimes are those that, by eliminating any pluralism, jeopardize the most the development of autonomous organizations and networks that could then be the promoters of democracy most. *Sultanistic* regimes, due to the high personalization of power, include the manipulative use of mobilization for ceremonial purposes and through para-state groups, discouraging and repressing any kind of autonomous organization that could sustain resistance networks. *Authoritarian* regimes, mainly when installed in countries with previous (semi) democratic experience, are those which generally experience the most massive mobilizations, and the best organized underground resistance based on several networks that either pre-dated the regime or were formed later thanks to higher degrees of pluralism. Within authoritarian regimes, I expect mobilization

opportunities to be different for *bureaucratic-authoritarianism*, where a technocratic civic-military elite commands the de-politicization of a mobilized society for capital accumulation (O'Donnell 1973), and *populist-authoritarianism*, where the elites mobilize the society from above for reasons of legitimating the regime while incorporating the lower classes (cf. Hinnebusch 2007). Mobilization during democratic consolidation also seems to be more difficult the *longer* the life of the authoritarian regime. In general, 'The authority patterns, elite bargains, and corporate interests on which different types of autocracy are based make those regimes differently vulnerable to different kinds of public challenge' (Ulfelder 2005: 326-327)

Different *transition paths* can also offer different opportunities to social movements. Linz and Stepan (1996, chap. 2) singled out the specific challenges of multiple simultaneous transitions, where regime changes are accompanied by changes in the economic system and/or in the nation-state arrangement. It is important not only whether the previous regime was authoritarian or totalitarian, but also whether it was a capitalist or a communist one (Stark and Bruszt 1998). Especially, when there is a triple transition, the problem of nation-state building is reflected in the emergence of nationalist movements mobilizing in the name of contending visions of what the *demos* of the future democracy should be (Beissinger 2002). The moderation versus radicalization of claims for autonomy/independence has been mentioned as favoring versus jeopardizing the transition to democracy (among others, Oberschall 2000; Glenn 2003; Reinares 1987).

Finally, our research will address major *transnational* influences linked to the evolving interstate rules that define the global normative context for action by states and parties engaged in violent conflict, as well as the development of transnational epistemic communities linking states and civil society organizations against human rights violations. Based on previous research (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Chiodi 2007; Féron, Beauzamy and Pellon 2006), I expect all of these aspects to have an indirect or direct impact on CSOs' participation in democratization processes. In particular, I plan to investigate the tensions between the conceptions of democracy expressed by local CSOs and the Western conceptions promoted by transnational actors, which may develop into cross-fertilization, but may also hamper efforts at developing an autonomous civil society (e.g. Challande 2008; Wada 2006; Dorronsoro 2005; Lelandais 2008). I also expect cross-national phenomenon of diffusion of ideas, often based on active strategies of promotion (e.g. Beissinger 2007a and 2007b; Chessa 2004; Henderson 2002).

## Methodology

As I believe that a systematic assessment is necessary in order to go beyond the rich but not directly comparable evidence currently available from case studies in various countries, I propose a cross-national research design, comparing countries in different parts of the world. Different parts of the research will address different questions linked to CSOs' participation in democratization processes: a) under which (external and internal) conditions and through which mechanisms do CSOs support democratization processes? b) Under which conditions and through which mechanisms do they play an important role in democratization processes? c) Under which conditions and through which mechanisms are they successful in triggering democratization processes? d) And, finally, what is the legacy of the participation of civil society during transitions to democracy on the quality of democratic participation during consolidation?

In order to address these questions, the research project is divided into four parts. The *first part*, that will cover the first 6 months of the research, will be devoted to a better refinement of the theoretical model presented in the above, to the conceptualization as well as to the selection of the sources and the specification of the instruments for the empirical research. The *second part* (from month 7 to month 24), focusing on Eastern Europe, will consist in the analysis of a (relatively) large number of cases of democratization, oriented to testing under which conditions CSOs a) support democracy; b) play an important role in the transition to democracy. In the *third part* (months 25-39), I shall develop paired comparisons of cases of 'democratization from above' and 'democratization from below', addressing the causal mechanisms in CSOs' participation in democratization processes. This part also aims at addressing the question d) about the consequences of previous participation by CSOs in transitions on the successive stages of consolidation. The *fourth part* (months 43-60) will then aim at controlling the degree of generalizability of the research by going beyond the East European experience. I shall here compare the empirical results collected so far with existing research on other cases of democratization, both in previous waves of democratization in Southern Europe and in non European countries. In this part, I shall also address question c) by looking at cases of unsuccessful mobilization, in order to develop reflection on the conditions under which civil society mobilizations fail to promote democratization.

The different parts require different strategies of *case selection*. In the second and third parts, I focus the research on the role of CSOs in recent democratization processes in EU associated and member states, locating then (part 4) the acquired knowledge in a comparative perspective including previous waves of democratization in Europe as well as selected non-EU countries. I see Eastern Europe as not only a relatively little frequented area of investigation,

but also as a critical set of cases, where the paradox I presented at the beginning of this research has emerged as most relevant. The importance of civil society for a sound development of democracy has been stressed by normative theorists and policy makers alike, particularly for the most recent wave of democratization, where empirical research indicated major difficulties in building an autonomous civil society. If the very concept of a civil society was re-founded in Eastern Europe (Kaldor 2003), and democracy building policies stressed especially there the need to develop a sound civil society, time and again empirical research has indicated its weaknesses (Ost 2005). The availability of public and private funds for NGOs has been said to contribute to an early institutionalization of movement organizations, while the weakness of civil society is often noted (Flam 2001; Howard 2003). Finally, Eastern European cases include variation in the strength of civil society both during and after transition (see, among others, Eckiert and Kubik 1998, Goldstone 1998, Beissinger 2002), as well as on our main explanatory dimensions. While, as explained below, the choice of the specific case studies for the small N parts of the research cannot be anticipated, as they will depend from the results of the second part, Poland as well as the Orange Revolution countries are potential candidates in the selection of *positive* cases of transition triggered from below. As for part four, given the relevance of their pro-democratic movements as well as the presence of extensive research, Argentina could be, for instance, a candidate for an extra-European comparison with a military regime, and the Greece in the 1970s for a within-Europe comparison.

The number of cases (and research strategies) will change in the three parts. In the second part, I shall adopt a large N comparison looking through Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) at those countries that have undergone democratization in recent times (post-1989). This part of the research will cover: a) Central-East European Countries: Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia; b) South-East European: Albania, Slovenia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia; c) Baltic Republics: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania. Through this analysis, I plan to single out paths of democratization from below, where CSOs played an important role, from paths of ‘democratization from above’ where no such influence was evident. In a second step, I shall select, on the basis of the previous analysis, some cases occupying different positions in the typology for an in-depth comparison of the democratization processes. In part four I shall, as mentioned, expand the comparison to include cases from previous waves of democratization in the EU (in particular, South European countries), as well as non-EU cases of failed mobilization, selected on the basis of their theoretical relevance as well as feasibility.

The cross-national historical comparison will focus on critical junctures, defined as crucial choices which have consistent historical legacy (Collier and Collier 2002). As in previous research on regime changes (Collier 1999), my

main *units of analysis* will be episodes of democratic reform. After singling out these episodes in the selected countries, on the basis of a systematic search of existing data bases, I will investigate the *major protest events* that accompanied these critical junctures. In his research on nationalist movements in the breakdown of the Soviet Union, Beissinger focused on protest events as ‘contentious and potentially subversive practices that challenge normalized practices, modes of causation, or system of authority’ (2002, 14). Singling out the specificity of an eventful temporality, Sewell (1996) defined transformative events as capable of altering the cultural meanings of political and social categories and fundamentally shaping peoples’ collective loyalties and actions. In my own work, I have stressed the importance of transformative protest events for the evolution of social movements (della Porta, 2008).

I believe that an empirical focus on events allows for an analysis of the constraining capacity of structures, but also of the power of agency of mobilized collective actors. Looking at (potentially) transformative protest events, I therefore plan to analyze how ‘what is initially constraints by structures, becomes potentially a causal variable in a further chain of events’ (Beissinger 2002, 17). Moving beyond cross-national comparison, looking at events would allow me to single out the cross-time and cross-space diffusion of ideas in strongly transnational processes. During democratization processes, protest events tend in fact to cluster in chains, series, waves, cycles, and tides ‘forming a punctuated history of heightened challenges and relative stability’ (ibid. 16). Additionally, events constitute magnifying lenses in which actor strategies as well as structural influences become more visible, ‘in the narrative of the struggles that accompany them, in the altered expectations that they generate about subsequent possibilities to contest; in the changes that they evoke in the behavior of those forces that uphold a given order, and in the transformed landscape of meaning that events at times fashion’ (ibid. 17). Finally, events are important *per se*, carrying a capacity to develop intense emotional, cognitive and relational mechanisms (della Porta 2008).

I shall address the research questions through a *mixed-method empirical analysis*: in the various steps of my research, different parts of the model will be tested on the basis of different methods and techniques. In some parts of the research, I aim at collecting basic information on a large number of cases and, whenever possible, analyze them using some descriptive statistics and QCA. The core of the research, however, aims at understanding CSOs’ mobilization in democratization processes on the basis of the cross-national comparison of in-depth case studies, with particular attention paid to historical and geopolitical contexts. Infra-case comparison of different types of CSOs will allow an understanding of the impact of internal resources on CSOs’ mobilization. While for the larger N comparison I plan to use Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) in order to single out different paths of democratization, in other parts of the research, I aim at systematic historical reconstruction (what is often called

process tracing) in order to investigate the development of CSOs' participation in different phases of democratization and democratic consolidation. In part of the research, in looking at the endogenous characteristics of civil society involvement in democratization processes, I shall build upon the results of the mentioned DEMOS project I coordinated that focused on conceptions of democracy in CSOs in six EU countries and at the transnational level. The use of similar research instruments will aid in developing a systematic comparison of CSOs in recent democratization processes with their counterparts in old member states.

I shall triangulate different *sources*. For the conceptual part as well as the large N research I plan to rely upon existing scholarly literature, databases and expert interviews. While these two parts of the project appear particularly ambitious, as they cover many countries, I believe I can use much of my previously acquired knowledge not only on social movements in general, but also on their specific development in the geographical area covered. Extensive use will be made of secondary sources, in various European languages. Existing databases will also be exploited. The historical work will not involve archival research but the critical use of existing texts. The in-depth analysis in the third part will also include news sources, published interviews with participants, eyewitness accounts, memoirs of movement activists and government representatives. The second and third parts of the project will involve documentary work and extensive interviews. Triangulation will be provided by comparing the responses of interviewees with each other.

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