

analysis of more instances – intended to bring out the characteristics of all the cases considered. The second dimension refers to those accounts that emerge from a comparison ranging from single – when all cases of a phenomenon have common properties – to multiple – when there are different forms of a phenomenon. By combining the two dimensions, four possible approaches to comparison emerge: «individualizing», «universalizing», «variation-finding», and «encompassing» comparisons. Individualizing comparisons are those that treat each case as essentially unique by minimizing the significance of any property in common with other cases. Purely universalizing comparisons, in turn, are based on the identification of common properties in all cases. On the other hand, we have those types of comparisons that are based on the search for possible variations (variation-finding) and, in particular, on the belief that we can establish a principle of change in the nature or intensity of a phenomenon starting from a systematic analysis of the differences between a number of instances. Encompassing comparisons are instead based on the analysis of different instances in different places within the same macro-system. The purpose of this form of comparison is to explain the characteristics of each case in the light of an evolving relationship with the system as a whole.

## **5. Contentious politics and democratic process**

At the end of our comparative study, we can suggest some reflections on the thoughts of our two authors. Within the scope of this work, we have to leave out the specific studies conducted by Gramsci and Tilly, to concentrate our attention on their approaches and in particular on those aspects where we can find significant evidence of connection. We have seen that both authors assume an analogous starting point in their criticism of mechanistic and evolutionistic sociology in order to support the need for an analysis of social phenomena understood in their specific historicity. Both authors regard contentious politics as the central dimension in the process of historical development and, therefore, as a vital element of sociological interest.

Tilly's intellectual agenda is absolutely historical. His main objective is to understand how collective action evolved in Europe under the influence of major structural changes such as the processes of industrialization, urbanization and, in particular, the two macro-processes represented by the devel-

opment of the mode of capitalist production and the emergence and consolidation of nation states. Within the broader category of collective action, he focuses on the practices of public, confrontational and sometimes violent mobilization. His main focus is on the practice of uprising against economic and political power holders within national or regional communities. As Lynn Hunt points out (1984, 246), «Tilly emphasizes the creativity of the ordinary people, their ability to organize themselves and to defend their interests». The dimension of the interests is, in fact, central to the theory of Tilly and represents a discriminating factor in the conceptualization of collective action that he defines, in general terms, as the practice by which «people acts together in pursuit of common interests» (Tilly 1978, 7).

In order to implement his theoretical and empirical project, Tilly is forced to react to the functionalist approach of Durkheimian matrix by starting a dialogue with Marx as well as with Marxist theorists. He himself admits that since he began his long investigation into the practices of conflict, protest and collective action, his main purpose has been the accumulation of sufficient empirical evidence to refute the Durkheimian line, with particular reference to the concept of anomie and the dichotomy between integration and disintegration, through which contentious collective actions ended up being relegated to the broader category of social deviance (Tilly 1981, 95-108). This leads him to approach the Marxian elaboration without fully embracing it. He himself, in one of his most famous works, describes his analysis as «resolutely pro-Marxian» (1978, 48), agreeing with the attention paid by Marxists to the dimension of the interests rooted in the organizations of production and in the practices of conflict rather than of consent.

Tilly, however, goes beyond Marx, by placing his attention not so much on proletarians as such, but on those movement organizations on which their activism and the success of their mobilization depend. Moreover, Tilly, although following Marx in his concern for the developments of production models, does not limit his study to this aspect, he takes into consideration also other relevant structural processes such as urbanization and the formation and consolidation of nation states. This last element brings him slightly closer to the tradition of Weberian studies. Finally, unlike Marx and Gramsci, Tilly rarely focuses on the concept of class consciousness, turning his attention to the combination of interests and organization. What finally distinguishes Gramsci from Tilly is the attention for the theoretical dimension. Both strongly believe that no study design can be successfully pursued wi-

thout reference to a theoretical framework firmly rooted in historical processes. But, whereas Gramsci has no doubt in identifying the crucial points of this framework in the Marxist tradition which, freed from certain deterministic propensities, is configured in the parameters of the philosophy of praxis, Tilly, being inspired by all major sociological theoretical traditions, never refers to a single paradigm. In Tilly's view, in fact, theory is a fundamental research tool that is subject to change. It can be a helpful guideline for a socio-historical investigation; the evidence of real historical processes, however, should never be constrained in static conceptual cages. Theories, if we refer to them, should always be dynamic and, to a certain extent, flexible.

Even Gramsci, while claiming its full adherence to Marxism, opposes any form of structuralist orthodoxy and focuses mostly on the historical role of ideological superstructures, as well as on the importance of intellectual organization in the process of transformation, starting from the structural conditions determined by the relations of production. The organization of conflict against hegemonic systems of power is the focus of interest for both authors (in particular, see Tilly, Tarrow 2007; and Tilly 2007) who, through their proposal of historical comparison as a tool for social analysis, present themselves as supporters of a historical sociology of political processes in a dynamic path toward democracy understood, first of all, as a process of conflict between power holders (economic and political) and subaltern social groups.