Introduction: Of King Solomon, Goethe, and Civic Networks

Ultimately, this book might owe everything to Goethe. Or King Solomon. Or the Assyrians. Or whoever we decide to credit for the well-known aphorism "Tell me with whom you associate, and I will tell you who you are." Regardless of its origins, this principle summarizes in a nutshell the main idea behind this book, namely, that we do not capture the distinctive traits of collective processes only by looking at the properties of their components; instead, we also have to take into account the patterned interactions between such components. In the present context, "you" stands for citizens' organizations in two British cities, Glasgow and Bristol, active in the early 2000s on issues such as social exclusion, ethnicity, migration, environment, urban decay, and regeneration. While "whom" refers to a broader range of voluntary organizations, but also local authorities and public agencies, with which citizens' organizations engaged in cooperative as well as contentious relations, sometimes even sharing core personnel. The networks formed through these exchanges represent the "cement" of civil society which the title of this book refers to. They constitute civil society as a distinct system of interdependence and define "who [citizens' organizations] are."

Why pay so much attention to networks, rather than to other aspects of civic collective action? Not because we should assign them an overarching explanatory role, but because a network perspective enables us to address from a distinctive angle a fundamental issue of research on collective action (and of course social research at large), namely, how to move from aggregative to relational conceptions of social and political structure. In turn, this conceptual and methodological shift leads us to reframe some basic questions about the features of political activism, participation, and civil society in contemporary Western liberal democracies.

From Aggregations to Relational Fields

By "aggregative" we mean a reductionist view of social structure as the sum of the properties of its discrete components, be they individuals, organizations, or events (Kontopoulos 1993, ch. 1; Monge and Contractor 2003, 14). It is important to note that the persistent relevance of such approaches is much more a matter of research practices than of theoretical assumptions. At the theoretical level, analysts of collective action and political participation widely agree on the relational and interactive nature of collective action processes. At the same time, attempts to map systematically the evolution and/or geographical distribution of collective action processes are still frequently – one could say predominantly – driven by aggregative conceptions of social structure.

Aggregative approaches focus on specific actors (individuals, organizations) and possibly other elements such as events, and on their characteristics and (where appropriate) motivations, rather than on the systems of relations between them. Research on social movements offers several examples of aggregative views, as the structure of a movement is often reflected in means and percentages, that is, in the distribution of the traits of the actors commonly associated with such a movement. If we focus on the organizational level, the structure of a movement may be the profile of the population of organizations mobilizing on a specific set of issues (see, e.g., in reference to local environmentalism, Andrews and Edwards 2005); if we focus on the individual level, it may correspond to the profile of individuals sympathizing with a certain cause, subscribing to a certain set of values, and/or adopting certain protest behaviors (see, e.g., in reference to peace activism, Walgrave and Rucht 2010; in reference to new social movements in general, Dalton 2008).

Likewise, social change is conceived, from an aggregative perspective, as the result of modifications in the properties of the units that make up a certain collectivity. For example, the evolution of new social movements in Western Europe has been analyzed by looking at the distribution over time of protest events on the issues normally associated with those movements, such as nuclear energy, women's rights, or the like (Kriesi et al. 1995). Or, questions about the diffusion and institutionalization of social movement politics in the United States (i.e., the emergence of a "movement society": Meyer and Tarrow 1998) have been explored by looking at the variation of the characteristics of protest events over time (McCarthy, Rafail, and Gromis 2013; Soule and Earl 2005).

Following this logic, collective phenomena can be read in terms of the presence or absence of certain traits: if we have more environmental protests, more citizens identifying with the environmental cause, or more organizations active on environmental issues in country A than in country B, then we have a larger environmental movement in country A. If we have more citizens considering the adoption of moderate protest tactics and more acceptance of protest by institutions at time 2 than we had at time 1, then we can conclude that social

movements are getting institutionalized. While this is a sensible and useful approach in many respects, what is left out is how the same elements combine in specific relational patterns. It makes indeed a great deal of difference whether the organizations interested in certain issues collaborate, mutually supporting their respective initiatives, and blending them in broader agendas, or whether they do work independently, trying to secure themselves a specific niche. For example, in the case of environmentalism, animal rights issues may or may not be linked to more classic political or conservationist agendas, depending on the traditions of different countries (Rootes 2003); only in the former case it would make sense to take animal rights campaigns as indications of a burgeoning environmental movement. Likewise, specific actions on polluting factories, new urban ring roads, the preservation of green commons, or the like, may take different meanings depending on whether they are the focus of ad hoc campaigns or they are part of longer-term initiatives (Diani 1995). In itself, a high number of local antiroad protests may simply reflect massive nimby orientations rather than the presence of a strong grassroots environmental movement.

The dominance of aggregative approaches is not restricted to social movement analysis but characterizes the analysis of political participation more broadly. One of the most systematic projects conducted in the 2000s on citizens and associations in Europe (Maloney and Roßteutscher 2006; Maloney and van Deth 2008) treats civil society primarily from an aggregative perspective; namely, as an organizational population rather than as an organizational field, with the focus on organizational properties rather than interorganizational ties. Even studies explicitly focused on networks largely look at indicators of networking by individual organizations rather than at structural patterns (for exceptions, Adam, Jochum, and Kriesi 2008; Anheier and Katz 2004; Roßteutscher and van Deth 2002; Zmerli and Newton 2006). Changes in value systems and patterns of political participation have followed a similar path, comparing changes across nations on the basis of the distribution of individual traits. Overall, we have been less good at exploring how patterns of relations between political actors changed over time, or across localities: for example, measuring how many people in each cohort held postmaterialist values has proved much easier than measuring the extent of exchanges between people holding materialist and postmaterialist values or, for that matter, between people located on the right and the left of the political spectrum (e.g., Dalton 2008; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Norris 2002).

The goal of this book is not to question the value of aggregative approaches, but to suggest that portraying social processes and structures *exclusively* as the aggregation of discrete elements (be they individual citizens or associations) may lead to partial, and occasionally misleading, conclusions. Instead, it is also important to look at whether and how quantities combine in specific relational patterns. Rather than as the sum of their components, collectivities are best viewed as complex bundles of social relations, emerging in turn

from the integration of several different networks (Kontopoulos 1993, ch. 1; Monge and Contractor 2003; Padgett and Powell 2013). Accordingly, answers to questions about social or political change, or about differences between territories, cannot rely exclusively on assessments of the quantitative presence of certain actors and/or certain properties at a given time or place; they also depend, instead, on how actors carrying different traits and orientations link to each other in distinctive structural patterns. This requires moving from a view of collective processes as the product of the action of populations of discrete actors, to a view that focuses on collective action fields.

While most social scientists would in principle subscribe to such a move, the translation of the principle into practice has been problematic. Despite remarkable exceptions (see, e.g., Anheier and Katz 2004; Baldassarri and Bearman 2007; Wang and Soule 2012) the amount of systematic empirical research conducted from a relational rather than an aggregative perspective is still relatively limited. One of the main factors behind this state of affairs lies in the difficulty of securing data, appropriate to the intellectual task: for example, it is less problematic, if by no means easy, to collect information on a person's participation in several types of associations than getting to know the names of the specific groups in which the same person has been involved. Unfortunately, such information is essential if one wants to use, for example, multiple memberships to explore connections across political cleavages within a given society (Diani 2000; 2009). And yet, it is not just a question of data availability: the problem also originates from the way in which our variable conceptualizations of collective processes are reflected in empirical research. The most systematic attempt to identify the analytic properties of collective action systems was probably Alberto Melucci's (1996), following in the footsteps of his mentor Alain Touraine (1981). Melucci treated social movements as a distinct analytic category, suggesting that one could easily identify different, multiple logics of action within empirical episodes of collective action. However, rather than theorizing the forms and conditions of the interplay of different logics of collective action in specific episodes and settings, he focused on the distinctiveness of social movements. The empirical scope of his research was limited by his increasingly exclusive interests in the loose, informal networks through which personal identities are negotiated and projects of personal change are conducted, as well as by his view of social movements as expressions of non-mediated conflicts, increasingly of the symbolic kind. In particular, this stance reduced the contribution that his approach could offer to a broader analysis of the multiple network patterns one can detect within civil society.

Coming from a quite different angle, leading proponents of the classic agenda to social movement research (Tilly and Tarrow 2007a) have stressed that social movements and grassroots politics cannot be studied as clear-cut phenomena with specific empirical boundaries. Accordingly, they have shifted their focus to contentious politics broadly defined, of which social movements are just one example. In particular, they have looked at the mechanisms through

which collective action processes develop over time (Tarrow 2012, 20). In this line of work, social networks are primarily seen as preconditions of collective action, and central to processes of boundary definition (Tilly 2005a). Although relational mechanisms are crucial in the contentious politics perspective, the main focus is on the interactions between different types of political actors and their environment, rather than on deeper, more stable relations (Diani 2007). The limited space attributed to systematic network mapping probably stems from the contentious politics theorists' suspicious view of network analytic approaches as static, and therefore not suitable to map the evolution in relational patterns in which they are most interested. One unfortunate consequence of this approach, however, is that when looking at the interplay of mechanisms within specific episodes of contention, contentious politics theorists have actually paid little attention to how networks can combine to generate different forms of coordinating collective action (see, however, Tilly 2005a; 2005b). Moreover, when dealing specifically with social movements, their approach reproduces the difficulty to account for movements of cultural change, already highlighted by earlier critics of the classic agenda of social movement research (Melucci 1996; Oliver and Snow 1995).

This book tries to develop a relational model of modes of coordination of collective action that builds on both Melucci's and Tilly and Tarrow's insights (Melucci 1996, ch. 1; Tilly 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007a), as well as on earlier categorization of movements as a distinctive type of social network (Diani 1992). Looking at modes of coordination will enable us to capture the distinctiveness of social movements as a particular form of collective action, while locating them firmly within broader civil society dynamics. The analytical approach of the book is outlined in Chapter 1. Its focus is resolutely on (theory-driven) description rather than explanation. It echoes recent claims that, when it comes to the study of basic structural mechanisms, it is impossible to start "with the sort of theory from which testable hypotheses can be derived . . . we must begin by looking very carefully at how social structures actually form" (Martin 2009, 4). In order to enable such explorations, we propose to look at modes of coordination as consisting of different combinations of two relational dimensions, corresponding to mechanisms of resource allocation and mechanisms of boundary definition. Sometimes, collective action is mainly coordinated within the boundaries of specific organizations, with few interorganizational exchanges and no, or limited, solidarity and identification between organizations. In fact, social movement processes are most likely to be found in situations characterized by extensive networks of resource allocation and diffuse feelings of solidarity that exceed the boundaries of any specific group (Diani 1992, 1995; Diani and Bison 2004). Other combinations of the same dimensions define two additional modes of coordination: a coalitional mode features dense networks of resource allocation but weak identities, while a subcultural/communitarian mode consists of sparse resource exchanges but relatively strong identities and broader boundary definitions. The chapters that

follow test the heuristic power of this typology in reference to two distinct urban settings in Britain, Glasgow and Bristol.

The Local Context of Civic Networks

A focus on the local level is advisable for various reasons. First, local settings enable a more fine-grained reconstruction of the relations between profession-alized and grassroots components of the civic sector, and between the organizations most oriented to service delivery and to protest, than studies conducted at the national level (see also Diani 1995, 45–6). Moreover, most relevant inter-actions between social actors take place within territorially delimited com-munities. Finally, and most importantly in the present context, a reference to specific local settings enables us to address basic questions concerning the link between political context and network structures. The most established indica-tors of opportunities, such as the presence of institutional opportunities for access and the salience of long-standing political cleavages, may affect civic network structures in a number of ways. The few studies that have explored such a link have mostly focused on specific local communities (Ansell 2003; Diani 1995; Entwisle et al. 2007; Knoke and Wood 1981; Laumann and Pappi 1976), although some have referred to national opportunity structures (see, e.g., Phillips 1991; as well as, if more impressionistically, Rucht 1989).

Chapter 2 illustrates in particular why between the late 1990s and the early 2000s Glasgow and Bristol provided a particularly interesting setting for exploring collective action dynamics. They witnessed, like the whole of Britain, a remarkable rise in protest activities, with protest repertoires spreading to broader sectors of the population than used to be the case (Whiteley 2012). The two cities differed in political traditions (dominated by Labour in Glasgow, more pluralistic in Bristol yet with a pronouncedly [new] middle-class profile), which makes them polar types in terms of local political culture (Cento Bull and Jones 2006; Routledge 1997). They were, however, similarly exposed, dur-ing the period analyzed, to the opening of opportunities for institutional access brought about by both Conservative and, later, New Labour governments over the 1990s (Deakin 2005; Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker 2001). The chapter shows how the tension between differences in cultural traditions and analogies in institutional access creates an interesting setting in which to test the possi-ble impact of political opportunities, and more generally of contextual factors, over network structures.

How Do Structural Patterns Emerge from Specific Exchanges? Detecting Modes of Coordination within Civic Networks

The second section of the book introduces the basic components of civic net-works. In particular, Chapter 3 deals with the nature of interorganizational ties, and the factors that facilitate or discourage their activation. The chapter

discusses this theme at different levels. First, it introduces various ways to conceptualize and measure interorganizational linkages, stressing in particular the difference between transactions, based on pure exchanges of resources, and social bonds, consisting of resource exchanges embedded in interpersonal networks. Then, it explores the factors that organizations regard as influential over their choice of allies. On that ground, the two cities appeared to be very similar, with shared values and principles, common agendas, and some resource dependency being the most important facilitators of alliances, and lack of trust and divergences in tactics being their stronger obstacle. However, the analysis of how specific alliances can be explained by similarities or dissimilarities of the prospective partners suggests some pronounced differences across the two cities. Compatibility of issue agendas facilitated collaborations in Bristol but not in Glasgow; the opposite applied to similar involvements in public events and in policy-making bodies and to the attitudes toward New Labour policies.

While Chapter 3 deals with specific alliances (in network language, dyads), and in particular with the factors behind their presence or absence, Chapter 4 looks instead at their combination in more complex structural patterns. More specifically, it looks for structurally equivalent positions within civic networks, characterized by similar patterns of relations between their incumbents and other actors in the networks. According to this logic, civic organizations with similar allies tend to play similar roles. If civil society is to be analyzed as a system of interdependence, then it is important to search for distinct roles within it (Borgatti and Everett 1992; Lorrain and White 1971). This exercise revealed a fairly similar structure in the two cities. In both cases, some clusters of organizations were engaged in relatively dense patterns of interaction, while being also linked to similar others; other organizations, however, occupied the same structural position by virtue of indicating the same alters as relevant partners, or being mentioned as important allies by the same alters, but were not directly connected to each other.

The chapter also shows, most importantly, that collaborative ties are distributed differently within civic sectors depending on their content. Some sets of organizations were densely connected both in terms of exchanges of resources and in terms of the deeper, multiple links combining resource exchanges and shared memberships. This latter type of ties (defined as social bonds in Chapter 3) resulted in effective mechanisms of boundary definition. Other clusters were only dense in terms of resource exchanges (i.e., in terms of transactions). Different combinations of social bonds and transactions enabled us to translate into empirical data the analytic model outlined in Chapter 1, showing that different modes of coordination of collective action may be matched to different positions within local settings. Three structurally equivalent sets of actors were identified for each city. One included actors linked by dense social bonds, which rendered the structural position they occupied closest to a social movement mode of coordination; another consisted of actors densely linked through transactions (i.e., through resource exchanges, but without relevant

mechanisms of boundary definition), which suggested that a coalitional mode of coordination was at play; the third hosted groups and associations poorly connected on both resource exchanges and multiple memberships, closest, in other words, to an organizational mode of coordination of collective action.

Questions of Homophily

One classic question in the studies of social networks regards the sources of homophily mechanisms, that is, the extent to which actors' traits and properties are reflected in relational patterns (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). Accordingly, Chapter 5 explores the properties of the organizations occupying different structural positions. The analysis shows nonrandom differences between organizations occupying the social movement structural position and organizations occupying other positions in city networks, as well as across the two cities. More specifically, the incumbents of social movement positions in both cities significantly differed from other organizations in their propensity to identify subjectively with social movements, to identify social or political opponents, and to represent excluded social groups. At the same time, the broader set of variables traditionally associated with social movement organizations (henceforth, SMOs), such as loose organizational structures and propensity to protest, turned out to be comprehensively significant in Glasgow, but far less so in Bristol. At a first glance, this might just be taken as a confirmation of the fact that the two cities were deeply different in their political profile. However, taken as a whole, civic organizations in the two cities were not so different, as we found similar percentages of groups willing, for example, to engage in protest or hostile to participation in local government initiatives. What differed between the two cities was actually how organizational traits distributed across different network positions. In Glasgow there was substantial variance across positions; in Bristol, very little.

Interactions and Relations

The previous chapters focus on social relations, conceived as those ties that civic actors perceive as relevant and binding, regardless of their measurable duration or intensity. Chapter 6 introduces a different perspective, looking at the broader and more inclusive concept of "interactions." In particular, it looks at the cooperative interactions that develop between organizations on the occasion of their joint participation in specific public events. Each event can be seen as the focus of a particular alliance, and Tilly's classic view of social movements as "sustained interactions" (1984; 1994) may be reframed to accommodate the interactions that take place in the context of organizations' involvement in multiple events and therefore in multiple alliances. In both cities, a number of events were singled out for their relevance in recent local civic life. Some events were of the protest type, others, that did not imply contentious exchanges, of

the civic type (Sampson et al. 2005). The chapter illustrates how different types of organizations became involved in different types of events, and to what extent. It then looks at the interplay of organizations and events from a double perspective. First, it examines the networks between public events, created by the multiple involvements of several organizations. Second, it illustrates the interorganizational networks created through joint involvement in events. To this purpose it focuses on organizations that, having been established before 1996, might have been involved, at least in principle, in all the events listed in the chapter. The analysis highlights the substantial continuity of alliance patterns over time, with involvement in events in the 1990s predicting a large share of the joint participations in events recorded in the early 2000s.

Modes of Coordination, Network Centrality, and Urban Governance

Two strictly connected chapters follow, exploring the possible contribution of a relational approach to our understanding of political representation. Chapter 7 takes an internal perspective, looking at representation and leadership within civic fields. It explores to what extent the horizontal image of social networks actually holds and provides an accurate portrait of the imbalanced distribution of ties within organizational networks. It examines in particular whether central network positions corresponded to perceived influence within the voluntary and community sector. At the same time, one should also examine the position of civic organizations within broader governance networks. This is the focus of Chapter 8. The chapter assesses in particular whether ties to political actors spread evenly across different types of organizations that adopted different modes of coordination; and whether organizations, most central within civic networks, also played some relevant role in connecting civil society and the political system. In contrast to earlier suggestions (e.g., Diani 2003), the most central civic organizations did not seem to enjoy privileged access to local political institutions, possibly as a result of the inclusive (at least, formally inclusive) policies put in place by the British government since the late 1990s.

Contentious Politics and Network Approaches: What Kind of Conversation?

Chapter 9 highlights the book's contribution to the contentious politics literature, and summarizes its major findings. Despite differences in the role assigned to the concept of "social network," the relational perspective presented in this book and the contentious politics perspective are largely compatible. There are at least two grounds on which treating fields of civic actors as specific systems of interdependence may bring substantial dividends. The first has to do with the relation between collective actors' properties and relational patterns (a key theme in contemporary organizational thinking: Kilduff and Brass 2010). Against expectations generated by social and historical differences between the

two cities, network structures turned out to be relatively stable across them (see also Baldassarri and Diani 2007); likewise, the overall profile of the organizations operating in the two cities was very similar (in terms, e.g., of levels of formalization, propensity to promote protest or to get involved in public events, or linkages to institutions). What varied substantially, however, was how those properties distributed within civic networks. In Glasgow, the structural position most directly associated with movements differed heavily from the rest; in Bristol, there was hardly any difference, as none of the traditional indicators of social movement activism characterized the social movement position. It was not the characteristics of actors, taken as individual cases, that were particularly affected by cross-local variation; it was whether and how such characteristics became salient – that is, how they affected relational patterns – that mattered. The chapter suggests that rather than be linked to opportunities for institutional access, differences between cities be linked to their dominant political culture. This is defined not in terms of values and beliefs, but as cognitive frames that, enabling actors to makes sense of their experience, also shaped their choices regarding alliance building.

The analysis also suggests that, while social movements might have been small if we had focused only on their most radical components (even allowing for the fact that the project did not look in detail at the direct action communities, largely consisting of individuals), the same could not be said of the social movement form of organizing. This seemed to have spread across civil society to involve different types of actors, and so had the identification with social movements. In particular in Bristol, the incumbents of the structural position closest to a social movement mode of coordination differed from other organizations almost exclusively in their greater propensity to represent unvested interests. The informal organizational structures or protest tactics, traditionally associated with social movements, seemed to have spread evenly across the civic sector. This has important implications for the movement society thesis: is a movement society characterized by the amount of protest activities taking place within it? Or, alternatively, is it characterized as such by the patterns of relations which link organizations that promote protest, to organizations that favor instead more conventional forms of pressure? Our two cases suggest that two societies with a similar presence of organizations, prepared to adopt protest repertoires of action, might differ substantially in the relationships between such organizations: in one case, Glasgow, the acceptance or the rejection of protest operated as criteria for boundary construction within civil society, with protest-oriented and protest-rejecting organizations working with their likes and engaging more sparingly with actors holding the other strategic approach; in the other case, Bristol, attitudes to protest had no effect whatsoever on the structure of civic networks. Rather than one single model of movement society, applicable across different localities, it seems therefore preferable to identify several models, each corresponding to a particular combination of actors' traits and relational patterns.