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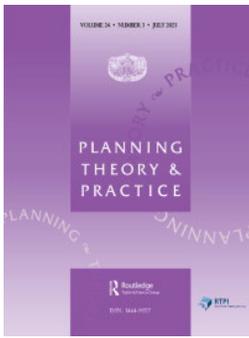
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A Pragmatist Approach to Insurgencies: Experience, Lived Situations and Public Problems

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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on the concept of insurgency. Through a review of conceptual and empirical literature, it argues that current conceptualisations limit our understanding of insurgencies by focusing on intentional, purposeful and non-evolutive practices, addressing single, external and objectified sources of oppression, considering oppressed groups as static and fixed realities, and understanding insurgencies only through thematic characterisations. Adopting a pragmatist approach, it conceptualises insurgencies as two interconnected experiences: an experience of transformation of lived problematic situations, and an experience of transformation of conventional approaches to treat public problems. The article suggests a new research agenda and critical position for scholars.

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Introduction

Insurgencies are objects of widespread attention in planning research and theory. While the seminal conceptualisation of insurgencies focused on the actions of specific actors (Friedmann, 2002, 2011; Holston, 1998; Sandercock, 1998b, 1998a), in recent years the concept has been the object of a practice turn (García-Lamarca, 2017; Huq, 2020; Miraftab, 2009, 2017). In parallel, extensive empirical research has been conducted on the subject (among others: Ay & Miraftab, 2016; Brakke, 2023; Butcher & Apsan Frediani, 2014; Freitas, 2019; Friendly, 2022; García-Lamarca, 2017; Jabareen & Switat, 2019; Meir, 2005; Meth, 2010; Miraftab & Wills, 2005; Novoa, 2022; Putri, 2020; Shrestha & Aranya, 2015; Sletto, 2021; Sweet & Chakars, 2010). Scholars have used the term “insurgent planning” to refer to empirical phenomena (e.g., insurgent planning practices, insurgent citizen practices, and insurgent histories) and the line of empirical and theoretical scholarship inquiring about them. Aiming for greater clarity, in this paper I will refer to the former as “insurgencies” bridging across multiple conceptualisations and empirical lenses.

In line with the works of radical planning scholars (Friedmann, 1987; Grabow & Heskin, 1973), expressing criticism of the structurally elitist, centralising, and change-resistant dimensions of rational and modernist planning, Holston's (1998) seminal concept of insurgent citizenship focuses on the actions of communities resisting the “modernist absorption of citizenship in a

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project of state-building" (p. 48) and opposing "the modernist spaces that dominate cities today" (p. 39). Considering the role of planners in these processes, Sandercock (1998b) further argues that while radical planning is associated with the activities of professional planners, insurgencies are based on the direct experiences of communities considered marginalised (Huq, 2020, pp. 381–382). In Mirafteb's (2009) approach, insurgencies resist neoliberalism rather than modernist planning. She argues that they generate "real inclusion," in contrast to the formal inclusion of participatory processes promoted by neoliberal governance structures. In particular, insurgencies are seen as occasions for the emancipation of marginalised communities in the Global South (Mirafteb & Wills, 2005; Watson, 2013).

The concept of insurgency has been criticised for its excessive optimism, suggesting that the ability to generate emancipation through these processes should not be taken for granted. Meth (2010) argues that research should place greater empirical and analytical attention on the repressive dimensions of insurgencies (including violent and exclusive practices), which should be understood in their complexity of interconnected oppression and emancipation. Davy (2019) also criticises Friedmann's (2002) definition of insurgent planning practices through the notion of counter-hegemony, as initiatives with repressive aims would be included in the category of insurgency.

In parallel and in response to these critiques, scholars theorised a practice turn to insurgent planning research. Mirafteb (2017) argues that "the theorising objects of insurgent planning research are practices, not the actors" (p. 281). These actions develop invented spaces of participation that are counter-hegemonic, imaginative and transgressive, against the neoliberal order. Insurgencies are considered progressive by definition, while regressive practices developed by actors associated with insurgencies are excluded from this conceptualisation. Garcia-Lamarca (2017) similarly supports the conceptualisation of insurgencies as socio-spatial and political practices, consisting of "both doings and sayings that enact equality and disrupt the dominant production of space, creating possibilities to generate new urban meanings and relations contrary to institutionalised ones and against the interests of dominant powers" (p. 5). Huq (2020) defines them as practices premised on collective necessity that "enact equality, counter-hegemony, transgression, and imagination through situated political contestations that lead to the reconstitution of political subjects" (p. 385). This approach marks a shift from earlier conceptualisations of insurgencies: Holston, Sandercock and Friedmann assume insurgencies to be what is done by a specific sphere of society (such as grassroots movements and local communities), rather than defining insurgencies as a specific set of practices (Huq, 2020, p. 386). In doing so, their scope of inquiry includes regressive actions and features.

These differences in the concept of insurgency highlight different features of the empirical world. Scientific concepts such as insurgency allow us to proceed with research, establishing knowledge of what is essential (Swedberg, 2014) and guiding empirical explorations and theoretical advancements. At the same time, as they organise our attention, they might move our focus away from other important aspects of the empirical world.

This paper reflects on the concept of insurgency to broaden its capacity to understand the empirical world, orient research and guide practice. Through a review of empirical results presented in the literature, this article argues that some features of the main conceptualisations of insurgencies limit our capacity to understand some key aspects of these processes. These features are the focus on intentional, purposeful and non-evolutive practices, the adoption of single, external and objectifying sources of oppression, the consideration of oppressed groups as static and fixed realities, and the understanding of insurgencies through thematic characterisations.

Adopting a pragmatist approach, this paper proposes to conceptualise insurgency as two interconnected experiences materialising other ways of doing and being (García-Lamarca, 2017): an experience of transformation of lived problematic situations, and an experience of transformation of conventional approaches to treat the public problem. This reconceptualisation reorients our attention towards different empirical characteristics of these processes, transforms the research agenda and suggests a new positionality for the researcher.

This paper adopts a pragmatist perspective. Pragmatism is not a unified school of thought (Joas, 1996, p. 60). In this discussion, I mobilise classical works of Dewey (1925, 1927, 1938; Dewey & Bentley, 1949) and their more recent interpretations in sociology (Cefai, 1996, 2010, 2013, 2016, 2019, 2020; Cefai et al., 2015; Cefai & Terzi, 2012; Quéré, 2002; Stavo-Debaugé, 2012) and philosophy (Frega, 2016; Joas, 1993, 1996; Pappas, 2016; Zask, 2002). This perspective is also informed by Crosta's (1998, 2010; see also Proto, *in press*) use of pragmatist thought in planning research and theory.

As in other social sciences (Abbott, 2004, p. 8), planning research aims to explain social life. The planning discipline, additionally and intrinsically, also has the ambition of developing knowledge and normative theories capable of guiding future action. Friedman (2008) distinguished between theories in planning (theories guiding planning practices), theories of planning (theories about what is planning), and theories about planning (theories explaining how planning is practised). In contrast with other planning theorists who use pragmatist concepts to develop theories for planning (Forester, 2013; Healey, 2009; Hoch, 2002, 2007), normatively indicating possible ways to directly tackle issues in planning practice, I use them as tools to support the development of explanatory theories about insurgencies from empirical research. These theories can then be used to inform practice theories in planning. Like phronetic planning research, this approach "explores current practices and historic circumstances to find avenues to praxis" (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 302).

While the paper proposes a re-conceptualisation of insurgency, it does not consider it a definitive concept. Rather, it proposes to see it as a sensitising concept, that "gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances" (Blumer, 1954, p. 7). Sensitising concepts guide research not prescribing us what to see, but "merely suggest[ing] directions along which to look" (Blumer, 1954, p. 7). This heuristic approach to the concept of insurgency can be useful for discovering new aspects of these processes in future research (Swedberg, 2014).

The paper is based on a review of literature on insurgencies. A keyword search (insurgent, insurgent planning) on Scopus resulted in 37 publications. Reading and annotating these publications, I reconstructed the disciplinary debates on insurgencies to recognise the most seminal and influential conceptualisations (Friedmann, 2002; García-Lamarca, 2017; Holston, 1998; Huq, 2020; Mirafteb, 2009, 2017; Sandercock, 1998b). These conceptualisations are the main object of discussion of this paper. I analysed their orientations, features and assumptions, reflecting on which aspects of insurgencies they consider essential, and which they omit. With no aim of comprehensiveness, this paper discusses some of the features of these conceptualisations that, I argue, leave out of focus certain dimensions of insurgencies limiting the understanding of these processes.

I also analysed the empirical accounts resulting from the keyword search in literature: in some instances they followed some of the limiting aspects of the main conceptualisations, and in others they generated results or reflections contradicting them. Throughout the paper, I use empirical examples drawing from the first instances to illustrate on which empirical features

these concepts orient our attention; empirical examples from the second type of instances are instead used to illustrate how the empirical reality of insurgencies overflows current conceptualisations. The use of these empirical examples does not aim to demonstrate that they all rigidly follow these conceptualisations or present all their limitations.

The paper first discusses some limiting features of the current concepts of insurgency, either by discussing the differences between the main conceptualisations or by highlighting some aspects of empirical research left unconceptualised so far. It then proposes a pragmatist concept of insurgencies, that addresses these conceptual limits using a pragmatist toolbox. In conclusion, this paper discusses how this reconceptualisation transforms the research agenda on insurgencies and the positionality of activist researchers inquiring about them.

Limiting Features of Current Conceptualisations of Insurgency in Planning Research

Intentionality, Purpose, and Evolution in Insurgent Practices

Holston (1998), Sandercock (1998b) and Friedman (2002, 2008) defined insurgencies as practices opposing state-led modernist planning processes developed by specific actors (Huq, 2020, p. 386), namely social movements, indigenous groups, local populations and marginal groups. This actor approach considered insurgency as an “oppositional practice developed by the local population [...] who may feel either deprived by the present allocation of resources or dispossessed of resources controlled by them in the past” (Meir, 2005, p. 206).

The recent practice turn focused on insurgencies as a specific type of action, and in particular as a “practice” (García-Lamarca, 2017; Mirafteb, 2009, 2017) or a “set of practices” (Huq, 2020) opposing neoliberalism. The focus on the concept of practice – understood as “open, temporally unfolding, connected actions” (Schatzki, 2002, 2012; in: García-Lamarca, 2017, p. 44), or as “activities conceptualised as collective skills, tacit knowledge, know-how, dispositions and pre-suppositions” (Huq, 2020, p. 283) – shapes the understanding of insurgencies. While the actor approach explored the multiple forms of action of social movements, the practice turn narrowed the inquiry to a specific form of action.

This approach has the benefit of framing the discussion on the characteristics of action, avoiding the assumption that any action by oppressed groups is a relevant practice (Mirafteb, 2017). At the same time, the use of the concept of practice partially limits our understanding of insurgencies. First, the concept of practice points to the understanding of insurgencies as regular and repetitive social activities (Frega, 2016). Assuming that they are stable and static sets of activities, the concept leads us to explore their content and characters, leaving in the background the processes of emergence and evolution, their instabilities and the eventual failure to reach stability. For instance, Friendly (2022), exploring an unprecedented federation of collectives in Rio de Janeiro, focuses on the activities they developed to respond autonomously to the Covid-19 pandemic rather than exploring the reasons, processes and means by which they succeeded in developing a joint action. Similarly, Garcia-Lamarca (2017), presenting two insurgent practices in Barcelona, only briefly describes their emergence before focusing on their characters and reproduction over time. These accounts do not tell us how these inventions reached this level of repetition and stability, which previous experiences were relevant references, or how they have evolved. Without inquiring in detail about the emergence process, researchers cannot understand how social groups can become actors and how they develop new ways of

doing; taking for granted that these processes achieve stability, scholars cannot reflect on their evolutions and the reasons for eventual stability.

Second, the practice turn focuses on purposeful and politically conscious actions: actions are recognised as insurgencies if they are guided by principles of “transgression; destabilising hegemonic order; and imagination of an alternative and just future” (Miraftab, 2017, p. 283). Assuming that goal setting and sense-making precede and are separated from action (Joas, 1996, p. 156), this conceptual focus narrows inquiry to actions with already explicit intentions and where actors have a defined understanding of their situation. Some empirical accounts have already highlighted how consciousness and intentionality result from previous actions in insurgencies. Actions with different levels of intentionality are instead important to understand insurgencies: everyday and emotional practices can lead to oppositional and confrontational insurgencies (Sletto, 2021); different levels of political intentionality orbit around insurgencies (Vasudevan & Novoa, 2022, p. 87); and different forms of oppositional planning can over time lead to explicit insurgent contestation and new imagination (Beard, 2002). Considering intention and purpose as prerequisites for action, framing insurgencies as purposeful practices limits the understanding of how meanings and imaginations evolve and emerge in insurgencies, how consciousness emerges in a situation, and how actions with different levels of intentionality are related.

Single, External and Objectifying Relations of Oppression

Insurgent practices, argues Huq (2020), are rooted in the epistemic privilege of oppressed social groups. These groups can mobilise knowledge that is inaccessible to professional planners. This approach shifts the basis for planning from professional analysis to first-hand collective knowledge. This move, however, is often not applied by scholars inquiring about these processes, who understand the situation faced by insurgencies through their external scientific analysis rather than representing how actors themselves understand it.

This distance is particularly visible in how insurgent planning research considers the relations of oppression, injustice, inequality, and exclusion. First, research has often understood the “collective necessities” (Huq, 2020) and the characteristics of the situations that insurgencies try to disrupt as objective realities, putting in the background how actors consider the situation. The “objective” elements of this situation are defined analytically and externally by the scholar: for instance, Garcia-Lamarca (2017, pp. 44–45) outlines the housing crisis in Barcelona – against which the PAH anti-mortgage movement is fighting – through external scientific studies, citing only a single source linked to the situated perspectives of the actors. Although this approach may offer a useful analysis of the mortgage crisis, it limits our understanding of how actors understand their context, orient themselves in their environment and give meaning to their actions. Seeing the context of action as an objective reality whose understanding is unproblematic, we cannot inquire how they connect their lived experiences of being evicted to broader contextual processes.

Scholars have also taken the situated understanding of these situations of injustice by insurgent actors as objective, with no exploration of how they are constructed, reproduced, tested and revised in action.

Secondly, each conceptualisation of insurgency has defined these processes as opposed to a single source of oppression: Sandercock (1998b) and Holston (1998) focused on modernist states and planning processes, Miraftab (2009) on neoliberalism, Garcia-Lamarca (2017) on the

dominant production of space and on “dominant powers.” Empirical research has instead reported insurgencies opposing a diverse set of oppressive relations, like ‘ethnocratic’ or colonial state policies (Jabareen & Switat, 2019; Sweet & Chakars, 2010) or authoritarian states (Beard, 2002). Shrestha and Aranya (2015, p. 440) further highlighted that conceptualising insurgencies as opposing the modernist planning paradigm, which is in decline, raises doubts. These empirical reports highlight how the conceptualisation of insurgencies as resistance against a single and predetermined type of oppressive relations limits the possibility to consider in this concept the multiplicities of situations of injustice lived and opposed by insurgencies.

Oppressed Groups as Static and Fixed Realities

Theorists of the practice turn qualify actions based on their inclusiveness. They might be actions that “enact equality” (García-Lamarca, 2017), they might “respond to neoliberal specifics of dominance through inclusion” (Miraftab, 2009), they are guided by principles of transgression, destabilisation of the “hegemonic order,” and imagination of an “alternative and just future” (Miraftab, 2017, p. 283). Across these conceptualisations, lies the common notion that insurgencies are defined by their ability to imagine and develop “real” inclusion against the “exclusions and erasures of people’s histories” (Huq, 2020, p. 373) embedded in liberal citizenship and modernist planning. Insurgencies are seen as processes of “political subjectivation” (García-Lamarca, 2017, p. 39), and “development of a self-determined political community” (Miraftab, 2017, p. 279).

Focusing on the characteristics of these constituted subjectivities or their differences from state-sanctioned processes of inclusion, these conceptualisations, however, tend to take for granted these groups as objective and fixed realities. This approach influences how, in empirical research, group assemblage around specific categories and group identities – such as being indigenous (Jabareen & Switat, 2019; Sweet & Chakars, 2010), being women (Sletto, 2021), being poor slum dwellers (Butcher & Apsan Frediani, 2014) – is considered objective and is not problematic.

Considering groups to have a “substantive essence” and their members to share a “common nature” (Young, 1990, p. 47) this approach hinders the inquiry into the incessant activity of group forming and dismantling (Latour, 2005, p. 29). For instance exploring the mobilisation of a group of squatters in Nepal against governmental eviction, Shrestha & Aranya (Shrestha & Aranya, 2015) recognised the problematic constitution of a unitary group, as tensions arose between evicted and non-evicted squatters.

Taking these subjectivities as objective and fixed groups limits the understanding of how actors in insurgencies evaluate who to include or exclude, who is the “fellow oppressed,” how groups are assembled and disassembled (Shrestha & Aranya, 2015), how already-existing identities and meanings are activated, and ultimately how they collectively define and experience commonalities.

Understanding Insurgencies Through Thematic Characterisations

The concept of insurgency has often been associated with other concepts: insurgent citizenship (Brakke, 2023; Holston, 1998), insurgent citizenship practice (Butcher & Apsan Frediani, 2014), insurgent historiographies (Sandercock, 1998a), insurgent planning (Freitas, 2019; Meir, 2005; Putri, 2020; Sweet & Chakars, 2010), insurgent planning practice(s) (Huq, 2020; Miraftab, 2009,

2017; Sletto, 2021), insurgent informality (Jabareen & Switat, 2019), insurgent public space (Hou, 2010), insurgent heritage practice (Novoa, 2022), hybrid insurgent citizenship (Comelli, 2022), insurgent participation (Hilbrandt, 2017). This approach allows us to understand the relevance of insurgent processes in different disciplines or debates: insurgencies can be processes of production of the inquired theme, such as insurgent citizenship (Holston, 1998), or they may be a subset of a disciplinary universe, such as insurgent planning practices (Huq, 2020, p. 383).

In this approach, insurgencies are understood and conceptualised through each discipline or theme. Developing separate concepts for each of these topics leads to the development of disciplinary debates focused more on how the discipline is understood than on what insurgencies and their features are. For instance, the terms “insurgent planning” and “insurgent planning practice” have been discussed in planning literature about what makes these activities planning (Alexander, 2011) and, ultimately, what is planning itself (Sweet, 2011). This approach hinders a general understanding of insurgencies per se, transversal to specific topics.

Garcia-Lamarca (2017) has taken a first step towards the conceptualisation of insurgencies beyond thematic labels. While it presented some of the limitations discussed in the previous paragraphs, her definition of “insurgent practices” rested on broader urban studies concepts like institutionalised meanings, space production, and equality, suggesting a direction for further theorisation. This approach can help to redefine a general concept of insurgency.

A Pragmatist Approach to Insurgency

How can a reconceptualisation of insurgency take into account the importance of the processes of emergence and evolution, the transformation of their goals and meanings in action, and the processes of group formation and dismantling, through a situated critical understanding of injustice and a generalising effort across thematic and disciplinary focuses?

To address these points, I propose a pragmatist conceptualisation of insurgency. I first introduce the pragmatist concepts of experience, situated injustice, problematisation, publicisation and public problems. Through them, I conceptualise insurgencies as two interconnected experiences: an experience of transformation of lived problematic situations, and an experience of transformation of conventional approaches to treat the public problem.

Moving Beyond Intentional Action and Practices: The Concept of Experience

The concept of experience is a cornerstone for reflecting on a new conceptualisation of insurgencies. Dewey's (1925, 1938) concept of experience consists of an ongoing process of dynamic organisation of a system formed by interactions between an organism and its natural or social environment (Cefaï, 2013, p. 8; Quéré, 2002, p. 168).

In Deweyan terms, experience comprises different moments. Individual activities, relating an individual organism to its environment, generate effects felt by the individual. The passive perception of these consequences leads to an active phase: the individual reorganises her conduct and puts it into practice (Zask, 2002, p. 137). Experience can be seen as a conduct that originates in the subordination of action to the awareness of the perceived effects of previous activities (Zask, 2002, p. 137).

In contrast with the concept of action, the concept of experience integrates passivity and activity in the process of development and growth, considering what has happened before,

how these effects have been perceived, what has been done, what is incorporated into the reaction and what changes have been brought in the situation (Quéré, 2002, pp. 170–172).

As the materiality of the organism forbids humans from stopping having interactions with an environment, experience is continuous: we are always in an experience, borrowing something from previous experiences and influencing future ones.

The concept of experience takes into consideration both reflexive and irreflexive elements. A common, ordinary experience consists of unreflexive habits: under similar environmental circumstances, organisms behave irreflexively in similar ways. Consider, for instance, how we irreflexively ride a bike. Experience becomes conscious through reflexivity, when we perceive a new situation, and our habits stop working (Cefai, 2019, pp. 34–35): for instance when we have a puncture and it becomes difficult to continue riding the bike.

Engaging in these situations, organisms activate the knowledge available to them – consciously or unconsciously. This knowledge constitutes a stock of experience that includes past and present personal experiences, but also of all others' experiences that have been socially transmitted (for instance through education) (Schütz, 1951, 1953).

In the interaction – and later transaction (Dewey & Bentley, 1949) – between organism and environment, both constituents of the relation are affected, transformed, and defined (Zask, 2002, p. 141). Individuals and collectives are understood as the contingent result of the transactions they have with their environments, through which multiple natural, social and institutional elements can promote or inhibit their individual and collective freedom of invention (Cefai et al., 2015, p. 4; Crosta, 2010).

The exploration of insurgencies through the transactions between the environment and organisms (Cefai & Terzi, 2012) directs scholar attention towards their emergence and evolution, away from conceptualisation as stable configurations. It opens inquiry into how consciousness can arise, how stocks of experience are mobilised, how their actions are rooted in perceptions, how goals are generated through experience (Joas, 1993, p. 248), and how actions and experiences are transformed and reconfigured.

Rooting Insurgencies in Everyday Problematic Situations

While current conceptualisations of insurgency often define them in the framework of theoretical-historical interpretations or diagnoses of relations of oppression, a pragmatist approach grounds its understanding of injustice in the practical and everyday problematic situations of injustice (Pappas, 2016). A problematic situation arises when “the usual reactions of an organism to the solicitations of its surroundings no longer provide the satisfaction of its needs and desires” (Cefai, 2016, p. 27; Dewey, 1938). Something in the continuity of experience stops being in harmony and appears problematic, confusing, perplexing, disturbed, unsettled, and indecisive (Dewey & Bentley, 1949). This experiential break occurs either because a new element in the environment has touched the organism – an eviction notice (García-Lamarca, 2017; Shrestha & Aranya, 2015), the planned destruction of a city park (Ay & Miraftab, 2016) – or because other experiences have led to a transformation of the understanding of the configuration of the situation – the experience of autonomy in a composting project leads women to problematise their role in their community (Sletto, 2021).

Facing a problematic situation with effects perceived and evaluated as unfavourable, organisms worry, question, investigate, experiment, discuss and define the problem, its causes and who is responsible for it (Cefai, 2016; Dewey, 1927). Organisms try to determine through an

inquiry what the problem is (Dewey, 1938), through previous stocks of experience and new transactions. This process of problematisation is not only a process of understanding and gathering knowledge but also of transformation of organisms and their environments. Defining what “isn’t right” people attribute responsibilities, define roles and elaborate plans for action (Cefai, 2016).

By exploring insurgencies through the emergence of problematic situations, it is possible to understand the situated perspectives of the involved actors, their experiences and their mobilisation processes. As there is no predetermined beginning in the continuity of experience, research can begin by exploring how the situation stopped working. It can be a minute accident that over time is connected to broader reflections about the local social and urban situation, or a disaster destroying all frameworks for action.

Rooting inquiry in lived problematic situations better accounts for the multiple situations activating insurgencies, breaking habits of experience, progressing towards problematisation and developing conscience and purpose for action. From there, it is possible to explore how situations are problematised as unjust, oppressive, and unequal. Conversely, this approach opens to the inquiry of how lived experiences that people might consider troubling – living in polluted environments, being segregated by urban plans, or being evicted – might not be an issue for the actors.

In this approach, categories such as neoliberalism, colonialism, and inequality are not objective starting points assumed to be fully known and understood by people, but practical elements eventually discovered, defined, mobilised and manipulated by actors: they come into existence in their experience of the problematic situation. By focusing on the situated perspectives of organisms, this conceptualisation avoids reducing their lived experiences to predetermined categories. Instead, recognising that actors may have different understandings of the same facts (Schütz, 1953) and different levels and types of knowledge (Schütz, 1946), research can assess how they inquire and determine the features of their situation through their stock of experience.

Insurgencies, Problematisation and Publicisation

The definition of a problem from a problematic situation – the process of problematisation – is coupled with the constitution of the involved communities – a process of publicisation (Cefai & Terzi, 2012). The public is constituted of “all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for” (Dewey, 1927, pp. 15–16). It is formed as a “community of inquiry, experimentation and discussion, brought together and oriented towards solving a problem that turns out to be common to its members” (Cefai, 2019, p. 80). Private problems, experienced by individuals separated from one another, are transformed into “public problems, which concern a community” (Vitale, 2007, pp. 11–12). The subjects of the public are mutually constituted in the process of confrontation and development of practices, discourses, and arguments (Cefai, 1996, p. 50).

Problematisation and publicisation do not occur in a void. They unfold by rearranging already existing pieces of the world (Cefai, 2019, p. 60), such as older problems, existing legislation, institutional contexts, or social conventions. Existing assumptions, categories, routines and procedures carry a path-dependent authority on new problematic situations, making actors blind to alternative solutions (Cefai & Terzi, 2012, p. 26; Gusfield, 1981).

The public is a conflictual, divided and plural political community (Cefaï, 2016, p. 36). As problems are publicised, arguments are opposed by counterarguments. Experiences are judged as valid or invalid. Interpretations are contested. Legitimation is not given, but can be contested by actors through their transactions.

Insurgencies are only a part of the public. They become “political subjects” (García-Lamarca, 2017, p. 39) in these publics engaging in the transformation of the public problem through their lived experiences. Mobilising existing categories or inventing new ones, they draw causal relations, establish roles, draw the borders of their groups, and constitute an environment upon which they can act.

This process can be seen in two empirical accounts of insurgencies, where assembly based processes reorganise the experiences of their members. Through transmission or inquiry, PAH collective assemblies socialise among their members an understanding of the “structural causes” of the current situation (García-Lamarca, 2017, pp. 46–47), and reduce their feelings of fear and guilt; the periodic meetings of a neighbourhood organisation in Belo Horizonte similarly reinforce “the consciousness of citizenship” and “highlight the structural factors leading to their perceptions of less-deserving citizens”(Freitas, 2019, p. 300).

The focus on everyday experiences, problematisation and publicisation orients our attention on how these groups emerge, how their bonds are maintained over time, how they interact, how they transform private issues into public problems, how they relate lived experiences to broader public problems, and how they orient their experience of these problems. This approach inquires how people can give meaning to their operations, transform their contexts, themselves, and their habits (Cefaï, 2019) and develop common grounds (Bidet et al., 2015). It can guide us in understanding how powerlessness, despair, subjugation (Stavo-Debaugue, 2012), or the configuration of existing assumptions and categories may limit the capacity of people to become actors and transform their problematic situations into public problems.

Insurgencies as Experiences Transforming Lived Situations and Public Problems

Based on these elements, I propose to conceptualise insurgencies as two interrelated experiences materialising other ways of doing and being (García-Lamarca, 2017, p. 40).

The first is an experience of transformation of lived problematic situations. In insurgencies, individuals and groups become subjects in tackling the issues they perceive and problematise. They do not delegate the identification and implementation of solutions to others. Rather, they become actors in the experience of transformation of the situation. The issues they tackle relate to practical and urgent needs, like providing food, medicines or essential goods (Friendly, 2022). They can also engage with issues at the imaginary and cultural level by developing symbolic and meaningful actions, such as translating books into native languages (Sweet & Chakars, 2010).

The second is an experience of transformation of conventional approaches to treat the public problem, developing and practising other ways of acting and thinking. The responses to lived problematic situations developed by insurgencies do not follow “authoritative” (Gusfield, 1981) approaches to the treatment of these public problems. Rather, these conventional approaches, such as existing public policies, are problematised and publicised (Cefaï & Terzi, 2012, p. 26). Insurgencies practise and publicise alternative ways to treat the problem, contributing to the reconfiguration of roles, responsibilities, and assumptions. For instance, in their blockage of evictions and occupation of empty bank-owned housing in Barcelona (García-Lamarca, 2017), PAH

members manipulated existing assumptions, categories, routines and procedures related to the treatment of the problem and enacted an alternative configuration of housing policy.

The inclusion of both experiences in the conceptualisation of insurgencies is crucial to distinguish them from a broader field of social processes. On the one hand, it does not consider as insurgencies processes that provide direct answers to problematic situations without transforming the existing configurations of treatment of the public problem. With this, I mean not only processes reproducing existing assumptions, routines and procedures with no transformative effects but also the ones that, albeit they transform the configuration of the situation, don't engage (critically or not) with the other members of the public active on it. For instance, this concept excludes a covert planning process of creation and the maintenance of a library in an authoritarian context that led to a transformation of local social relations and roles but avoided a public presentation and representation of this reconfiguration (Beard, 2002).

On the other hand, it also excludes experiences that transform the public problem without providing operational solutions at the level of lived situations. These processes are closer to social movements – developing activities of protest, information and demand – such as the squatter movement in Shrestha and Aranya (2015). They problematise a situation, publicise it, and can pressure others to transform the way the problem is treated.

These two experiences are interrelated but only weakly linked, as they might be related to different but connected problematic situations. For instance, Sletto (2021) showed how, through a process of transformation of household waste into a source of income, a group of women experienced a reconfiguration of gender roles that they later publicised and used to problematise new planning processes. Through these processes, they experienced connections between issues and problems. Empirical research will help us to reflect on the connections between these two experiences.

A Pragmatist Lens for Insurgencies

This pragmatist reconceptualisation lets us tackle aspects of insurgencies that are marginal in current conceptualisations.

Understanding insurgencies through the notion of experience allows research to trace their evolution and not just their stable forms of action. In contrast to a focus on purposeful practices or guiding principles, this concept better accounts for the emergence of consciousness and intentionality through the passive and active phases of experience. Furthermore, the connection with the notion of public problems allows us to see their double value: acting on lived problematic situations, and on public problems.

Rooting insurgencies in the lived problematic situations of individuals and groups, scholars can see how they develop transactions with their environments to become actors, define the problematic situation and share their reconfigurations of public problems with a broader public. Understanding the issues they face through their words and actions, research remains loyal to the idea of rooting the concept of insurgency in the epistemic privilege of social groups in situations of injustice (Huq, 2020). Through this approach, scholarship on insurgencies can better account for the multiple configurations and formats of injustices lived by people without reducing our inquiry to a single or predetermined type of oppressive relations. This conceptualisation, however, does not objectify the perspective of insurgencies, rather it explores how it is tested and elaborated through experience and how it is contested by others.

Rooting insurgencies in lived experiences and processes of problematisation and publicisation, research is led to explore how individuals and groups interact to establish common actions and inquire how their responses to lived problematic situations transform the conventional configurations of treatment of the public problem.

Considering insurgencies for their transformative value through experience, the concept detaches them from an ideal theory of justice and does not assume them to be more just or equitable than existing approaches to the public problem they face. From this perspective, insurgencies are not understood to enact an idea of justice defined a priori (either by them or by the scholar): they construct and experience their understanding of what is just or equitable starting from their lived experience. Furthermore, the concept acknowledges that transformative does not imply more inclusive or equitable: these reconfigurations establish categories and borders, limiting participation and excluding others on the basis of criteria of justice and commonality. The inclusiveness and equity of insurgencies are, therefore, to be inquired about and problematized by research.

Following Garcia-Lamarca's (2017) approach, this conceptualisation focuses on a transversal understanding of insurgencies detaching them from the specific types of problems and experiences. It leaves the door open to explore the relations of insurgencies with themes such as planning, heritage and citizenship, but strives for a general understanding of these processes.

Finally, this approach follows previous concepts of insurgency as it considers the ability of social groups to become actors through their first-hand collective knowledge (Huq, 2020, p. 381). It assumes that external professional knowledge (like that mobilised by professional planners) has a limited value in tackling public problems, as it is detached from the lived experience and the situated configurations of the situation. What matters is how individuals mobilise and activate (ordinary and expert) knowledge in a transactive process of transformation of the situation. Professional planners and other experts can contribute with their skills and stock of experience in the treatment of the public problem, but they are just one element in a collective and social experience. Their hypothetical-deductive rationality is substituted by practical and deliberative rationality (Cefaï, 2010, p. 469).

New Directions for Research and New Positionality for Scholars

This paper reflected on the concept of insurgency. Through a literature review and mobilising empirical examples, I argued that some features of current conceptualisations of insurgencies limit our capacity to understand key aspects of these processes. These features are the focus on intentional, purposeful and non-evolutive practices, the adoption of single, external and objectifying sources of oppression, the consideration of oppressed groups as static and fixed realities, and the understanding of insurgencies through thematic characterisations.

To address these limits, the paper proposed a pragmatist conceptualisation of insurgency. It introduced pragmatist concepts of experience, situated injustice, problematisation, publicisation and public problems. It proposed to conceptualise insurgency as two interconnected experiences materialising other ways of doing and being (García-Lamarca, 2017): an experience of transformation of lived problematic situations, and an experience of transformation of conventional approaches to treat the public problem.

The actor approach to insurgencies was rooted in the exploration of the actions of a certain field of actors, and the practice turn focused on a set of actions. This experiential approach instead roots its inquiry in lived problematic situations, relating them to public problems,

planning processes, and public policies. This conceptualisation sides with the practice turn by separating the concept from specific actors and focusing instead on types of experiences, that anyone could have. It sides with the actor approach stating that these experiences could be regressive or progressive, and that this aspect requires empirical attention.

This reconceptualisation also transforms aspects of the research agenda on insurgencies and the positionality of scholar(s).

First, it affects the analytical focus of the research agenda. Greater attention is dedicated to the passive phase of insurgencies, describing the lived experiences of perception of an issue and the effects of one's actions. The concept focuses research attention on the processual emergence and evolution of insurgencies, on the problematic status and borders of active groups, and on the linkage between lived experiences, problematic situations, and public problems. It requires us to situate the understanding of situations of injustice in the lives of people, beyond external categories (Cefai, 2010, p. 464).

Second, this new conceptualisation modifies the field of empirical initiatives conventionally considered in this line of scholarship, including processes with different levels of intentionality. As this concept of insurgency is rooted less on intentionality and more on the transformation of public problems, the empirical focus is broadened beyond processes with explicit progressive intentionalities. The actions MirafTab (2017) excluded because they were not progressive (as in Meth, 2010) might be included in this expansion. Inquiring about these "regressive" processes can nourish the understanding of insurgencies: as insurgencies are not assumed to be more just or equitable than other approaches to the same problems, this expansion can help understand how the grammars of experience of insurgencies can be transformative in different ways.

Exploring a broader field of experiences and adapting a sensitising approach to the concept means to also inquire mobilisations that do not are not fully coherent with the concept of insurgencies, like processes that are unable to transform problematic situations into public problems or to transform lived experiences. These cases can also be informative about how insurgencies operate and evolve.

Third, this reconceptualisation only slightly alters our research questions on insurgencies, continuing to explore how insurgencies can be transformative. Following the previous analytical and empirical shifts, this question takes a different meaning. Research can focus on the unfolding of experience, asking how categories of problems, actors, and environments are reorganised in these processes. Among other things, scholars are drawn to inquire how lived experiences are problematised, publicised, and transformed; how individuals and groups move from passive receptors of a situation into active participants of the process; and how these actors mobilise knowledge, elaborate the situation and organise to generate solutions beyond the conventional way the problem is treated.

Fourth, this approach also affects theory-building processes in research. In this pragmatist posture (Cefai, 2010, p. 18) the scholar refuses to subordinate inquiry to preconceived categories or theories through an hypothetico-deductive logic (Cefai, 2010, p. 23): instead she starts from direct observations in the field (Swedberg, 2014) to describe the situated complexity of social situations and the plurality of ways of doing, systems of thought, and interpretations (Crosta & Bianchetti, 2021). The researcher may adopt a value-critical approach to social research, acknowledging her moral position while at the same time "doubting that position sufficiently to want to expose it to evidence and criticism" (Rein, 1976, p. 257).

At the same time a purely inductive logic like in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Zamani & Babaei, 2021) risks limiting the connection of this ground-up theories with existing

theories (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). Pragmatist scholars propose an abductive logic: starting from field observations and descriptions about insurgencies, scholars focus on evidence that do not fully fit in existing theories about these processes to generate new hypotheses (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). Making sense of a theoretical surprise, the scholar creatively develops an inferential back-and-forth between observations, generalisations, and theories (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Meth (2010) followed a similar logic, starting from a case contradicting current interpretations and difficult to make sense to open a theoretical discussion.

Through this focus on surprising evidence about insurgencies, research can be able to develop theories *about planning* representing the complexity of lived experiences and linking them to existing theories. The understanding, representation and theorisation of these experiences can then inform the development of future planning actions.

This pragmatist conceptualisation of insurgencies also has consequences for the scholars' positionality. Scholars active in the insurgent and radical planning debates have mostly adopted the role Siemiatycki (2012, pp. 154–155) defined as activist researchers: they support socially transformative actions, against oppressive forms of planning and promote the empowerment of the disempowered. Researchers are motivated by the idea that their academic work can help tackle social problems through involvement in social movements and citizen initiatives (Piven, 2010). Activist scholarship is based on the activation and generation of unique, situated knowledge that is accessible only through direct involvement. However, the current concepts of insurgency lead scholars to define problematic situations through external and objectified categories. In their engagement with the situation, these concepts guide them to abstract representations of the situation detached from the lived experiences of actors, rather than helping them nourish the process of collective experience.

The pragmatist concept may instead guide scholars towards an experimental approach to activism: scholars can actively engage – and lead – the inquiries and problematisations developed in the processes they interact with, supporting the experience of transformation of the public problem. Following the example of how pragmatists helped to understand and tackle situations of injustice at the turn of the twentieth century in US cities (Cefai, 2019, 2020), scholars exploring these processes can contribute to the experiences of insurgencies. They can support these processes through an experimental approach, reorganising empirical facts to develop new hypotheses to tackle problematic situations (Cefai, 2020, p. 279).

Concluding, this paper proposes a pragmatist conceptualisation of insurgencies. This conceptualisation of insurgencies tackles some of the limits of the current concepts. Like all concepts, it highlights and focuses on what is considered essential (Swedberg, 2014) guiding us in empirical explorations and organising scholar attention. The adoption of this concept in future empirical research will help test its potential and highlight its limitations.

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