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Abstract

Monaco, S. 2008. Neighbourhood Politics in Transition. Residents' Associations and Local Government in Post-Apartheid Cape Town. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. *Skrifter utgivna av Statsvetenskapliga föreningen i Uppsala* 168. 223 pp. Uppsala. ISBN 978-91-554-7084-5.

This study focuses on the changing practices of South African residents' associations and their relationship with political parties and local government from 1990 to 2006, with the aim to examine how associations in Cape Town respond when they are confronted with a new democratic institutional and political context.

Two empirical questions guide the analysis: How do residents' associations perceive that the changing political context has affected them in their attempts to influence agenda-setting and decision-making? And how can we understand the process in which they decide to act, or not act, in response to important changes in their political environment?

Drawing on social movement theory, most importantly the notions of political opportunity structures and framing processes, an analysis is made of the most significant changes in Cape Town's post-apartheid institutional and political context. The empirical findings – based on questionnaires, interviews and an in-depth study of the township of Imizamo Yethu in Hout Bay – show that associations in socio-economically distinct areas have different perceptions of their prospects of affecting agenda-setting and decision-making. Because of the close links with political parties, many associations interpret the political and institutional changes as either threats or opportunities depending on which party controls the City Council. In predominantly white affluent areas associations generally seem to underestimate their chances of being influential, whereas those in black poor areas tend to overestimate their ability to influence decision-making when the ANC is in a government position.

The study contributes to the development of social movement theory by its systematic application of the framework of political opportunity structures in a local urban context outside the US and Western Europe. The pattern suggested by theory, that movements choose their action repertoire according to the rule “as moderate as possible, as radical as necessary”, is largely confirmed by the findings.

Keywords: post-apartheid civil society–state relations, the dilemma of pluralist democracy, neighbourhood politics, social movements, residents' associations, political opportunity structures, framing processes, South Africa, Cape Town, Hout Bay, Imizamo Yethu

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