

## Role of Social Movements in the Construction of Social Problems

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Social movements are the participants of constructing of social problems; however, they are often out of sociologists' view, as they do not have access to main public arenas for the articulation of their own position. Most of the case studies of social problems refers to the official policy, official media, etc. Meanwhile, now social movements take a great part in the processes of problematization and they use new ways of claims-making activity.

The purpose is to offer the conceptual framework for study of the role of social movements in the construction of social problems.

We need to define what social problem is. Nowadays objective approaches to understanding social problems remains the most popular and widespread in Russia. However, it is difficult to research social movements from this perspective. We assume that the most appropriate approach in this way is social constructionism. The main features of constructive perspective are presented in the following table.

Table 1.

The main differences between objective and subjective approaches to understanding social problems

<b>Objective approaches</b>	<b>Social constructionism</b>
Social problems as a negative conditions – dysfunction or disorganization, failure of social institutes etc.	Social problem is the claims-making process with the requirement to change negative conditions that considered as existing by different social groups
Objective condition	Putative condition
«Society»	Specific organizations, social groups, social movements, individuals that have their own interests and goals of their activity
Levels and indicators of different phenomena	The vocabulary (words, terms, rhetoric, etc.) that is used to describe and classify conditions

Social problem as a static phenomenon	Social problem as a process that has some stages (H. Bloomer, M. Spector, J. Kitsuse etc.)
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Social problems are selected, discussed and defined in the special space – public arenas (Hilgartner S., Ch. L. Bosk). Among them, we can note mass media, the courts, the science, religious organizations, nongovernmental organizations, the cinema, the Internet etc. Public attention is a scarce resource distributed by means of competition on the public arenas. Social problems compete for public attention with each other at two levels:

- a) competition between different interpretations of a situation as a problem.
- b) the various social problems compete with each other for public attention.

Different social agents including social movements offered their own interpretations of social problems and compete with each other for control under the definition of a problem, promote their own values and norms. As a rule, they seek various resources and represent social problems publicly. Social movements compete with each other and with government in interpreting some putative conditions as social problems. Thus, social movements can be considered as the networks of functionaries of social problems, concentrating around macrocategories of social problems, “big social issues”, like inequality, human rights, ecological issues, health.

Claims-making activity of social movements would include both rhetorical products, such as ideology, propaganda and special vocabulary, and mobilizing activities, such as demonstrations, agitation, and political organization. General and specific social movements (A.Mauss) use different ways of claims-making activity. Rhetoric of social movement can be analyzed in different ways. First of all, rhetoric as the means of attracting resources in a cases of corresponding or not corresponding to official definitions are of special scientific interest. Secondly, rhetoric can be considered as the means of forming and strengthening the movement identity. Thirdly, we can say about rhetoric as the part of the movement ideology. We should remember that rhetoric always involves actions.

The traditional forms of mass media is the main public arena of constructing of social problems. Even now, 70% of Americans generally get their news from

television, radio, and print outlets, according to a 2014 American Institute survey and report (J. Wihbey). In Russia, TV is the most popular source of information (60%), the Internet ranks second (23%), according to 2013 research. TV remains a significant source of information, making it difficult to attract attention and mobilizing resources for social movements because of limited access to it.

In modern Russia only social movements whose activities initiated by the government or those that support government reforms have access to the central mass media, to agenda-building process. They should use the official rhetoric in constructing of social problems. Pulling attention away from big media sources remains difficult in the extreme. This is effect of «zero-sum nature of public attention». In this situation social movements (for example, urban movements) are forced to use alternative media, including the Internet (networks, blogs etc.).

Activists can create the networks of functionaries and use modern social media as public arenas. Due to modern mass media, especially Internet, social movements can mobilize resources and propose alternative to governmental definitions view on social problems and methods of its solving. Sometimes social movements can create new social problems, initiate its public discussion and activity. The rhetoric used to attract the public attention and support of their position is of considerable research interest.

Thus, social constructionism may be a perspective appropriate framework for the analysis social movement activity. Firstly, we should consider social movements as the networks of functionaries interacting and competing with different agents of process of problematization. Secondly, rhetoric used by social movements is of particular research concern. Thirdly, different public arenas, traditional mass media and the Internet, and its abilities to attract public attention may be analyzed. Social movements does not reflect and solve social problems but create them.