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CONSENSUS SOCIAL MOVEMENTS
AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD
– THE EXAMPLE OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT

Abstract. The importance of consensus social movements consists in the creation of new cultural orientations based on the principles of humanism and universal values, and the way they catalyse the process of a new state of 'social aggregation' and strive to gain control over historicity by actively taking part in structuring the global world. They mark a path of constructive social involvement, both on an individual and communal plane. The essential activity of consensus social movements is promoting a new culture – i.e. lifestyles which constitute an alternative to those in the mainstream – as well as concrete action for social change. Such movements consist mainly consists of "work at the base", i.e. activity at the most fundamental human level. One of the specific characteristics of consensus movements, which sets them apart from different movements, is the fact that social mobilization in this case is not based on conflict; it is geared toward constructive action. The Focolare Movement has existed since the 1940s. It is present in 182 countries and has over 2 million members and adherents, mainly Catholics, but also about 50 thousand members of other denominations and about 30 thousand followers of other religions as well as about 70 thousand non-believers. They get together, despite their differences, and engage in solving social problems on every level – global, international, local and interpersonal.

Keywords: Consensus social movement, communal subjectivity, cultural orientation, socialization.

We are living in a time of social movements. Intensified social activity outside of politics is fast becoming a characteristic trait of contemporary societies, regardless of their geographic location or level of development.

What, then, are contemporary social movements? Sociological writings are rife with definitions (which in itself bears witness to the complexity of this phenomenon). They can be "collective efforts made in order to transform norms and values", "collective undertakings aimed at changing the social order"; "organised attempts made by groups of people to effect social change"; "collective efforts aimed at controlling a change or altering its direction"; "collective endeavours

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undertaken in order to establish a new order of life" (S z t o m p k a 2005: 226); "dynamic collective activities promoting changes or opposition against transformations which society is undergoing – in groups, systems of values" (S z y m c z y k, ed. 2010: 33). A common denominator for these definitions is the great potential inherent in social movements, which manifests itself (to a greater or lesser extent) in action. This represents a potential for change, and it can manifest itself both in constructive and destructive activities.

Social movements are very diverse in their aims and the directions of the desired changes, as well as in the arsenal of means they utilise. As a rule, they are characterised by a bottom-up collective activity for a collective benefit. They manifest themselves in involvement – sometimes more active, sometimes less so – in public life outside of the system of official institutions. Social movements influence both massive social structures and the consciousness of individuals, while their organizational structure is chiefly communication-based. We are witnessing a transformation of politics – from institutional politics to "life politics" (cf. G i d d e n s 2006: 21). A peculiar feature of many contemporary social movements is that in a world where social bonds and structures are fast dissolving, new types of social bonds are being created, which play a role in the creation of new principles of social structuration – ones that are more flexible, more open to the changing reality, and offer more opportunities for individual and collective subjectivity. The metamorphosis of social movements in the past few decades has been from "socio-political" towards "socio-cultural" movements (T o u r a i n e 1995: 224). The area where these movements are born and are active has been increasingly that of culture, as broadly understood.

The organizational structure of contemporary social movements consists of a network of small groups and loosely confederated individuals who subscribe to similar values and who act and react together. These subjects systematically work every day. The social movement as such, however, manifests itself during extraordinary actions, spectacular undertakings (S z y m c z y k, ed. 2010: 44). This trait of social movements can be compared to an "iceberg", whose visible part are the "activities" of the movement, while the much greater, invisible part, is the potential, or "readiness to act".

The rapid development of new technologies causes the organizational structure of contemporary social movements to increasingly morph into a network, which in turn allows the movements to quickly spread on the global scale. Today's attempts to define social movements stress the rationalism behind group mobilisation – the social movement is a conscious collective actor, which makes rational choices, following instructions from the shared collective identity (D e l l a P o r - t a, D i a n i 2009: 23–24).

The chief factor in collective mobilisation, as well as the source of meaning and experience, is value-based cultural identity. In the words of Manuel Castells, the identity of social actors "is a process of constructing meaning on the basis

of a certain cultural attributes or a linked set of cultural attributes which are given precedence before other sources of meaning" (C a s t e l l s 2008: 22).

Identity, and especially collective identity based on a shared system of values, are key concepts for understanding the phenomenon of contemporary social movements. The movement's identity is primary with respect to its social activity. The process of forming the collective identity of a movement is two-dimensional – on the one hand, the movement's identity consists of the multitude of identities of its members, but on the other, the fact of participation in the movement brings about changes in the identities of individuals. The collective identity of a social movement is more than the sum of the identities of its members, it is a subjective identity. The logic of social activity of contemporary movements is construed around a shared system of values, a certain view of humanity and the world, as well as a belief in the viability of change. Therefore we can identify two elements vital in studying the phenomenon of social movements:

1) the movement's identity – that is, a system of meanings and values, as well as the model of culture the movement adheres to (which is often alternative with regard to the official one);

2) communication and relations with its surroundings (testimony of lifestyle, communication of collective identity), what we call the social activity of the movement.

One form of mass organization for societies, apart from various conflict movements (resistance movements, reactive movements), are consensual collective activities around which consensus social movements are born (D e l l a P o r t a, D i a n i 2009: 26). Such movements are a peculiar and significant form of bottom-up collective activity, since – as opposed to conflict social movements – they are aimed at constructive activities. A characteristic trait of consensus movements is that social mobilization is not, in this case, based on any conflict. Consensus social movements are first and foremost cultural projects (T o u r a i n e 2006: 783). They are "quiet" movements, which do not particularly stand out on the socio-political scene, because they are chiefly active in the area of culture as broadly understood, and their activities are for the most part "grassroots work" (socialization). The goal of their activity is transformation of "metasocial guarantees of social order" (T o u r a i n e 1995: 223), that is, of the foundations (basis) of the structurization of said order. The fundamental "visible" activity of such movements is thus promoting new cultural patterns as well as lifestyles that are alternative with respect to the mainstream. This is tied to concrete activities towards effecting social changes. Social movements of this type, which strive to "transform interpersonal relations on their most fundamental level", are also called "proactive movements" (C a s t e l l s 2008: 17).

It is worth stressing the historic longevity of consensus social movements. These movements are characterised by a life cycle unlike that of most social movements

(S z y m c z y k, ed. 2010: 34): the phases of creation and development are followed by a phase of active persistence, that is, keeping a certain level of mobilization and reacting when certain conditions are met. Fields of activity are much broader for such movements than for resistance movements, and include all areas of social life – from the level of individual identities to global macrostructures.

Consensus social movements are a broad and diverse category. Among them are various religious, charity, and solidarity movements as well as certain types of human rights or environmental movements. The fact that they are characteristically "left ajar" institutionally makes it that much more difficult to define them precisely and comprehensively. Indeed, it is impossible to even list all currently active social movements of this type. This category is rather an analytical one, presenting a certain model of subjective collective social activity. Such movements spread intensively and are more long-lasting than others. One may ask why this is so. It seems that the secret of their success lies in their being a constructive alternative to the structural breakdowns in today's societies. Consensus social movements serve an important social function – they answer vital needs of contemporary individuals, who seek to make sense of the world, seek meaning in their own lives, and crave security. These are thing which are no longer passed from generation to generation, owing to globalisation processes which uproot us culturally. This is of particular importance in today's world of weakening institutions, where, as Zygmunt Bauman put it, people are unable to anchor their identities. These movements then create positive models for reconciling what is "modern" with what is "traditional", "open" with "closed", "eclectic" with "fundamental" – both on the individual scale and community-wide.

The Focolare movement can serve as a specific example of the phenomenon of consensus social movements (*focolare* literally means "hearth" in Italian). As of today, the movement is present in 182 countries, has more than 2 million members and sympathisers, who are chiefly Roman Catholics, but also about 50 thousand members of other denominations, ca. 30 thousand members of other religions, and some 70 thousand atheists, who work together to solve social problems and build "a better world". The Focolare movement is a secular religious movement. At the same time, it is a dynamic, network social movement on a global scale. It dates back to 1940s Italy and revolves around higher, transcendental values. These are assumed to be Christian values, but a key characteristic of Focolare is its exceptional openness to all human beings (in accordance with Christian tenets). The shared value system, with special stress placed on universal humanitarian values, is the motivating factor for all activities. The movement is active in all spheres of human life and activity, both private and public.

The value system of the Focolare movement stems from the charisma passed down from its founder, Chiara Lubich. The central, most socially significant and motivating values include "love", "brotherhood" and "unity". Love is the most fundamental, the innermost of these (for God is Love). This is what inspires mem-

bers to do everything they do as Focolare. This principle is laid down in the General Statutes of the movement: "the goal of Focolare's activities is perfect love which is realized in universal unity and brotherhood" (*Statuti Generali Opera di Maria*: arts. 5 and 6). To elaborate on what kind of love is meant here, let me quote the founder of the movement: the aim is

> to love with a special love. Not only with one directed at one's own family or friends, but one that reaches out towards everyone alike, the nice and the not-very-nice, the rich and the poor, the great and the small, compatriots and foreigners, friends and foes. To love everyone. To love first, taking the initiative, not expecting to be loved back. To love first, even if others do not love you, even if others hate you. If we all act this way, universal brotherhood will spread. To love not only with words, but concretely and actively (L u b i c h 2007: 488, 491).

> Love is something active, very active. It tells you to live not for yourself anymore, but for others. And this is something that requires dedication, effort. It requires from everyone that they transform from cowardly, egotist individuals, focused on their own business, on their own things – into little heroes of every day, who serve their brothers day in, day out (L u - b i c h 2007: 486).

Brotherhood (and we need to stress that what is meant here is universal brotherhood) is another key point and ultimate goal of the movement's activities. It is a value linked with interpersonal relationships. As an internalised value it induces the attitude "every human being is my brother", "we are all one family".

Unity is a value that involves all spheres of a person's life, as well as those of their surroundings. It is this fundamental value that gives the movement its global dimension. Focus on building unity leads to caring for harmony and peace. The entire activity of Focolare is therefore aimed at building unity in all areas of human life and activity – from the harmony of spiritual life, through brotherhood and peaceful coexistence with others, to caring for the environment. Led by the principle of love, people involved in the movement attempt to reach unity in their personal and communal lives, promoting the system of values they subscribe to and the culture that stems from it wherever they find themselves. The Focolare movement is a broad influence movement, whose activities span multiple dimensions – from changing individual mindsets and identities, through to structural changes in small groups, local communities, and to the macro level – in global projects and systems.

The main activity of the Focolare movement is passing on the "ideal" (love-brotherhood-unity) to all social groups and all corners of the world, "to bring order to souls and societies again" (L u b i c h 2007: 248). Great heed is paid here to socializing activities of the movement's participants, hence its meetings, congresses, and formation schools are very professional and well-prepared. They serve as much to pass information as to create communal bonds among participants. The formation process in Focolare is flexible and adaptable for particular types of societies. The movement's ideas reach diverse groups through people

socialized in Focolare. Wherever they live, work, travel or seek entertainment, the movement's participants find opportunities for "silent work", for "being love".

Owing to the fact that the 'activists' of Focolare are chiefly lay persons, the movement's spirituality reaches ever wider, and its structures lead to transformations on the mass scale. Thousands of people, often quite unnoticed, attempt to make their ideals real in their everyday lives. In the words of Vera Araújo, a sociologist linked with the movement,

> we, modern, effective people, want to touch, to see, to calculate the results, palpable consequences for our social life. We crave statistics and evidence. But love makes no noise, it works in the depths: in the souls, the minds, the hearts, building bonds: so it works inside institutions and structures, it works for the benefit of international life, it works hidden, like leavening in a dough. In Focolare love is present through lay people living in the world in their apartments, tenement buildings, blocks of flats, people who walk the city streets and work in offices, schools, factories, banks, in the field, everywhere. This is a revolution (A r a ú j o 2009: 44).

A characteristic trait of the movement is its dialogism. Focolare leads a "dialogue of life", whose effect is the capability to reconcile diversities in a divided world. Socialization in Focolare fosters the development in its members of an attitude of sensitivity to social problems and readiness to positively react to them. This is especially true today, in times when societies are transforming towards multiculturalism and greater religious diversity, in times of escalating xenophobia and religious intolerance. The movement is also involved in dialogue with other religions "so that religious pluralism does not lead to division and wars, but contributes to renewal in brotherhood of the unity of the family of all humans" (www.focolare.org). Inter-religious dialogue, which the movement is actively involved in, creates favourable conditions for diverse religious circles to get to know one another better and to undertake activities together, which in turn leads to greater understanding and more peace in the world.

This may be due to the fact that the Focolare movement stresses in its dialogue what is shared, universal – like the golden rule "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" – and makes it the fundament of relations between diverse people, cultures, nations and religions. According to the Focolare ideal it is not enough to engage in dialogue in a limited sliver of reality, what is required is a life of dialogue. Of great value in the dialogue is the relationship between the content and the form of what one passes on – "without imposing yourself, without the will to conquer, without the will to convert" (L u b i c h 1997: 8). In the Focolare movement dialogue is a certain lifestyle which contains an active potential for unity. The Focolare dialogue, even though it is realized in a particular life dialogue, always relates to transcendence through the medium of love.

The organizational structure of the Focolare movement is rather complex. This is largely due to the global and open nature of the movement. There are also internal reasons – in the case of Focolare, structure is secondary with respect to activity rooted in its system of values. The structure, "softly" crystallised in any

case, is created in order to pass on the doctrine as globally as possible, to facilitate information transfer, and coordinate activities. Focolare is a typical social movement of the new type, with a multidimensional, network structure consisting of the "centre", "branches" as well as "networks of groups" and "networks of individuals".

What is worth noting is the double structure of this movement. On the one hand it appears as a well-managed organization that guarantees a high level of co-operation with other subjects of social life and continued formation of participants, and which facilitates an organizational, moral, program and spiritual unity of millions of people worldwide. At the same time the movement is characterised by great variety and diversity in terms of its forms and areas of activity, and above all – of its structures – which are open, decentralised and to a greater or lesser extent fluid, scattered in various environments. This creates space for individual and wholly subjective activities by individuals and group subjects on the level of small groups, local communities, *etc*. This duality serves on the one hand to make the movement's activities more effective, and on the other, enables the structurization of both the individual identities of its participants and of the collective identity of the entire movement in all of its forms and agendas.

An important aspect of the Focolare movement is that its reality as a whole is made up of a network of particular movements active in different areas of social life – the family movement, the youth movement, the children and teens movement, the charity movement, *etc*. All activities of the networks of movements working within the frame of Focolare agree with the general strategy of the movement and involve the promotion, in their respective environments, of new cultural patterns in a way that is suitable for each environment, according to its specific nature and needs. They create a significant social and cultural capital, peculiar to each environment.

In addition to the above-mentioned "grassroots work", and in accordance with the principle "love must be implemented", the movement also animates concrete activities to incite changes in social reality. Various actions and projects are undertaken at all levels of social life. Examples of this "concrete" involvement in solving social problems may be the global project "Action for a United World" (www.amu-it.eu) or the youth project for local communities, "ColoriAmoLaCittà" (http://teens4unity.net/home_inaction.html).

Focolare is constructively involved in counteracting the negative effects of globalization. This is done chiefly through activities aimed at lessening the social distance between groups and societies. The movement also participates in activities that foster the development and integration of local communities. This may be illustrated by the project "Economy of Communion" (edc-online.org), initiated in the early 1990s and actively promoted by Focolare worldwide. It clearly shows a systemic approach to thinking about social problems. Economy of Communion companies function in accordance with market economy: they are rationally managed, they are competitive and make a profit. At the same

time, however, they differ from others because of a certain philosophy of economics that lies at the foundation of their functioning. This philosophy has led to a new economic system which is also effective in standard economic conditions. The idea of communion in economy dictates that company profits be divided into three equal parts and used to finance three areas. One part pays for further development of the company, another – the development of formation structures, and the remainder finances aid for the poor, to provide them with means of survival until they find employment (L u b i c h 2007: 398–399). These fundamental assumptions are the foundations of a "new economy" (as opposed to the principles of 'new economy' as traditionally understood), which is based on a certain view of man and the world. As of today, more than 700 companies around the world operate according to principles of Economy of Communion. This project shows that an economy based on different, more humane, principles is possible and does not automatically lead to lessening the competitiveness of a company.

Another interesting social phenomenon are the so-called Mariapoli towns – laboratories of social life organised in accordance with the model of values and culture promoted by the Focolare movement. The first of these was created in 1964 in Italy and is still developing actively, another 34 can be found on five continents. These towns are homes to members of diverse cultures, religions, and world views, all living together. "Normal life" goes on in these towns through building real unity among these cultures, religions and world views, rather than through elimination of differences. The fundament here is not assimilation or homogenization, but a dialogue based on universal human values. Focolare towns, institutions and groups, as well as their activities, are a social and cultural fact.

Brotherhood and unity, the ideological cornerstones of Focolare, mean that an important place in the movement's structure is reserved for the media. The central publisher CittàNuova puts out several dozen books every year, as well as magazines for organizations and movements working within the Focolare structure. Twenty-five publishers can be found outside of Italy, with a combined annual output of 200 titles. The best-known and most commonly read magazine of the movement, CittàNuova, has 37 national editions in 22 languages, while the monthly *Words of Life* – consisting of an excerpt from the Bible together with a commentary – is issued in 2 million copies in 96 languages and dialects. In addition to the extensive global official site www.focolare.org, edited in 7 languages, there are 24 local sites and sites for each of the movement's branches, Mariapoli centres and towns, as well as web pages for various projects. One of the most widespread ways to distribute information about the movement's life and activity among its members are "mailing lists" made by branches and communities on all levels. The network of recipients of Focolare messages via all forms of media runs to some 14 million people (L u b i c h 2007: 414).

The fact that the forms and techniques of Focolare's activities remain very up-to-date also plays another role: it connects millions of people scattered all over

the world, thus opening them to constructively experience globalisation. This in turn gives the movement another function, in that it participates in structuring the global world on the basis of, and along the principles of, higher values, in a profoundly humanised way. This construction of the seeds of a global community is done, in the case of Focolare, with deep respect for what is anthropologically significant, for what comprises the cultural context for local communities (national, regional, religious or cultural ones). This exemplifies what we know from sociological literature: the combination of the global and the local dimension ("glocal" in Giddens's terms).

The Focolare movement's effectiveness is very thought-provoking in the light of its orientation against the leading cultural trends of our age. One is especially surprised by the ease with which the movement crosses all borders and reconciles diversities in this deeply divided world. One reason for this astounding success may be the Focolare's integral approach to life and to humanity, its action strategy rooted in universal values and its reference to transcendental values. It seems that what makes participation in the movement attractive are its universal system of values and fitting activity models. This gives participants a relatively high sense of security, and participation significantly reduces the deficit of a sense of meaning and significance that is so severe in our times. Focolare's communal character lessens the sense of loneliness and alienation that is so distressing for the contemporary human. Focolare seems to provide a solid basis for the construction of both individual and collective identities, at the same time including the participant in a diverse, dynamic, and changeable network of relations, groups and institutions. In the words of Chiara Lubich, the "secret" of Focolare's popularity

> lies in a new way of life, a new lifestyle accepted by millions of people, which, while basically following Christian values – by no means overlooking, rather stressing similar values present in other religions and cultures – awakens in the world a need to find and strengthen peace; yes, peace and unity. It's about a new spirituality, one that is contemporary and current, a spirituality of unity. Not just individuals live by it, but also many people together. For it has a clear communal dimension (L u b i c h 1997: 8).

The Focolare movement promotes a new lifestyle, one which helps people reconcile two realities – those of spirituality and of modernity. This is what truly attracts people, especially the young. It is a lay movement which makes ample use of modern technologies and enters directly into the area of everyday life.

The movement has been noticed and recognized by numerous institutions, including the UN. In 1996, Focolare's founder was awarded the UNESCO prize for "Education to Peace". The official justification for the award read:

> For the input the movement has had in building peace and unity between individuals, nations, generations and social groups, in which everyone participates: children, young people, adults, the rich and the poor, atheists and adherents of all religions (Z a n z u c c h i 1997: 6).

Such social movements enable individuals to participate in a community and give them an opportunity to publically articulate their opinions and exert influence, to be a subject in a world of dissolving social forms. Movements of this type promote a value-based process of constructing individual and collective identities and new lifestyles, ones that are constructive though adequate for modernity, by developing people's sensitivity and allowing them to react positively to social problems. Their significant social role is also that they comprise what might be called a new "social state of matter" and moderate the process of creation of new cultural orientations.

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RUCHY SPOŁECZNE KONSENSUSU I ICH ZNACZENIE W GLOBALIZUJĄCYM SIĘ ŚWIECIE – PRZYKŁAD RUCHU FOCOLARI

Streszczenie. Zjawisko ruchów konsensusu zasługuje na uwagę badacza przede wszystkim ze względu na masowość i skuteczność szerokiego spektrum działań społecznych; wart zbadania

jest także fenomen konstruktywnego zaangażowania społecznego w wymiarze zarówno indywidualnym, jak i wspólnotowym. Ważne znaczenie społeczne tego typu ruchów polega m.in. na tym, że współtworzą one jakby nowy „stan skupienia społecznego" oraz katalizują proces tworzenia się nowych orientacji kulturowych. Dążą do uzyskania kontroli nad historycznością poprzez czynne uczestnictwo w strukturyzowaniu świata globalnego.

Ruch Focolari istnieje od lat 40. XX w. Jest obecny w 182 krajach, liczy ponad 2 mln członków i sympatyków, głównie katolików, ale też ok. 50 tys. przedstawicieli innych wyznań, ok. 30 tys. wyznawców innych religii, oraz ok. 70 tys. osób niewierzących, którzy wspólnie angażują się w rozwiązywanie problemów społecznych na wszystkich poziomach – globalnym, międzynarodowym, lokalnym i interpersonalnym. Strategia działań tego ruchu oparta jest na wartościach uniwersalnych.

Słowa kluczowe: ruchy społeczne konsensusu, podmiotowość społeczna, orientacja kulturowa, socjalizacja.