Confereenze prof. Paolo Parigi
(Stanford University)

Proposte nell’ambito del
Workshop on Grassroots Innovations for Sustainability
Osservatorio CORES

"A Community of Strangers"
Martedì 26 marzo, ore 11-13, aula 3, P.zza Rosate

“From Grass-Roots to Digital Ties: A Case Study of a Political Consumerist Movement”
Mercoledì 27 marzo, 14-16, aula 3, P.zza Rosate

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Abstracts:

"A Community of Strangers"
P. Parigi, B. State, D. Daklallah, R. Corten and K. Cook
In this paper we explore two contrasting perspective on individual’s participation in associations. On the one hand, some have considered participation the byproduct of pre-existing friendship ties—the more friends one has in the association, the more likely he or she is to participate. On the other hand, some have considered participation driven by the association’s capacity to form new identities—the more new friends one meets in the association, the more likely he or she is to participate. We used detailed temporal data on an online association to adjudicate between the two mechanisms and their interplay. Data for our analysis came from a sample of members of CouchSurfing, an international hospitality organization established in 2003. Members of CouchSurfing engage in hospitality exchanges with other members of the organization, with host and guest often previously-unknown to each other, and form friendship ties as a result of these interactions. Our results show a significant impact of new friendships ties on participation but a negligible impact of pre-existing friends. We relate this finding to sociological literature on participation and we explore its implications in the discussion.

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“From Grass-Roots to Digital Ties: A Case Study of a Political Consumerist Movement”
P. Parigi and Rachel Gong
New grassroots organizations that target ethical consumer choices and behaviour represent a departure from traditional social movement organizations. In this paper we study the activists of one of these organizations and show that social network ties formed mainly online greatly reinforce commitment toward the goals of the movement. We suggest that online ties, i.e., digital ties, are important for political consumerism movements because they create audiences for private actions. It is because of the presence of these audiences that the individual participants can re-interpret their actions into public ones. We used an online survey to collect data on the users of the Transition U.S. social website on Ning.com. Over half of respondents have experiences with political activism. However, their responses indicate that they are dissatisfied with traditional means of political participation (e.g. rallies) and prefer non-contentious collective actions (e.g. local gardening). Respondents perceive community organizing to be the most effective way to bring about social change, deprioritizing connections to local government. Furthermore, respondents that formed digital ties with other activists were significantly more likely than respondents that had no ties with other activists to adopt consumer changes consistent with the goals of the movement. We interpreted this finding as an indicator that digital ties share some of the characteristics of strong ties and we explored this similarity in paper.