

## **Critical Margins. Politicizing the Crisis**

ESA Research Network 25 on Social Movements  
ECPR Standing Group on Participation and Mobilization  
Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento  
CoACT - Research Group on Collective Action, Change and Transition, University of Trento

at

**University of Trento, Italy**

**15-17 June 2022**

During the last years, the conditions for critical mobilization and social movements have been reshaped by a number of crises, most notably the climate crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic.

On the one hand, increasingly urgent signs of a mounting climate crisis have led to powerful mobilizations, especially of younger generations, and there seem to be unique opportunities for reshaping society in a more just and environmentally sustainable direction. On the other hand, climate activists criticize political leaders and established social movements for being inefficient and unwilling.

Meanwhile, the global Covid-19 pandemic has greatly impacted the conditions for collective action. Not only have standard movement repertoires become impossible throughout the various lockdowns and social isolation. The pandemic has also increased (and created) multiple grievances concerning both material conditions as well as the governmentally imposed “Corona restrictions”. These grievances are unequally distributed along existing inequalities and oppression dynamics pivoting around gender, race, class, religion, age, geographic origins and physical ability. Contemporary struggles emerge from various combinations of these inequalities and sometimes revamp and transform past and established movement constellations.

Furthermore, in light of proclaimed climate emergencies and pandemic urgency, values of critique, democratization, and enlightenment have been reframed by the political right in order to reject the diagnoses of crisis. In this context, demands for more just societies clash harshly with the rise and consolidation of conservative and regressive stances advanced in between institutional and grassroots political spaces.

The intersection of these different crises has created new challenges as well as new opportunities for critique and collective social action. The present situation therefore gives rise to multiple pertinent questions for social movement scholars. How should this overall mobilizing context and the temporality of crises be understood and how can contemporary movement strategies be interpreted in relation to this? How have perceived opportunities and threats been negotiated within both newer and more consolidated mobilization endeavors, as well as among the broader public? What do movement strategies that are undertaken to politicize the current multilayered crisis context reveal about online and offline protest repertoires, collective identities and imagined futures? How should we understand the tendency to reappropriate the claims for more self-determination and autonomy, which have stood

at the core of progressive movements for decades, by actors and movements that imagine a very different transformation of society? May new alliances along emerging cleavages be changing the landscape for political conflict, or are existing cleavages being entrenched?

Alberto Melucci famously defined movements in complex societies as “disenchanted prophets”: “Like the prophets, the movements 'speak before': “they announce what is taking shape even before its direction and content has become clear. [...] They announce the commencement of change; not, however, a change in the distant future but one that is already a presence”. The conference will provide a space to discuss how crises are politicized and which phenomena, at the margins of contemporary societies, anticipate what is coming next for collective action. To do so, it bridges social movements and political participation research to a wider range of related research areas such as, inter alia, the geographical dimension of crises, from urban-level dynamics to the global processes of location and mobility, the gender dimension of crises, from the contentious politics of sexualities to the challenge of tackling the intersectional nature of oppression, and explorations of the politicizing and depoliticizing effects of today’s emphasis on ‘crises’.

We invite submissions from a variety of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives focusing on collective action, and welcome both empirical and theoretical research. To submit an abstract please fill in the form available at <https://tinyurl.com/criticalmargins> with an abstract of no more than 250 words.

The conference will feature keynote speeches from internationally-renowned scholars, including:

Mario Diani, University of Trento  
Akwugo Emejulu, University of Warwick  
Walter Nicholls, University of California/Irvine  
Silke Roth, University of Southampton  
Justus Uitermark, University of Amsterdam

**Key dates (deadlines postponed):**

- Abstract submission: **22 February 2022**
- Selection outcomes: no later than **22 March 2022**
- Confirmation of participation: no later than **2 April 2022**. Lack of confirmation will entail relocating the participation slot to other applicants in the reserve list.

Participation in the conference is free of charge for one presenter per paper while attending co-authors will need to pay a fee of 70€. Travel and accommodation costs will have to be covered by participants. A limited number of travel and accommodation grants (four) will be assigned by the organizing committee after evaluating requests issued by applicants upon confirming their participation in the event.