

Mercedes Martínez-Iglesias (ed.)

Experts and Campaigners: scientific information and collective action in socio-ecological conflicts

València: Universitat de València, 2014, pp. 168

Paolo Giardullo *Università di Urbino, Carlo Bo*

This edited book by Mercedes Martínez-Iglesias, University of Valencia, Spain, provides an opportunity to further explore the sociological debate about environmental conflicts. This subject has already been developed in Italy by different scholars (among others, Pellizzoni 2011; Bobbio 2010) focusing on the role of public participation in environmental decision making. The key feature of this research topic, as it has been approached in the existing literature, consists of connecting environmental sociology with social studies of technoscience. The link is made by the analysis of the use and/or endorsement of scientific knowledge as a strategic resource in a context of conflicts between groups. Conflicts may arise about the building of new important and invasive infrastructures (Lorenzet 2013; Bobbio 2010) or other environmental policy related interventions such as, for instance, waste incineration and management (Pellizzoni 2011; Bobbio 2002). As for these contributions, a specific relevance has always been recognised for the role of expertise and attempts to depoliticize the conflict as well as the production of new data by actors who oppose such specific intervention.

“Experts and campaigners” offers the opportunity to look at the Spanish debate on socio-ecological conflicts, which seldom overcome their geographical and linguistic borders. The book is written in English with the intention of tearing down language barriers; a symptom of the intention to move towards a more international debate.

The essays collected in the book are the outcome of a workshop on the results of a national research project about environmental conflicts in Spain, which involved also researchers from France and Ecuador; therefore, this book actually offers to the reader a privileged point of view about both the state of the art in the Spanish debate and about the empirical results of specific case studies. The added value of this book is the opportunity to resume in a single book the various theoretical perspectives about environmental conflicts and studies about the role of expertise and scientific knowledge: how it is embodied, endorsed and contested. The role and influence of expertise in environmental conflicts is the fil rouge that connects the nine chapters which compose the book.

In the introduction Martínez describes the overall framework which the book applies; it is composed of three main areas: i) the reason why collective action takes place in ecological conflicts; ii) the features and role of scientific knowledge as a resource mobilised by the groups involved in conflicts; iii) the basic reasons for a change in the status quo.

These areas touch upon different fields of inquiry (i.e. social movements, social change and innovation) which traditionally have been analysed in sociological terms. In this case, Martinez explicitly declares the aim of putting scientific knowledge under the lens: as “a causal factor in social conflicts” (p. 9), the experts’ discourse in conflicts, its effect in the dynamic of social movements and finally the general effect on social change. The empirical contributions deal with conflicts related to the long-distance power line between Spain and France (ch. 5) and the impact analysis of conflicts about water governance on environmental policies in Catalonia (ch. 6). Furthermore, interesting analytical hints have been provided by the study of scientific knowledge in configuring the environmental movement in Ecuador (ch. 4).

These studies and perspective recall classic STS themes, namely the scientific competence of non-experts (Irwin 2002; Wynne 1996) and the study of public engagement and participation (Philips et al. 2012). This opens the opportunity to apply the STS perspective with policy and governance problems for the management of commons such as water, and environmental planning. But what strikes the reader here is the concept of science to which all the essays in “Experts and campaigners” (also implicitly) refers to: the one proposed by Kennet Gould in the second chapter. Gould considers the nature of science as dyadic, distinguishing between impact science and production science. In doing so, Gould adopts Schnaiberg’s category of a ‘treadmill of production’ (Schnaiberg and Gould 2000; Schnaiberg 1980) within which scientific activity is conceived as a mere apparatus; such a neo-Marxist approach considers scientific knowledge and its application as part of a productive capitalist mechanism, separate from society and yet able to shape it directly. Therefore, it is pretty obvious to find in the framework of this book the “causal factor” of social conflict. This vision of science obliterates almost thirty years of STS history, delivering a representation of “science” and “scientific knowledge” as an external factor, a kind of independent variable within a regression model.

The most recent generation of environmental sociology (Mol 2010) denies such a rigid approach, considering instead the crucial role of streams materiality, objects, ideas and people that perpetually re-configure each other; a perspective that, through Urry (2000) openly recalls John Law, Bruno Latour and Michel Callon.

In concluding this review, “Experts and campaigners” offers us a two-folded opportunity: to explore a debate which clearly is interested in technoscientific issues applied to environmental conflicts and to explore how such hybrid research topics may be addressed more directly by STS. The book should be considered as a seminal attempt to analyse socio-ecological conflicts starting from the key role of scientific knowledge. It is certainly a fruitful approach but the way deterministic categories have been uncritically applied demonstrates how long we still have to go for a thorough integration of STS and environmental sociology.

References

- Bobbio, L. (2002) *Le arene deliberative*, in “Rivista italiana di politiche pubbliche”, 3, pp. 5-29.
- Bobbio, L. (2010) *Il paradosso dell'expertise nei conflitti ambientali*, in “Tecnoscienza Italian Journal of Science & Technology Studies”, 1(1), pp. 81-91.
- Irwin, A. (2002) *Citizen Science: A Study of People, Expertise and Sustainable Development*, London, Routledge.
- Lorenzet, A. (2013) *Il lato controverso della tecnoscienza: nanotecnologie, biotecnologie e grandi opere nella sfera pubblica*, Bologna, Il Mulino.
- Mol, A. (2010) *Social Theories of Environmental Reform: Towards a Third Generation*, in M. Gross and H. Heinrichs (eds.), *Environmental Environmental Sociology: European Perspectives and Interdisciplinary Challenges*, Dordrecht, Springer, pp. 19-38.
- Pellizzoni, L. (2011) *Conflitti ambientali. Esperti, politica, istituzioni nelle controversie ecologiche*, Bologna, Il Mulino.
- Phillips, L., Carvalho, A., and Doyle, J. (eds.) (2012) *Citizen voices: performing public participation in science and environment communication*, Bristol, Intellect Books.
- Schnaiberg, A. (1980) *The Environment: From Surplus to Scarcity*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- Schnaiberg, A., & Gould, K. A. (2000) *Environment and society: The enduring conflict*, West Caldwell, NJ, Blackburn Press.
- Urry, J. (2000) *Sociology beyond societies: Mobilities for the 21st century*, London, Routledge.
- Wynne, B. (1996) *A reflexive view of the expert-lay knowledge divide. Risk, environment and modernity: towards a new ecology*, London, Sage.

* * *

Christian Fuchs

Social Media. A Critical Introduction.

London: Sage, 2014, pp. 293

Cosimo Marco Scarcelli *University of Padova*

Over the last few years there has been a slow but relevant reconciliation of two different approaches interested in media and technology: STS and media studies. Both approaches ask similar questions concerning media and Information Technologies; however, they are rarely discussed together. Even though they can involve different empirical and conceptu-