

# Social Movements

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**Abstract:** This study discusses the development of social-movement research in the German-speaking world over the past two decades. The second part focuses on how different theories of society have conceptualized social movements. It asks whether there have been any new developments since the theory of new social movements lost its hegemony? This question is explored by considering three contributions from Niklas Luhmann, Jürgen Gerhards, and Ulrich Beck. The third part deals with the long-term transformation of social-cleavage structures and their analysis. In the fourth part, the study shifts its attention to the rise of the extreme right and the environmental movement. Most researchers would agree that recent public discourse in German-speaking countries has mostly been shaped by the spread of these two movements.

**Keywords:** Social Movement, protest, theory of society, extreme right, environmentalism

## 1 Introduction

Social-movement research in German-speaking countries has a lively history. In the 1980s, the discourse about social protests was closely connected to the theory of society (Schimank, *SOCIETY*, this volume). Social-movement studies during that period could hardly be described as an independent sociological research area. The discussion in Germany and other European countries was dominated by the so-called theory of new social movements, which referred in particular to the peace, women's, and environmental movements (Offe, 1985; Rucht, 1994). Research was primarily focused on their "cultural significance" (Weber, 1949). It was assumed that these protest movements showed "where the reproduction of order does not succeed" (Eder, 2015: 31) and—in the tradition of Marxist class theory—that they reflected a comprehensive shift of modern societies' fundamental contradictory relations from labor and economy to identity and culture (Touraine, 1985: 774).

At that time, social-movement scholars in the United States were discussing entirely different questions. After the demise of the collective-behavior tradition, the focus of research shifted to the micro-level structures of protest mobilization. Under the maxim of "from structure to action" (Klandermans, Kriesi, and Tarrow, 1988), a new generation of researchers not only anticipated "new explanatory advantages but also [articulated; my insertion] a normative claim: bringing the actor back in as something which is good in itself" (Eder, 2015: 35). Instead of exploring the "why" of social movements, their research emphasized the "how." The ensuing debate was increasingly dominated by the "conceptual triad" (Rucht, 2014: 70) of resource mo-

bilization, framing, and political opportunity structures as central approaches of movement research.

Since then, American and European perspectives have moved substantially closer together. Especially in Germany, the narrow focus on new social movements has been replaced by a broader view that integrates a wider range of micro-, meso-, and macro-sociological perspectives. The field of movement research has become more professionalized and has consequently emancipated itself from the theory of society. The discussion is now more internationalized and has opened itself up to inspiration from other scientific disciplines. At the same time, its theoretical approaches and empirical methods have become more diverse, systematic, and ambitious (Rucht, 2014: 85).

In view of this vast plurality, an exhausting appraisal of movement research would exceed the scope of this review. The diversity of approaches, topics, and methods that have guided the study of social protest over the past two decades cannot be forced into a single scheme. With this in mind, the following review does not claim to present a body of research that is fully representative of the German-language social sciences.

In its second section, this review sheds light on how different theories of society have conceptualized social movements. Have there been any new developments since the theory of new social movements lost its hegemony? The discussion will focus on three contributions, from Niklas Luhmann, Jürgen Gerhards, and Ulrich Beck. The third section deals with the long-term transformation of social-cleavage structures and their analysis. In the fourth section, I will shift my attention to the rise of the extreme right and the environmental movement. Most researchers would agree that the recent public discourse in German-speaking countries has mostly been shaped by the expansion of these two movements.

## 2 Protest Movements in a “Society without a Center”

Even after the decline of new-social-movement theory, most studies have attributed the rise in the number of protest movements more or less explicitly to the structural strains of capitalism. In this respect, their perspective on social change does not deviate much from the interpretation of movement activists who blame capitalism for their grievances. Without denying the prominence of economic tensions, a common critique of this theoretical perspective maintains that it systematically ignores “the diverse range of contexts out of which movements emerge and the very different types of conditions which prevail within those contexts” (Crossley, 2002: 51). Consequently, some authors have followed up on more recent developments in differentiation theory, which—at least in Germany—has been strongly influenced by the legacy of Niklas Luhmann (Gerhards, 2001; Kern, 2008; Kern, 2016). His theoretical perspective explains the emergence of protest movements through basic structural tensions in the

functional subsystems of modern society. Accordingly, capitalism is a powerful source of strain, but there are also other institutional contexts from which conflicts may arise. Although his approach remains marginal, it still offers great potential for social-movement research (Eder, 2015: 41–43).

Niklas Luhmann's ambivalent attitude toward social movements earned him a reputation as a conservative thinker. The great complexity of his theory and his general disinterest in empirical research were perhaps further reasons why his work was so reluctantly received by movement scholars in Germany. Luhmann (*Theory of Society*; 2013) maintained that protest movements are a distinctive type of social system with unique traits. He stressed that they often depend on formal organizations—as resource-mobilization theories have pointed out—but, in contrast, social movements “do not organize decisions but motives, commitments, ties. They seek to bring into [...] [society; my insertion] what an organization presupposes and mostly has to pay for: membership motivation” (Luhmann, 2013: 155). Therefore, formal organizations (Hasse, ORGANIZATION, this volume) must be clearly distinguished from social movements as a concept. The former are important to the latter only to the extent that they solve “residual problems” related, for example, to resource mobilization and strategic communication with outside actors. A further significant difference between these concepts is based on the fact that movements “have no control over the process of their own change” (Luhmann, 2013: 156).

Luhmann also distinguished sharply between interaction systems (based on face-to-face communication; Schützeichel, MICROSOCIOLOGY, this volume) and social movements. On the one hand, face-to-face interactions—such as protest rallies, marches, or vigils—are indispensable elements of social movements. On the other hand, social movements are far more than face-to-face communication because participants at rallies or demonstrations are not only coordinated by an organization in the background but also rely on a comprehensive framework of issues, practices, and repertoires that exceeds the narrow social, temporal, and spatial boundaries of face-to-face interactions.

Luhmann stressed that the dynamic of social movements is shaped by specific structural features of protest communication in that protesters attempt to exert political influence outside the established regime of political decision-making. In doing so, they draw a distinct boundary between the periphery, which they claim to represent, and the center of society: “The center is expected to listen and take the protest into account” (Luhmann, 2013: 157). However, as functionally differentiated societies have no center, social movements usually emerge in more centrally organized subsystems, such as politics or religion. Protesters often create the impression that they represent the whole of society vis-à-vis its political and economic elites. Therefore, Luhmann conceived of social movements as a response to the “relative unresponsiveness” (Luhmann, 2013: 159) of functional subsystems. For this reason, he also described protest movements as an immune system that “observe[s] modern society on the basis of its consequences” (Luhmann, 2013: 161), in particular how functional

subsystems constrain an individual's life chances. Here, Luhmann observed one of the major (positive) functions of social movements in modern society.

In its details, Luhmann's perspective on social movements exceeds the traditional differentiation-theoretical perspectives of Smelser and Parsons in four respects. First, it overcomes the old structural functionalism's negative image of protest movements as an expression of social anomie, which is dysfunctional for society. Second, his theoretical framework allows for a clear conceptual distinction between social movements on the one hand and other forms of coordinated action (e.g., formal organizations and face-to-face interactions) on the other. Such conceptual clarity is helpful when making full use of new findings from other research fields for the analysis of social movements. Third, his differentiation theory identifies promising entry points for the heuristic search for structures and conditions that stimulate (and explain) protests (Kern, 2007). Fourth, Luhmann's framework provides a sound basis for further systematic investigations into the consequences of social movements.

In his explorative study *Der Aufstand des Publikums (Rebellion of the Citizens)*, Gerhards (2001) further elaborates on Luhmann's theory of society. Although Gerhards expresses some fundamental concerns about Luhmann's systems theory, he regards it as a promising framework for the integration of findings from various sociological areas, such as research on organizations, professions, and social movements. Gerhards follows Luhmann's assumption that modern society consists of about a dozen subsystems, including politics, economy, religion, law, science, art, and education. These subsystems are functionally specialized in the sense that each makes a specific contribution to the reproduction of society: for instance, the political system produces collectively binding decisions, the economic system produces goods and services, and the religious system provides salvation goods. Historically, the emergence of functional subsystems was closely linked to an increasing professionalization of "producer roles" that provide goods or services (in a broad sense) for complementary "consumer roles," including incumbents and citizens in the political system, suppliers and consumers in the economic system, and pastors and laypeople in the religious system (Stichweh, 2005).

Gerhards (2001: 165) emphasizes that, in most functional subsystems, professional roles are tied to formal organizations, such as companies, schools, and political parties. Professions and organizations are central to the stability of modern society because they perpetuate the production of goods, services, and other performances in the functional subsystems. Thus, professional roles are usually more exclusive and difficult to access. Occupants must usually establish their formal qualifications with some form of certificate. In contrast, their complementary consumer roles are more inclusive. In general, modern society is built on the premise (and promise) that everyone should have access at least to the basic performances of the functional subsystems (although the empirical reality is often quite different).

Gerhards' explorative analysis concentrates on changes in the relative distribution of power between producer and consumer roles. He investigates these processes in six functional subsystems between the 1960s and the late 1990s: healthcare, law, politics,

economy, education, and art. Accordingly, in the political system, for example, the self-image of security agencies increasingly shifted from state police to civilian police. In the public art sector, the so-called alternative culture increasingly challenged the conventional tastes of highbrow culture. He stresses that these changes were often initiated and supported by protest movements that used the social infrastructure of the functional subsystems for their mobilization. The undeniable strength of his approach rests on its ability to empirically identify specific cleavages and tensions in various functional subsystems that stimulate protest mobilization. It is regrettable that Gerhards did not elaborate further on this approach in subsequent years.

Although Ulrich Beck sometimes even sharply distanced himself from Luhmann's system theory, both scholars' conclusions were surprisingly similar regarding the interpretation of social movements. In his 2009 book *Weltrisikogesellschaft (World at Risk)*, Beck maintains that the traditional institutions of representative will formation in modern nation states are increasingly bypassed by so-called "subpolitical" alliances between sometimes distinctly different actors, such as political parties, corporations, media platforms, and NGOs. He labels this process "subpolitics" because "it sets politics free by changing the rules and boundaries of the political so that global politics becomes more amenable to new goals, issues and interdependencies" (Beck, 2009: 95).

Beck links the global rise of subpolitics to a fundamental transition of society from linear to reflexive modernization. Accordingly, linear modernization generally equates rationalization, economic growth, and technological innovations with social progress. However, the more society advances on the path of progress, the more it is confronted with the undesirable side effects of successful linear modernization, such as pollution, extinction of species, climate change, and nuclear risks. Consequently, the negative effects of linear modernization increasingly shift to the center of political discourse. This is where the latter concept—reflexive modernization—comes into play: it implies the continual modernization of already modern societies.

As a result, the public becomes more and more sensitized to the consequences of political and economic decisions regardless of whether a new technological or political program is actually dangerous. It is only important that the program is *perceived* as dangerous. Beck illustrates this in the case of climate change and the new subpolitics of terror: public discourse becomes increasingly important for the political definition of risks, and persuasiveness turns into a primary source of power. Consequently, Beck sees a growing discrepancy between political and communicative power: while the decisions of professional elites from politics, economy, or science often have far-reaching consequences for third parties, their cultural legitimacy is in decline.

Although Beck perceives the influence of social movements in this context as rather limited, he still regards them as an important counterweight to the professional elite's propensity for social closure and the monopolization of power. However, while the personal costs of participation in social protests constantly decrease (at least in Western democracies), it appears that the complexity of problems overstrains public

attention. By shifting subpolitics to the center of his analysis, Beck comes—despite all other differences—to similar conclusions as Luhmann and Gerhards: modern society has lost its center. The political process becomes not only more open but also more contentious and more unpredictable.

### 3 Long-Term Analysis of Social Cleavages

How has the social-movement sector in Germany changed over the past several decades? Even though a rapidly growing number of studies on individual movements is available today—the handbook by Rucht and Roth *Die soziale Bewegung in Deutschland seit 1945* (*The Social Movement in Germany since 1945*; 2008a) offers an excellent overview—little is known about the development of the movement sector as a whole. This is mainly due to the fact that the field of movement research is still “strongly oriented towards the monographic presentation of individual cases” (Rucht, 2014: 86). The intrinsic value of these contributions is not in question. However, to advance theory on the transformation of cleavage structures in modern societies, we would need more comparative research on “different movements or movement types in the same or in different cultural areas” (Rucht, 2014: 86).

The example-based analysis of individual movements often only paints a rough picture of social-cleavage structures and neglects important interaction effects between movements since the course of protests often depends strongly on cooperative and competitive relationships inside the protest sector, for instance, between movements and countermovements (Klandermans, 2013; Rucht, 2007). There is also a lack of comparative analyses of different types of protest and movement types. Finally, there is also a lack of longitudinal comparative analyses of protests. Without an appropriate examination of the temporal patterns of conflict dynamics, however, we cannot examine the change in social-cleavage structures.

An established methodical approach to closing this research gap in empirical terms is the comparative “protest event analysis” (Koopmans and Rucht, 2002). Koopmans and Statham (2010) have since extended this technique to the method of “claims analysis,” which examines the change in broader discursive opportunity structures beyond mere protests. Recent studies imply that access to new data (“big data”) and the development of new methods (“computational social sciences”) in connection with the increasing digitalization of public life will offer a range of innovative perspectives for long-term analyses of changing cleavage structures (Hutter, 2019; Zhang and Pan, 2019). (Barth/Blasius, QUANTITATIVE METHODS, this volume; Hollstein/Kumkar, QUALITATIVE METHODS, this volume) However, this development is still in its infancy.

The potential of longitudinal analyses of protest events has been outlined in a study on the transformation of the movement sector in Germany. It was presented by Rucht and Roth (2008b) in their handbook as a summary analysis on the basis of event data from the PRODAT project, which was conducted at the *Wissenschaftszentrum*

*Berlin* (WZB; Berlin Social Science Center). Their study indicates that the diversity of protest topics has grown considerably and that protest repertoires have expanded. In addition, a rising share of the population conceives of protests as a legitimate form of political activism, and the share of violent protests has also increased significantly, especially among right-wing protest groups. Further important developments include a remarkable expansion of movement organizations, increasingly dense protest networks, and a general tendency toward enriching protests with performative elements of popular culture.

These findings confirm that Germany has become a “movement society” (Rucht and Neidhardt, 2002: 7). Despite all possible differences with the three previously discussed approaches (i.e., Luhmann, Gerhards, Beck), the authors conclude that movements strongly contribute to the reproduction of modern society by shifting (former) non-issues to the center of public discourse and challenging conventional and dominant perspectives on well-known problems (Rucht and Roth, 2008b: 656–657): In the 1950s and 1960s, social movements criticized the remilitarization of West Germany and denounced the insufficient prosecution of Nazi collaborators. In the 1970s and 1980s, the environmental and new women’s movements addressed “genuinely new topics” (Rucht and Roth, 2008b: 657) that shaped public discourse. In the 1990s, identity politics—in particular, anti-migrant protests and respective counter-mobilizations—dominated the public agenda. The last great protest wave mentioned in the book is related to the “discovery of transnational politics” (Rucht and Roth, 2008b: 657) by alter-globalization movements around the millennium.

The authors demonstrate that shifting non-issues to the center of public discourse has not been the only accomplishment of social movements in Germany. They point to tangible policy effects, such as the legal recognition of homosexuals, gender mainstreaming, green-energy politics, and welfare-state reforms. In many policy fields, social movements have helped to improve the conditions of social participation for ordinary citizens. They have also contributed considerably to pushing back the authoritarian culture of everyday life in postwar West Germany. On this basis, the movement sector has not only grown but has also become a stable institutional element of political culture.

## 4 Two Opposing Movements

All available evidence suggests that the movement sector in German-speaking countries has gained in vitality and has become more complex over the past two decades:

“The movement sector is teeming with both progressive and reactionary actors; in addition to a pragmatic politics of interests, which also makes use of protest, there are increasing numbers of mobilizations that once again embody the desire for nationalist greatness and authoritarian leadership. Many aspects of the situation are contradictory. Although the protest scene has always been colorful and multi-faceted, it has rarely ever been as cleft as it is today” (Roth and Rucht, 2019: 99).

Aside from the growing importance of social media for mobilizing collective action (Dolata, 2017; Dolata and Schrape, 2018; Hepp, *MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION*, this volume), probably the most important changes have been the enormous expansion of the extreme right, contrasted on the left by a strong increase in the importance of the environmental movement. Capitalism-critical and anti-capitalist movements have likewise recorded a strong increase; and some major waves of protest were initiated by the peace movement (Rucht, 2016). However, the cultural, social, and political impact of these mobilizations has far been exceeded by the growth of the first two movements.

## 4.1 The extreme right

After reunification, the domestic political agenda in Germany was influenced by a continuing wave of protests against asylum seekers, who were mainly escaping the war in the former Yugoslavia. This development elicited an intense debate among researchers about the extent to which the extreme right meets the criterion of a social movement at all (Koopmans and Rucht, 1996). One reason for this dispute was that no general definition of social movements had been established by that point. Furthermore, some scholars wanted to reserve the term exclusively for pro-democratic, participatory, and progressive movements (Butterwegge, 1993).

In the meantime, this situation has changed fundamentally (Rucht, 2017). The extreme right has now firmly established itself as a major object of movement research. The ideological core of the movement is the idea of an ethnically and culturally homogenous national community whose unity is threatened by modern pluralism, liberalism, globalization, democracy, immigration, and Islamization. In contrast, activists often mobilize romantic notions of nation, patriotism, nature, order, home, and family (Häusler, 2017; Langebach and Raabe, 2017). At the core of their collective identity is their “self-image as a legitimate resistance movement” (Schedler, 2017: 303) against a corrupt political, economic, and cultural elite that has a damaging effect on the unity and wellbeing of the people. Around this ideological core, a broad alliance of groups from the populist and new right-wing scene has evolved over the past two decades, which follow up on these ideas. They have been met with broad approval among parts of the population.

In some widely acclaimed works, Kriesi et al. (Kriesi et al., 2008; Kriesi, 2001) have interpreted the rise of the extreme right as an expression of right-wing protectionism against the negative consequences of globalization:

“The new radical right is clearly defensive on the socio-cultural dimension. At the same time, it is populist in so far as its instrumentalization of feelings of anxiety and disappointment is concerned along with its appeal to the man in the street and his supposed common sense. It builds on the losers’ [of globalization; my insertion] fears of the removal of national borders and on their strong belief in simple solutions” (Kriesi, 2001: 35).

A number of small, radical parties such as the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD; National Democratic Party of Germany) along with local right-wing comradeships constitute the ideological core of the right-wing movement. Up until today, these groups' neo-Nazi worldview embodies the most radical expression of right-wing ideology (Schedler, 2017). Building on strategically well-prepared demonstrations and a strong presence in the social media (Nam, 2017), the extreme right has penetrated deep into the center of political conservatism. However, this should not conceal the fact that the propensity to violence and hate crimes have also increased significantly throughout the scene.

Around the ideological core of neo-Nazism, a somewhat more moderate spectrum of New Right activism evolved in the 1960s and 1970s (Langebach and Raabe, 2017; Virchow, 2017). In contrast to the “old” right, which at that time was still strongly revisionist in its National Socialist orientation, the New Right was more open to influences from popular culture and tried to address a broader and younger public. Its basic goal has been a cultural revolution from the right. Perhaps the most recent movement in this field is the French-born Identitarian movement (Virchow, 2015), which currently exerts a considerable influence on society and politics, especially in Austria (Schedler, 2017).

This intellectual and political spectrum forms the ideological basis of the currently much-discussed phenomenon of right-wing populism in German-speaking countries. Although the debate has mostly focused on successful mobilization campaigns of right-wing political parties such as the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD; Alternative for Germany), the topic also plays a crucial role in movement research. In an attempt at conceptual clarification, Rucht (2017) defines right-wing populism as a political and moral attitude located between political conservatism and the extreme right. For Priester (2011; 2017), however, it is less an attitude and more a specific form of public communication that combines a “thin ideology” with strong tendencies towards personalization, moralization, and orientation towards the past: “It is not so much the content that matters [...] but rather the approach: the polarization between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Priester, 2017: 534). Thus, a typical feature of social movements seems to penetrate ever deeper into the center of politics. Kriesi considers this a clear confirmation of the “movement society” hypothesis (Rucht and Neidhardt, 2002): “Professionalization and institutionalization are changing the social movement into an instrument of conventional politics and social movement organizations become rather like interest groups” (Kriesi, 2014: 371).

From the viewpoint of protest research, no movement in Germany embodies right-wing populism as successfully as the *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (PEGIDA; Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident) with their “Monday Demonstrations,” which they have been organizing weekly in Dresden since 2014 (Daphi et al., 2015; Nam, 2017; Vorländer, Herold, and Schäller, 2018). At its height, PEGIDA mobilized up to 20,000 citizens every week. As the name of the group suggests, protests are directed against the Islamization of the West that its followers fear—a fear that has been triggered by refugees. Although the movement has

at times succeeded in expanding beyond Dresden, it has basically remained a local phenomenon in eastern Germany.

## 4.2 Environmental movement

Most movement scholars would agree that the environmental movement has exerted great influence on the political development of German-speaking countries. Important campaigns of the past include protests against the rail-node construction project Stuttgart 21, coal-fired power plants, and nuclear energy, as well as gatherings like Fridays for Future. In the German-speaking countries, it appears that environmental groups are able to mobilize tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of people for their concerns frequently and seemingly without effort. In light of its political and social relevance, it is even more surprising that comparatively few sociological and political studies have addressed this movement. Only recently has the protest wave of the Fridays for Future movement seemingly revived research interest (Sommer et al., 2019).

Previous research on the environmental movement has focused mainly on its societal institutionalization. (Engels, ENVIRONMENT, this volume) Roose (2003), for example, addressed the reasons for the movement's (then) surprisingly small influence on EU environmental policy. Kern (2010) looked into the interactions between national and global levels in the development of environmental activism in South Korea. In another study, he highlighted the movement's crucial influence on the transformation of the electricity market in Germany (Kern, 2014). However, while interest in the environmental movement has been relatively modest in sociology and political science over the past twenty years, the subject has received far greater attention in the historical sciences. In a remarkably comprehensive book-length study, Radkau (2011) examines the global rise of the environmental movement since the 18th century. Another book of his is dedicated to the relationship between society and nature over time (Radkau, 2012). In his study on the development of environmental policy in West Germany up until 1980, Engels explores "how the problem of endangered nature in the Federal Republic of Germany [...] was dealt with" (Engels, 2006: 19). He shows how the rise of the environmental movement in the 1970s was favored by changes both in the mass media and in politics. A more recent study deals with environmental policy in the GDR but also dedicates a chapter to the environmental movement (Möller, 2019). The author comes to the conclusion that environmental activism in the GDR was not only limited to church opposition groups but was also supported by government-related organizations.

In his study about the emergence of green politics in West Germany, Pettenkofer (*Die Entstehung der grünen Politik (The Emergence of Green Politics)*; 2014) connects the historical analysis of social movements with a genuine perspective from cultural sociology. He examines the emergence of new value commitments and their impact on the social-movement sector in Germany. As this book stands out among sociological

studies on the environmental movement for its innovative approach, it is worth being described in greater detail. The author sharply criticizes conventional social-movement theories, which assume that protest participation depends on rational cost-benefit calculations. Were this model true, he argues, activists would never support collective action linked to protest issues that are “newly, not, or only weakly institutionalized” (Pettenkofer, 2014: 15) due to their high probability of failure (see also Kern, 2009). Hence, the study’s focal theoretical question is how non-institutionalized and “initially improbable actions” (Pettenkofer, 2014: 23) are sustainably maintained in the face of unfavorable opportunity structures.

Pettenkofer’s theoretical approach is based on two trains of thought. First, he elaborates the similarities between radical political movements and Max Weber’s account of religious sects. Radical movements and sects not only reject the existing social order but also have an increased demand for indicators confirming that their conduct of life actually complies with their ethical standards. Thus, their radical activism serves themselves and others as proof of their commitment. Under certain circumstances, it is possible that a group’s striving for self-perfection triggers a self-enforcing dynamic of attempts to outpace others. A possible outcome of this is the institutionalization of a field of competing “communities of virtuosos” (Pettenkofer, 2014: 24).

Second, the author follows Durkheim, who maintained that new “improbable forms of collective action [...] are stabilized” by shared moments of euphoric experiences that are so dramatic for the participants that they “fundamentally change their perception of the world and themselves” (Pettenkofer, 2014: 27). Durkheim considered such experiences part of a “sacralization process” (Joas, 2013) that stimulates the formation of new collective identities. In particular, strong experiences of violence—for example, police brutality—can radically change the development of a social movement. The collective memory of such experiences has the power not only to create new value commitments but also to stabilize the order of a protest field by providing a cultural template for future protests. Other studies have come to similar conclusions (Kern, 2009).

These two cultural mechanisms—based on Weber’s and Durkheim’s sociology of religion—constitute the theoretical background against which Pettenkofer develops his historical analysis of the environmental movement in Germany. Accordingly, the roots of contemporary environmentalism date back to the student movement in the late 1960s. The first critical event of this period was the dissociation of the *Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund* (SDS; German Student Union) from the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD; Social Democratic Party), whose leadership attempted to shift the party from the left margin to the country’s political center. Pettenkofer’s account of this sequence is mostly based on Weber’s analysis of the fundamental conflict between “church” and “sect” as two types of religious association that both rely on the same tradition (Pettenkofer, 2014: 46). The schism between the SPD and the SDS triggered a chain of divisions that led to the formation of a new field of radical left-wing groups.

In the early 1970s, many of these groups participated in a protest movement against a planned nuclear plant in Wyhl in southwestern Germany. Initially, the protests were mostly driven by anti-capitalist sentiments. The participants had no specific environmental agenda. However, environmental ideas increasingly inched their way to the center when a growing number of local civic groups, including farmers and professionals from the tourism sector, joined the movement (Pettenkofer, 2014: 140–44). The unexpected success of this grassroots mobilization had a strong euphoriant effect on the participants that further strengthened not only the movement but also its environmental orientation (Pettenkofer, 2014: 337).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the opposition to nuclear power became a central goal of a growing number of protest organizations. The author describes the new ideology of these organizations as a “comprehensive apocalyptic cosmology” according to which “more or less everything points to the possibility of [...] nuclear annihilation” (Pettenkofer, 2014: 289). The environmental movement left behind the tradition of class struggles and constructed a completely new frame with the “cosmological generalization [...] of nuclear power” (Pettenkofer, 2014: 337) as its outcome.

Pettenkofer’s study provides a convincing historical analysis of the environmental discourse in Germany. One small flaw is perhaps the author’s emphasis on the singularity of his historical case despite the fact that the environmental movement also took off under entirely different historical and cultural conditions in many other countries during the same period. Furthermore, the author’s frequent critique of established social-movement theories partly overshoots the mark. Although he provides a plausible explanation of radical activism on the basis of Weber and Durkheim, the question of why the new cosmology of the environmental movement became so popular still remains.

## 5 Perspectives on the Study of Social Movements

What follows from this review of the study of social movements in the German-speaking world? Over the past two decades, the study of social movements has made great progress in terms of theoretical and methodological approaches. It has also benefited from its professionalization, specialization, and, subsequently, its emancipation from broader discussions in sociological theory. At the same time, it also appears that the mainstream of movement research in the German-speaking world (and beyond) is more and more narrowly focused on the political relevance of social movements. Only a few studies have addressed the broader changes in social-cleavage structures and, in particular, the plurality of cultural and institutional conditions that affect the mobilization of individual waves of protests as well as the transformation of the movement sector as a whole in an increasingly differentiated society. Against this background, the studies described in this review have substantiated that the relationship between protest movements and societal change remains an issue. Understanding not only the “cultural significance” (Weber, 1949) of social movements but

also the diverse range of institutional contexts and conditions from which movements emerge calls for an extensive exchange with sociological theories of society. This is an ongoing challenge for social-movement research as well as an invitation to a continual and fruitful dialogue.

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