

# The Land of Opportunities?

## Social Movement Studies in Switzerland

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A 'marginal field of research': this is how Hanspeter Kriesi (1990) characterised social movement studies in Switzerland in a review at the end of the 1980s. Little research had been done on social movements in Switzerland, the review said, and even less so on the so-called new social movements (203). Nonetheless, a few movements had attracted scholarly attention at that time, if not always with the theoretical perspective of the sociology of social movements: the right-wing anti-foreigner movement, the regional and separatist movement in the Jura that had resulted in the creation of a new canton in 1978 (e.g. Ganguillet 1985), the peace movement (Epple 1988), the ecology movement (Lévy 1981) and the 'youth' movements of the late sixties and the beginning of the eighties (Kriesi 1984). Kriesi himself played a pioneering role in doing social movement research in Switzerland: in a study using protest event data (Kriesi et al. 1981), and in case studies based on interviews and surveys (Kriesi 1985) on 'political activation', he was the first to look at these 'new' actors shaping the Swiss political process, and offered an initial mapping of protest activity in Switzerland. The broader field of political sociology and research on political participation, however, was much more focused on institutionalised means of participation. The scholarly neglect of protest and social movements certainly had something to do with the availability and greater legitimacy of direct democratic means of participation (Kriesi 1990).

More than twenty years separate us from Kriesi's assessment. Does it still hold true? In terms of academic institutionalization, the situation has notably improved: some tenured sociologists or political scientists are movement scholars, although this is only true for the French-speaking part of the country. In German-language universities, movement studies barely exist. It is mostly in terms of actual research that the situation has progressed. Many studies have analysed Swiss social movements and protest from the 1990s onwards, often integrated into international research programs. In-

deed, some of the core contributions of ‘European’ social movement studies originated from Swiss research projects and scholars. I will start by briefly reviewing the most important of these studies, leaving aside work produced before 1990, already covered in Kriesi’s exhaustive review. I shall then discuss the dominant theoretical perspectives on movements in Switzerland in the recent past and how they relate to international theoretical debates, teasing out the specificities of movement studies in Switzerland.

## Main Research Projects and Findings

If one were to quickly characterise Swiss social movement studies over the past two decades, three major observations stand out. First, the study of social movements in Switzerland is more often than not comparative, frequently conducted within cross-country research projects. Second, movement studies in Switzerland have been very much influenced by the political process approach, and have also added some core insights to this perspective. Finally, a different strand present in Swiss social movements is more interested in activist trajectories and often takes a more critical stance to the political process model.

### ‘New Social Movements in Western Europe’ and Their Offspring

The ‘new social movements’ project directed by Kriesi (see Kriesi et al. 1995), based on a protest event analysis covering 1975–89, was certainly one of the major works in social movement studies at large, and movement studies in Switzerland in particular. Initially, Switzerland was not supposed to be part of the study covering France, Germany and the Netherlands; when Kriesi started the project, he had a position in Amsterdam, but then moved to the University of Geneva where he was offered a chair of comparative politics. Not only did this move lead to adding the Swiss case to the comparison, but according to Kriesi’s recollection of the events, it also significantly influenced the theoretical framework of the study. The comparative politics perspective that came with his new position led Kriesi to increasingly focus on the concept of political opportunity structures. The new social movements study thus bridged two important theoretical traditions, an American one with the political process model, to which Kriesi’s team added a strong focus on comparative state institutions, and a European one of the social origins of ‘new’ social movements, with cleavage structures as the key factor. In the study, Switzerland appears as a case with a particularly open opportunity structure, explaining the comparatively numerous protest events as well as their rela-

tively moderate character in terms of action repertoires. Furthermore, the study establishes the importance of 'new' social movements in Switzerland (ecology, anti-nuclear, third world/solidarity, peace, squatter/urban) compared to the 'old' labour movement, and explains it through the pacification of the traditional class cleavage in Switzerland and the importance of a new cleavage in the middle class. Within the sector of 'new' social movements, the data shows that the anti-nuclear movement was the most active in the 1970s. By the 1980s, there was a sharp increase in protest events, due to the actions of the peace movement and urban movements. The ecology and solidarity movements, on the other hand, while strong in terms of membership numbers, use more institutionalised forms of action than protest (Giugni 1995).

In addition to the publications based on this dataset, a few studies from the 1990s focused on more specific aspects of social movements in Switzerland. Kriesi and Wisler (1995) were interested in the relationship between direct democracy and protest. Indeed, the wide availability of direct democratic instruments at local, regional and national levels in Switzerland raises the question of its effects on protest. Marginal political actors are expected to use direct democratic means rather than other repertoires such as demonstrations. Studying the peace movement, Epple (1988) argued that it had been weakened by direct democracy. The availability of direct democratic instruments drained movement resources, forced them to moderate demands and led to heightened bureaucratization and centralization. Other authors suggest that it can also be beneficial, for example, to allow a movement to re-mobilise for a particular referendum campaign (Kriesi 1990: 215) Using the important local institutional variation with regard to direct democratic instruments, Kriesi and Wisler (1995) analysed the role of direct democracy in shaping police tactics to respond to protestors. A comparison of Zurich's and Geneva's response to youth movements in the 1980s shows that in Zurich, where direct democracy is widely available, movements are expected to make use of it; 'unconventional' protest forms are less legitimate and repressive police tactics normal and widely accepted. In Geneva, where direct democratic instruments are less developed, the police followed a more appeasing strategy. In a recent book, Tackenberg and Wisler (2008) further develop this institutional-cultural argument by showing the contingent historical origins of police repertoires and their justifications in workers' protests of the 1910s and 1930s, again comparing Zurich and Geneva.

The second important development of this period is found in studies on extreme right-wing movements. Based on the structural analysis of the transformation of traditional cleavages and the rise of new ones, Kriesi argued that in addition to a new cleavage among middle classes triggered by

increasing levels of education, the process of economic globalization led to the formation of another cleavage between ‘losers’ and ‘winners’ of this transformation. Contrary to the middle-class cleavage, globalization created a potential for right-wing movements fighting against the opening up of frontiers and defending national identities (Kriesi 1996). The analysis of the dataset from the new social movements project, which also included protest events from the right, showed that they were responsible for only 0.6 per cent of all protest events. However, the number of violent radical right-wing protests increased over this period (Gentile 1998). Perhaps more importantly, the radical right had mostly used party politics to express its demands, and with increasing success. For some Swiss movement scholars, this constituted a plea to bring the study of movements and political parties closer together, as both are highly intertwined. This would be done in the political claims analyses that came to characterise Swiss social movement studies in the following decade, at the price of relegating movements to a more marginal role in study designs.

### Political Claims Analysis

The first of these political claims analysis projects was a study on immigration policies and citizenship (Giugni et al. 2005; Koopmans et al. 2005). Again, as part of an international research project, the study looked at political claims-making in the field of immigration policy in five countries, considering not only social movements but also all other actors that intervened in the public debate on this topic. Insisting on the importance of *discursive opportunity structures* characterizing immigration regimes, the research showed how the exclusive and assimilationist discourse dominating Swiss immigration policy handicapped immigrant claims-makers, and strongly favoured their right-wing opponents (Giugni and Passy 2002). A very similar study design was employed to investigate claims-making in the realm of unemployment, comparing countries with different welfare-state regimes (Giugni 2010). This analysis also tends to show how marginal social movement organizations were in shaping public discourses on unemployment compared to government actors, unions and political parties.

Political claims analysis was also applied to studying the debates around globalization and global justice that emerged on the Swiss movement agenda at the turn of the century. Beyeler and Kriesi (2005) analysed the international media coverage of protest against the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and against the ministerial conferences of the World Trade Organization. Their analysis shows that the Swiss newspaper they studied—the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*—mostly reported on the protests taking place in

Switzerland against the WEF, put security issues forward most of the time, and was generally very critical of protesters. Finally, in Kriesi et al.'s research on public debates and political transformations (2012), social movements had definitely moved to the background, since the project studied the re-shuffling of party politics and ignored the role of social movements in political transformations. One strand of it, however, attempts to bridge the analysis of party politics with movement politics. Building on the previous protest event database from the new social movements in Europe study, the project extends it up to 2006 and thus covers more recent developments in the movement arena (Hutter 2014). Comparing six countries, the study shows particular interest in examining how the rise of the cleavage linked to globalization affected movements, and therefore focuses on analysing the claims protesters raise. For Switzerland, this extension of protest-event data continues to stress the highly contentious 1980s—the mobilization of the global justice movement in the early 2000s did not lead to such high protest levels and was actually comparatively quite modest (Hutter and Giugni 2009). The cleavage opposing globalization winners and losers expressed itself more in the arena of party politics, through the rise of the right-wing party SVP, than in the street politics of the global justice movement (Hutter 2014).

### Surveys in Rallies

The analysis of protest events and political claims strongly shaped Swiss social movement research. However, beyond such approaches, a number of studies on the global justice movement in Switzerland used survey techniques to yield insights into the participants of the movement. For the 2003 G8 summit in Evian, France, a bi-national research team conducted a survey among protesters in Geneva, Lausanne and Annemasse (France) (Sommier et al. 2004). Building on a research program developed earlier for the French case (Agrikoliansky et al. 2005), this research portrayed the organizational diversity of the movement, its different organizational components and their networks through declarations of organizational affiliations. In addition, it pointed at the co-presence of a group of 'overinvested' activists characterised by multiple organizational affiliations and a group of new protesters who tended to be non-affiliated. Another transnational research project with a Swiss branch on the global justice movements used similar methods—adding an organizational survey (Giugni and Nai 2013; Eggert and Giugni 2008). The latter study, based on surveys of demonstrations against the WEF, shows the relatively strong presence of organizations stemming from the previous 'new social movement' protest cycles, for example the environmental and

solidarity movements, and the lesser importance of the new groups and organizations that have emerged in the protests against globalization.

### **Movement Outcomes**

To be sure, not all movement research in Switzerland was done within transnational projects. A few important ‘Swiss’ contributions to movement studies in the past few decades did not follow this rule. This is true in particular of two fields of studies: movement outcomes and activism. Marco Giugni, the European editor of *Mobilization*, was a pioneer in studying movement outcomes (see the 1998 volume ‘How Social Movements Matter’, which he co-edited) (Giugni et al. 1998). In a comparative study on three movements in three countries (the anti-nuclear, ecology and peace movements in Switzerland, Italy and the United States) (Giugni 2004a), Giugni analysed the role of tactics, resources, political opportunities and public opinion in movement outcomes using time-series analysis based on protest event data and different outcome variables. He suggests that there is a joint-effect model of movement outcomes, where political opportunities (allies) and public opinion are crucial external resources for movements, strengthen the weight of protest and thus increase the chances that power holders meet movement demands (121). For Switzerland, Giugni’s results show an impact of the ecology movement when combining the local, regional and national levels. His measures indicate no policy impact for the anti-nuclear and peace movements. However, Giugni looks at short-term effects: he relates outcome variables to movement activity preceding them by a year and thus does not grasp middle- and long-term outcomes. In addition, the degree of incorporation of movement demands in the political system and movement institutionalization is another form of movement outcomes (Giugni and Passy 1998). The weak Swiss state often ‘delegates’ tasks to integrated social movement organizations, for example in the sectors of environmental and development aid policies (Giugni and Passy 1998), in health policy (Voegtli and Fillieule 2012) or in the realm of pensioners (Lambelet 2012). Thus, the relationship between movements and the state in Switzerland goes far beyond confrontation.

### **Sociology of Activism**

Another stronghold of movement studies in Switzerland is the sociology of activism. Florence Passy has been particularly interested in explaining why people join movement organizations and distinguishes between different types of activism—members, participants and activists, characterised by a grow-

ing intensity of commitment. Passy particularly focused on *altruist* forms of political participation (Passy 1998), and tried to understand the specificities of ‘members of conscience’ mobilizing for the sake of others (Passy and Giugni 2001). Through a survey of a Swiss SMO from the solidarity sector, Passy stressed the importance of socialization, interpersonal networks and decisions (agency) in the recruitment process (Passy 2001, 2003). Linking research on activists to the political claims analysis and the concept of discursive opportunities in the sphere of immigration, Passy and Giugni also studied the role of collective narrations in the formation of collective identities and choice of action repertoires (Passy and Giugni 2005).

### Critical Perspectives on Activism and Social Movements

The researchers assembled in the *Centre de recherche de l'action politique* of the University of Lausanne (CRAPUL) also studied activism and activists, mostly focusing on the determinants and consequences of activist trajectories or ‘careers’, as Olivier Fillieule (2001) put it. Originally from France, Fillieule moved to the University of Lausanne in the early 2000s, and his work is thus part of both Swiss and French social movement studies. His move to Switzerland prompted the rise of a new group of researchers analysing movements, who have produced a number of studies on activism and activist careers. Using a Bourdieusian framework, Gottraux’s study of the left-wing group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was a precursor in analysing activist trajectories to understand the fate of movement organizations (Gottraux 1997).

Many studies applied the interactionist perspective, focusing on activist careers developed by Fillieule (2001, 2010a; Blanchard and Fillieule 2013) to different activist organizations and political parties. Gottraux and Péchu (2011) studied activists of the Swiss right-wing party SVP through interviews and participant observation. Their work aims to show that most of the activists in this radical right-wing party are not globalization ‘losers’. A study by Bennani-Chraïbi also focused on political parties, but in the Moroccan context (Bennani-Chraïbi 2010). In addition to interviews and observation, this work is also based on surveys to reconstruct and quantitatively analyse activist careers, a technique that was also used in studies on the Swiss movement against AIDS, which showed the successive transformations of the Swiss gay movement and its reactions to this health crisis (Voegtli and Fillieule 2012; Delessert and Voegtli 2012). In research currently underway on gender and unionism, union activists are interviewed and surveys are made in three Swiss cantons; participant observation is used to shed light on gender dynamics in the daily routines of unions (Monney, Filleule and Avanza 2013). And Lambelet’s study on seniors’ association in Switzerland used

qualitative methods including participant observation to understand the rarely addressed question of activism by retired people (Lambelet 2011a, 2011b, 2012). While some of these studies do not analyse social movements but rather parties, unions, or interest groups, their focus on activism and activist trajectories likens them to classic studies of movement activism, and constitutes a different form of how the study of movements, parties and interest groups came together in Switzerland. In this respect, reference should also be made to a number of conferences that were organised by the CRAPUL in Lausanne and gave rise to edited volumes on the topics of disengagement (Fillieule 2005), gender and activism (Fillieule and Roux 2009) and collective identity (Surdez, Voegtli and Voutat 2010).

Overall, the common point of the studies from the CRAPUL research group is their critical engagement with dominant theoretical approaches and a broad perspective on social movements and activism in general. They are influenced by French theoretical perspectives—Bourdieu's sociology, in particular—while still engaging the core social movements literature. In the Swiss context, they thus constitute a second pole next to the protest event and political claims studies firmly situated in the traditional political process framework. This is also true of my own work, which extends the traditional scope of movement studies focusing on the state to analysing interactions between movement actors and firms. Through a study of anti-sweatshop campaigns in Switzerland and France, this research emphasises the role of social movements in shaping consumer preferences (Balsiger 2010), and analyses the campaigns' interactions with firms and influence on the rise of new market niches (Balsiger 2012, 2014, 2015). Broadening the perspective in yet a different direction, scholars from the University of Lausanne have also researched police behaviour (Fillieule and Della Porta 2006), protest in authoritarian countries (Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule 2004) and, recently, turned to investigate the upheavals of the Arab Spring. Fillieule and Bennani-Chraïbi (2012) called for a sociology of revolutionary situations and a theoretical approach looking at micro-level interactions, and El Chazli (2012) analysed how 'depoliticised' Egyptians became revolutionaries in the course of the ousting of Mubarak.

## **Protest Cultures**

A final research project that needs to be mentioned here can also be considered as developing a critical perspective, emphasizing the cultural aspects of social movements. Holding a professorship financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation, Oliver Marchart led a research group investigating media and protest. Closer to cultural studies and communication studies than

the social movements framework, these studies looked at the use of different kinds of media and protest forms by precarious workers and their movements, such as the EuroMayDay protests. Contributions analysed the timing and coordination of online demonstrations (Marchart et al. 2007) or the use of images by protestors (Marchart and Hamm 2011).

## A Swiss Perspective on Social Movements?

One aspect that characterises Swiss movement studies above all is the frequency with which Swiss movements are studied in comparative frameworks, most often when Switzerland is one of the cases in a cross-country study with researchers from different countries. Swiss movement research is therefore highly internationalised, although Switzerland's non-membership in the EU made financing sometimes troublesome, at least until the bilateral treaty of 2004 that allowed Swiss researchers to receive EU funding. Internationalization is also reflected in the languages of publications. The majority of research is published in English, especially in these comparative projects. Nonetheless, there is also a strong research tradition in French—the research by scholars from CRAPUL is often published in French, and addresses French scholars and approaches. Publications in German are much less common. This has to do with the fact that research on social movements in Switzerland, even when part of international projects, has been overwhelmingly done in universities from the French-speaking part.

Comparisons have proven useful to point out some distinguishing characteristics of social movements in Switzerland: their relatively high level of mobilization and use of moderate action forms, in particular petitions and direct democratic instruments. The Swiss case thus suggests the importance to analytically consider protest and more institutionalised forms of participation in an interlinked manner. Social movement organizations use direct democratic means of participation, and are often expected to do so, with other protest forms being perceived as less legitimate. Scholars have therefore pleaded against a clear-cut separation of the study of the spheres of institutionalised (party and interest group) politics and non-institutionalised movement politics. In the study of activism and mobilization processes, this was already the starting point of Switzerland's earliest studies on political activation or mobilization (Kriesi 1985), where new social movement actors such as the anti-nuclear movement were studied alongside interest groups, unions, and political parties. Hutter and Kriesi (2013) emphasised this point anew based on their work on political claims and protest: movement scholars, they say, neglect the existence of different channels of mobilization, in

particular the electoral channel or channels of interest intermediation. Recent Swiss studies in the sociology of activism (Lambelet 2011; Péchu and Gottraux 2012) also study movements, interest groups and parties alike, analysing processes such as recruitment or socialization that can be found in all groups composed of activists mobilizing for a cause.

In the study of political processes and their contestation, the Swiss case therefore stands against a narrow understanding of social movements and protest, and begs in favour of studies of contentious political processes that look at all the actors attempting to shape them, some using movement tactics, some more institutionalised forms, some combining tactics from different arenas. Political claims analysis is one possible option for a more encompassing study of political processes: it does not focus on social movements alone, but takes as its analytical unity a policy field. However, social movements tend to fall out of the spotlight of this kind of approach, and we do not learn much about proper movement dynamics. Another way of studying political processes more broadly would be to analyse the interplay of movement actors with other players, see what kinds of tactics they use to challenge different kinds of social orders, and look at the transformations movements undergo in this course. Interesting questions arise when one addresses the articulation of different spheres—how collective actors usually defined as interest groups use movement tactics, or how movements lobby administrations, for instance, and how they combine tactical action repertoires (Fillieule 2010b).

Movement studies in Switzerland have also had considerable impact on theory. Kriesi and colleagues' work of the 1990s has been especially influential in shaping the conceptual toolkit of movement scholars. While there is no 'Swiss school' of movement studies, the research on new social movements (Kriesi et al. 1995) has managed to bridge theoretical traditions of the structural origins of movements with the political process model in an encompassing framework. Furthermore, through its comparative perspective, it has contributed to introducing institutional factors to the concept of political opportunity structures that had hitherto been neglected. State capacity or strength, the level of centralization, or the inclusiveness of the political system have become routine aspects for scholars to investigate when studying the interactions of movements with states.

Within Switzerland, this mostly structuralist approach has been very prominent. Textbook overviews of movements in Switzerland (Giugni 2004b) relate the standard view of movements reacting to political opportunities. Nonetheless, while theory-building by Swiss scholars has penetrated the international scholarly community, debates on existing movement theories in this community have not had much impact on Swiss movement studies in turn. The challenges to the political process model of the late 1990s (Good-

win and Jasper 1999, 2003; McAdam et al. 2001) have left few marks on Swiss movement studies. These issues were mostly taken up by the researchers from CRAPUL (Fillieule 2006; Fillieule et al. 2010), although domestic scientific debates on movements are rare. This is certainly also due to the small size of the specialised scientific community, and the lack of institutionalization thereof. Most Swiss scholars studying movements are political scientists, yet at the yearly conference of the Swiss political science association, panels on protest and movements are not common. Debates take place at the international level, not within the country.

The predominance of structuralist approaches and international research projects adopting macro-sociological methods (protest event or political claims analysis), and the relatively weak institutionalization of movement studies at Swiss universities, means that we know astonishingly little about many of the movements that have been active in Switzerland during the past forty years. While we do know, thanks to protest event analysis, how active the peace, solidarity or urban movements were over time, there is a lack of case studies that would allow us to place these movements in their historical context and to understand them also with the use of more qualitative methods. In other words, there is solid knowledge on the big panorama of movements in Switzerland, but historically rich sociological research on specific movements, organizations, or protest episodes is rare. Since Kriesi's case studies (1985), this kind of research has been neglected—with few exceptions such as Epple's (1988) study on the peace movement. In particular, we lack studies analysing the social movement field, focusing on the rise of new movements, interactions between different collective actors, the building of alliances and the games of distinction taking place. We do not know enough about which organizations compose(d) these movements and how internal fights shaped their outlook. Historical and qualitative studies would be required to complement—and maybe also challenge—some of the insights based on protest event or political claims data. Historians have very recently started to fill this gap for the movements of the 1970s (in particular (Kalt 2010; Schaufelbuehl 2009)), but they rarely address questions of movement dynamics and do not engage with concepts and theories of social movement studies.

Many of the most interesting and influential movements that are active in Switzerland today or have shaped Swiss politics in the recent past have not (yet) been studied. This includes, notably, the movement for an independent and neutral Switzerland (AUNS), a sort of Swiss tea party from the 1990s that was very influential in shaping Swiss European policy and enabling the transformation and success of the radical right-wing party SVP; the ongoing struggle against flight routes at the Zurich airport, a NIMBY protest

driven by citizens from some of Switzerland's most affluent communities with a cross-national dimension; the very influential movement against sexual delinquents, which has launched a series of successful popular initiatives; and the social media-coordinated youth protest taking the form of 'dance demonstrations' that recently unnerved the cities of Bern and Winterthur and were met with strong repression. These and similar contentious episodes and groups raise questions that are at the very heart of theoretical debates in current movement studies, regarding the interplay of different action forms, their interaction with authorities, the spread of protest in the social media age or the role of emotions.

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