



*WP6 – Integrated Report.*

**MICROANALYSIS OF PRACTICES OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY.**

**Edited by**

**Donatella della Porta and Dieter Rucht  
European University Institute**

**Florence, January 2008**

WP6 Report for “Democracy in Europe and the Mobilization of Society”, a project funded by the European Commission, Contract n. CIT2-CT2004-506026, and (for the Swiss case) by the Swiss Federal Office for Education and Science, Contract no. 03.0482.

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# Microanalysis of practices of deliberative democracy: An introduction

By Donatella della Porta

(European University Institute)

Previous work packages of the Demos project provide information about attitudes on democracy and existing experiments with deliberative and participative democracy both in social movements and in public decision-making. In order to develop a better understanding of the way in which deliberative experiments function and what their virtues and limitations are, in work package 6 we studied the activities of movement organizations, with particular attention to experiences in internal decision making and interactions with institutions at the local and supranational levels. In the project proposal we stated that “We are interested in studying the characters and the evolution of internal decision making, the rules of participating, the relationship between the deliberation process inside the specialized group and the more general process of deliberation at the local social forum level. At the supranational level, participant observation shall be carried out during the preparation and development of supranational events”. Regarding internal democracy in particular, the research focused on the ways in which communication develops within relatively small groups, how decisions are made, how (if at all) internal democracy is thematized and discussed, and which of the groups characteristics facilitate or restrict participation and deliberation. Additionally, with respect to the external dimension of democracy, we have observed the internal debate on established political institutions, the debate on whether or not to collaborate with these institutions, and the groups’ framing of local, national and global institutions of governance.

The main tool for this analysis is *participant observation*. At both the local and supranational levels, participant observation is complemented by *interviews* with group members. At the end of the observation period, the results of our analysis have been presented to and discussed with the group. Similar to *focus groups*, this last step aimed at clarifying obscure or unexpected aspects of the previous analysis and discussing with activists and institutional political actors the main problems in deliberative processes as described in our research.

In this introduction, I shall first describe the characteristics of participant observation as a method for empirical analysis (part 1), briefly discuss its implementation in research on social movements and participatory democracy (part 2), and then present some general choices in our own research (part 3). I shall conclude by indicating some main themes that emerge from the chapters included in this report (part 4).

## 1. Participant observation as a method

*“By participant observation I mean a technique that wouldn’t be the only technique a study would employ, it wouldn’t be useful for any study, but it’s a technique that you can feature in some studies. It’s one of getting data, it seems to me, by subjecting your body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation, or their work situation, or their ethnic situation or whatever. So that you’re close to them while they are responding to what life does to them.”*  
(Goffman 1989, 125)

In this way, Erwin Goffman presents what he considers to be the main characteristics and main focus of participant observation. First of all, researchers do not only observe but participate: participant observation is a way of getting data by “subjecting your body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals”.

Second, it is a technique that is used especially when researchers are interested in looking at how individuals respond “to what life does to them”, that is to the “set of contingencies” that play upon them.

In general, participant observation is linked to the ethnographic methodologies: it implies immersion in small groups and/or specific settings; detailed observations on what happens are reported in field notes; concepts and hypotheses arise from the interaction of ethnographic work and theoretical questions. The definitions of participant observation as a method usually stress two elements: a) in-depth field observations, i.e., the researcher observes “in natural loci” and to a certain degree takes part in the action being studied while the action develops; b) regular (systematic) observations of people. Part of the ethnographic approach, it “is naturalistic, in that it works with society as it is, without trying to influence or control it. The goal is to understand behaviour in its habitual context, as opposed to an abstract or laboratory setting, and to interpret how people give meaning to their experiences” (Bray 2008). Additionally, participant observation is intensive observation, its duration ranging from some months to some years.

Even within these widely shared general assumptions there are, however, also methodological choices that differentiate between various implementations of participant observation as a method. In Paul Lichterman’s words, “There is more than one way of doing participant observation. Instead of one, exclusive model for a ‘good’ research design, participant observation encompasses several, evolving models of inquiry.” (2002, 119) These choices relate in particular to the following continuums:

a) *How much participation versus observation?* In general, participant observation implies both aspects of participation and observation—“the researcher observes and to some degrees participates in the action being studied as the action is happening” (Lichterman 2002, 120). Different scholars have argued about the advantages and disadvantages of specific approaches along the continuum observation—participation. Detached observation has been praised as a choice that allows not only meeting scientific standards of neutrality, but also avoiding disturbing the observational field through the perception that the observed actors have of their observer. This position, however, has been criticized as being either impossible to implement or unethical. In the tradition of action-research, more participation (as involvement in the group life but also sharing of the group values) has been praised as increasing the capacity for emphatic understanding. “Observant participation” has referred to “fieldwork in contexts in which the researcher is personally involved outside the immediate context of her academic work” (Bray 2008). It has been promoted especially for its advantages for the analysis of closed milieus. Yet there is the risk of being led by ideological, political or self-interest concerns rather than by scientific criteria.

b) *How much visible versus invisible?* Participant observation might be overt, with various degrees of disclosure of information to the observed subjects about the purpose of the research and the background and intentions of the researcher. In some cases, a sort of contract can be negotiated. At the opposite pole, the researcher can work undercover, without revealing his/her own purposes. This second option could indeed avoid disturbances of the field, but is debatable in ethical terms. In fact, it has been defended only for extreme cases, such as the observation of illegal activities or total institutions, that would not be possible otherwise, or in cases in which the observer actually plays an official role in the observed institutions (e.g. a policeperson, who is also a social scientist). Undercover observation also often happens when the object of the observation is a public space. Additionally, always debated is how much of the specific purpose of the research should be mentioned to the observed actors, without influencing their behavior.

c) *How much field-driven versus theory-driven?* Differently from statistical methods, ethnographic methods foresee a strong interaction between theory and empirical analysis, as concepts are developed during field works, and hypotheses reformulated and retested. As William Foot Whyte (1984, 27) put it, “participant observation offers the advantage of serendipity: significant discovery that were unanticipated”. In fact, “participant observation lends itself much

less to standardized concepts, instruments and measures than other research methods” (Lichterman 2002, 1199). Different preferences exist, however, about the extent to which the researcher has to enter the field with already a baggage of concepts and hypotheses, or, vice-versa, theory-free. The latter option has been defined as “field-driven”: here “participant observers write up projects intended to elucidate an empirical unit or subject matter—a labor union, a network of anti-nuclear affinity groups, a gay community—given that the boundaries of the subject matter may take work to discern” (ibid., 122). Vice-versa, a “theory-driven” project aims “to address a theory. . . . A field sites or subject matter is meaningful only in the categories of a theory, since the very beginning” (ibid.). Theory-driven research facilitates accumulation of knowledge; field-driven research facilitates the development of new concepts and hypotheses.

d) *How much structured observations versus open-ended observation?* Choices about theory-driven versus field-driven observation tend to be linked with the instruments chosen for observation. In general, the ethnographic method allows for more flexible approaches to issues of conceptualization and operationalization, preferring ‘sensibilizing concepts’ (Blumer 1969: 148) to ‘definitive concepts’, which pre-determine reality: “Instead of prescribing what should be looked at, as would be the case with definitive concepts, sensibilizing concepts merely indicate the direction in which the researcher could look” (Bray 2008). Field driven approaches, especially for research carried out by individual researchers, usually produce field notes in the form of open-ended narratives. Vice-versa, the more theory-driven a project, the more necessary a check list of relevant dimensions to guide the observation.

As it is obvious for a context-sensitive technique, some of these choices have been related to specific types of observations. Some contexts (e.g. illegal activities) cannot be entered unless undercover, and the researcher cannot either adapt his/her values to those of the observed subjects or decide to observe only what s/he likes. While new areas of study invite field-driven and unstructured observation, research on established, already well-studied questions or comparative works require a structuration of observation and better developed hypotheses. Additionally, while ethnographic work was initially intended as in-depth immersion in unknown (and strange) environments (such as indigenous communities or criminal milieus), it had then to adapt to research in contexts that are instead often part of the everyday life of the researcher.

As we are going to see in the next paragraph, the presence of an established (although not surely broad) scholarship in the field of social movement norms, as well as the need for a coordinated comparative work pushed us towards the development of a theory-driven scheme of observation that would facilitate cross-case comparison. At the same time, our knowledge of the object of our research as well as relationships of mutual trust converged with our ethical preferences for disclosed observation.

## **2. Participant observation and social movements**

*“While scientifically motivated, ethnographic research is carried out with a humanist emphasis, with a view to understanding the lives of people, their social world and their culture. In this way, the ethnographer provides an account of the cultural ‘web of meaning’ that shapes the society and the lives of its members... Ethnographic research is an exploration of a society’s cosmogony, of the way in which people make sense of the world they live in and how, acting on the basis of their beliefs, they relate to each other and those outside their group. Through descriptive generalisations and the development of explanatory interpretations about how societies and cultures work, in particular contexts and time spans, the researcher seeks to account for the commonalities and variations among societies and their trajectories over time.” (Bray, 2008)*

As with other ethnographic (or just qualitative) methods, the use of participant observation has been usually linked to some epistemological preferences: First of all, the researcher looks at naturally occurring phenomena, privileging the observation of what happens in “real life” than in experimental settings. Although various types of interviews usually accompany participant observation, the method itself is based upon what happens without the intervention of a researcher. Although we observe behaviour, another characteristic of participant observation as a method is its focus upon the meanings that motivate and direct action. In this sense, subjectivity is a focus of analysis and preferences or motivations are endogenous to the analysis (contrary to a search for “objectivity”). In most cases, participant observation produces qualitative data (not numbers). Scholars who use it are more interested in an inductive generation of hypotheses (the so-called context of discovery) rather than in testing hypotheses. Additionally, no high degree of generalization is searched for; rather, the contextual constraints are emphasized. In fact, participant observation is often praised for allowing for an in-depth analysis of what is really happening, the collection of information on everyday life, its capacity to contribute to conceptualizations and theory building. At the same time, it is criticized as producing non-representative, non-generalizable and not (strictly) replicable results. It is considered as more useful when the focus is on the micro and the meso level—that is, on “how groups and settings shape people’s thoughts, feelings and interactions” (Lichterhan 2002, 122)—than at the macro level; more useful for the analysis of cultural than of structural processes. A lot of interpretative work by the researcher is needed in order to develop more general explanations by “extracting the general from the unique” (Burawoy 1998, 5).

Participant observation has not been a very widespread technique in social movement studies that mainly had a focus on macro characteristics (such as political opportunities and environmental resources). There have been, however, some exceptions, with attention paid to micro-dynamics within small groups. The main theoretical foci of these studies have informed our research on the micro-practices of democracy.

First of all, we have an interest in singling out the ways in which general cultural attitudes are reflected in our small groups’ dynamics. In his ethnographic work on environmental groups, Paul Lichterman (1996) has developed the theme of political commitment. Departing from the widespread assumption that the rising emphasis upon self-expression and personal feelings in the US-American culture weakens the sense of community and, therefore, political commitment, he shows how different styles of commitment might develop and interact with different conceptions of communities. An emphasis on self-expression would therefore not necessarily hamper the development of a sense of community and sustained commitment to a common cause. Additionally, differences in members’ conceptions and practices of participation would not necessarily weaken a group. In our research, we shall pay attention to the effects of different conceptions of commitment on group democracy.

Observations of both frontstage, public interactions and backstage, more private ones, is also relevant in order to understand how collective conversation is influenced by the perceived grammar (Talpin 2007), which is dominant in a public space as well as in more intimate context. Relevant here is non only the degree and conditions for politicization versus avoidance of politics (Eliasoph 1998), but also the role assigned in the specific social movement culture to rational arguments versus emotions or story telling (Polletta 2006; Doerr 2007).

Another relevant concern of research that has used participant observation of social movement refers to the development of a sense of identity “in action”. In his research on workers conflicts, Rick Fantasia challenged the widespread idea of a lack of class-consciousness among U.S. workers. By looking at intense moments of protest (such as strikes and occupations) he developed the concept of a “culture of solidarity” as a more dynamic substitute for “static” class consciousness. Also in our work, the observation of group meetings helps understanding how (existing and changing) cultures of solidarity influence group life.

Even more directly connected with our main focus is social science research that has used participant observation to investigate democratic practices in social movements. In a path-breaking study on the evolution of democratic conceptions of democracy in social movement from the sixties to the end of the millennium, Francesca Polletta (2002) has observed the micro-dynamics of some specific groups, focusing upon their decision-making styles, their broad normative aspirations and (to a certain extent) limited accomplishment. As she did in her study, also in our project we aimed at an in-depth description of decision-making practices, but also at an understanding of the origins of the normative conceptions of democracy prevalent in the groups as well as the conditions that facilitate or restrict their accomplishments. As suggested by the in-depth study carried out by Polletta, also in our cases we shall see the tensions created in the organizational life of the group by the dilemma between internal solidarity and external support, orientation to the process or orientation to the goal, ideological consistency and instrumental rationality, reasons and emotions.

On the basis of previous research, we assumed that a number of group characteristics would affect internal democracy: on the cultural dimension, the ideological tradition (old left/new left, religious/secular, etc.), a single-issue or multi-issue focus, as well as the degree of internal homogeneity might play a role; on the organizational dimension, the degree of centralization, professionalization, structuration, specific rules for discussion, etc. as well as the amount and type of resources (material, human and social capital) available for the groups are to be taken into account; on the action dimension, the rejection or acceptance of violence, the use of new technologies or the emphasis on self-transformation may have an impact. Additionally, meetings could follow different patterns according to some specific characteristics such as the type of decisions to be made, their degree of technicality and divisiveness, the number and types of participants, and the setting of the meeting.

Given that the in-depth research strategy of our research did not allow for investigating the impact of all mentioned dimensions, we decided first of all to keep some dimensions constant. In particular, we focused on small groups, endowed with limited resources, and active mainly at the local level. All of them were relatively young and developed within the global justice movement, adopting some its general values and concerns, in particular in terms of “democracy from below”. The main dimension that varies between the groups is the (cultural and political) homogeneity/heterogeneity of participants, which we assume has an impact on the above mentioned conceptions of commitment and culture of solidarity.

### **3. Our research**

Previous work packages of the Demos project provided information about attitudes towards democracy and existing experiments with participatory and deliberative democracy in social movements and in public decision-making. In order to develop a better understanding of the way in which deliberative experiments function, and of their richness and limitations, with work-package 6 we planned to observe, at the local and supranational levels, the activities of movement organizations, with particular attention to involvement in experiences of participatory and deliberative decision making (we expected one case study per partner). As mentioned, the research focuses on the ordinary and extraordinary meetings and activities of the selected groups in the period under investigation. In order to reduce the impact of the observer’s presence on group behaviour and collect enough observations for comparative analysis, we attended on a regular basis the meetings on the selected groups for periods that ranged from a few months (Switzerland) to two years (France and Germany)

Given that trust is a crucial resource in this kind of research, we decided not to work undercover, i.e. hiding or even denying our role as researchers, but rather to negotiate an agreement with the group in which we clarified our interest, role, and demands from the very beginning. Most of the time, the participant observation consisted in attending situations that, in the narrow sense of the research question—decision making practices—, were of little interest since they exhibited the

routine process of the group life, e.g., exchanging information, chatting, making jokes, performing organizational tasks, etc. Participating in this ordinary group life, however, has been important in order to become familiar with the group, to understand the relationships, roles and personalities within the group, and to familiarize the group to presence of the researcher so that he/she, after some time, might be considered as a quasi-member.

Embedded in these ordinary situations were potential or actual situations of (attempted) deliberation and related participation. These conflictual situations may last from a few minutes to a few hours and sometimes may not be easily recognizable because of a smooth or subtle transition from one kind of communication to another. The recognition and documentation of these situations played a crucial role in our research. They are most central for the analysis because they unveil the standards and actual practices of (attempts of) deliberation. Typical elements and facets of such situations are the following: attempts (failed and successful) to participate in a discussion or a decision; complaints about inequality and (hidden) power in the group; attempts to separate personal conflicts from substantive conflicts; reflections on the standards and ways of interaction and communication (e.g. consensus principle, need to compromise, suggestions to postpone decisions); appeals to group solidarity, protection of minorities, needs to reach a decision; proposals or refusals to further arguing; propositions to vote, to exclude or disregard a minority opinion; summary of arguments or opinions in a more or less biased way, insistence on feelings or opinions instead of arguments; implicit negligence of certain speakers or arguments; meta-communication on the normative standards that undergird groups behaviour.

As explained in the next chapter of this report (which relies upon our preliminary report, D8), the instruments of participant observation are:

- A “general group description/portrait” which is based on the whole period of participant observation. It may gradually emerge during the observation but will be finalized only towards the end of the period of observation. The report is organized according to a list of items that should be covered (see chapter 2.1 and Appendix A).
- “Session reports” on the character, content and course of every meeting. These reports should be written immediately after each meeting following a common scheme (see section 2.2 and Appendix B). The reports draw a more general picture of the group meetings and allow to put the instances of discourse into context. The report information should be entered in a structured form (on paper). Whether or not part of this information was transferred to an electronic data base was left to each team’s discretion.
- “Discourse protocols” that register participation, symmetry/asymmetry, the kind of power used in a controversy and a range of other variables for controversial moments (see section 2.3 and Appendix C).
- At a later stage of research, tape-recordings of “critical discourse moments”. These moments, or at least some of these, will be analyzed in greater detail in a kind of hermeneutic qualitative analysis. The latter will serve to illustrate practices of discourse and combinations of and passages between different forms of discourse.

Unstructured observation at meetings of various social movement organizations started already in the second year of our project. Additionally, our energies in the second year focused on the development of the research instrument—in this case, participant observation—as well as some first tests of it. The German team has prepared a codebook for participant observation and tested it at meetings of social movement organizations in Berlin. The draft of the codebook has been discussed at our fourth consortium meeting in Athens in May 2006 and was tested in the Fall.

During the third year, we have selected two cases per country and started our structured observation. The groups which have been observed (for a period of at least 6 months and until July 2007) are the following: EUI Team: National campaign on water; ATTAC- Florence; UK Team: ai Faversham; World Development Movement, London Social Forum; German Team: Attac Berlin

Financial Markets Group; Berlin Social Forum; French Team: No-Vox Network; Solidaires; Spanish Team: Córdoba Solidaria; Ecologistas en Acción Córdoba; Swiss Team: Attac Geneva; Forum Social Lemanique; Urbino Team: Reclaim our UN Campaign.

Regarding each of these groups we have combined participant observation with in-depth and/or more casual interviews and analysis of group documents. Groups have been contacted through key informants and informed about the purposes of our research. In most of the cases, the groups had no objection to our participation. In the beginning of our observation we took narrative field notes which (among others) helped us developing a more structured codebook (see chapter 2). We then continued the observation according to the instructions for coding critical moments (i.e., controversies). At the end of the observation period, the results are presented and discussed with the group.

#### **4. This research reports: main themes**

As for the analysis of the data, in the consortium meeting of Helsinki (May 2007), we decided to proceed in two steps: first, to produce detailed chapters for the report, and then the chapters for a collective volume. The chapters for this report are country-based and follow the structure of the description of the groups already provided above. The report chapters pay attention to the main issues that will be addressed in the planned book and which include: sources, types and practices of power in social movements; the empirical study of power, leadership and democracy in (global justice) movements; patterns of participation (distribution of kinds of speech acts according to certain criteria e.g. founder, newcomers, issues, gender, etc.); cleavages and patterns of conflict handling (typical and exceptional matters of conflict; empirical distribution of four types of power); minorities and dissenters (the making of minorities/dissenters; the strategies and reactions of minorities/dissenters); conflict resolution and decision-making (modes of avoidance and resolution; the advantages and problems of these modes; What comes after the resolution?); meta-communication (explicit and implicit norms of communication; justification of norms); emotions in deliberation (When is emotional communication more likely? - individual and contextual dimensions; What are the effects of emotional communication?); How participatory and deliberative are Global Justice Movements? (assessments of the degree/type of participation; assessment of degree/type of deliberation).

We shall explain more in-depth our methodological choices in the following chapter (see also appendixes for more information especially on the most innovative aspects of our research). The next ones are organized around the country reports with the addition of a transnational case. Although all reports are based on the same research design, the chapters differ slightly in the reliance on the qualitative versus quantitative parts of the research as well as the reference to individual versus group interviews. We consider these differences as part of the very enterprise of work-package 6, where we moved for a more standardized quantitative analysis to in-depth case studies. Some observations that emerge from a transversal reading of the dozen cases presented in this report are presented in the concluding chapter.

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## Notes on the methodology

By Dieter Rucht, Christoph Haug, Simon Teune, Mundo Yang

*(Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung)*

Work package 6 of the Demos project combines a variety of methods, both qualitative and quantitative. Before describing these methods in more detail, we will first lay out the central question and the factors to be studied to answer this question, then define key concepts that are used in this work package. We claim that some of the methods developed during the research process are quite innovative. This applies in particular to the standardized observation of controversies for which we developed a specific tool that allows for a quantification of complex processes that so far have been mainly been a matter of more or less vague qualitative description. The tool for documenting controversies was tested on the basis of different material (transcribed debates and a section of a movie – Twelve Angry Men – that displays intense controversies). Moreover, all tools were discussed and refined in a methodological workshop that took place in Berlin in December 2006.

### 1. Key questions and key factors

Two main questions are at the center of the empirical research:

(1) *How do (attempts to) deliberation, participation and decision-making look like in different kinds of groups, different countries (and probably at different levels – from the local to the international)?*

Among the aspects to be studied are:

- Which role does deliberation/participation play as an explicit or implicit aim of the group?
- Are there different styles/patterns of deliberation/participation?
- Do groups shift from communication about x and y to meta-communication, that is communication about the ways (patterns, rules, ideals) of communication? If so, under which conditions, in response to which problems, and with regard to which normative criteria?
- Is there an observable impact of meta-communication on subsequent patterns of communication? Changes in the way of communication? Learning processes?
- Do groups differ in their practices of intra- and intergroup communication? Do they separate concepts applied to the group or movement from concepts applied to society as a whole?

(2) *What factors influence and restrict deliberate/participatory practices?*

Among the aspects to be studied are:

- size of the group,
- ideological homogeneity/heterogeneity of the group (control for intra- and intergroup communication!),
- social/emotional homogeneity/heterogeneity of the group,

- dominant group ideology (emphasis on particular values, e.g. correspondence between means and ends as opposed to means-end-rationality),
- issue at stake (moral, technical/organizational, strategic; concerning the identity or essence of the group...),
- conditions under which an agreement is sought (e.g., time constraints, absence of important group members),
- conflict setting (intra-group, inter-group, conflict with groups external to the GJMs)
- level of conflict (local, supra-local),
- positive/negative experiences with the other speakers (particularly in inter-group communication).

These and probably additional factors are used to formulate hypotheses on the expected degree of deliberation and participation in particular groups and group settings, for example:

Hypothesis 1: Debates under time constraints reduce participation and deliberation.

Hypothesis 2: Debates in a group with an ideology emphasizing correspondence between means and ends are more deliberative and more participatory.

Hypothesis 3: Deliberation is more likely in homogeneous than heterogenous groups.

## 2. Key concepts

*Participation*, in our context, is considered as taking part in communication regardless of the content of speech acts. It refers to the extent that persons affected by decision are actively involved in the process of communication and decision-making.

*Discourse* (or controversy) is a way of communicating on a conflictual issue. A discourse starts when somebody objects to the position, opinion or statement of somebody else who, in turn, defends his or her position. Regarding a discourse, we differentiate, aside from the extent of participation, between two dimensions:

By the dimension of *symmetry* of discourse we refer to the way the speakers relate to each other. Symmetric (or reciprocal) relations exist when the speakers respect/recognize each other as being equal and act accordingly. In an asymmetric constellation one side is considered/treated as inferior or less important than the other side.

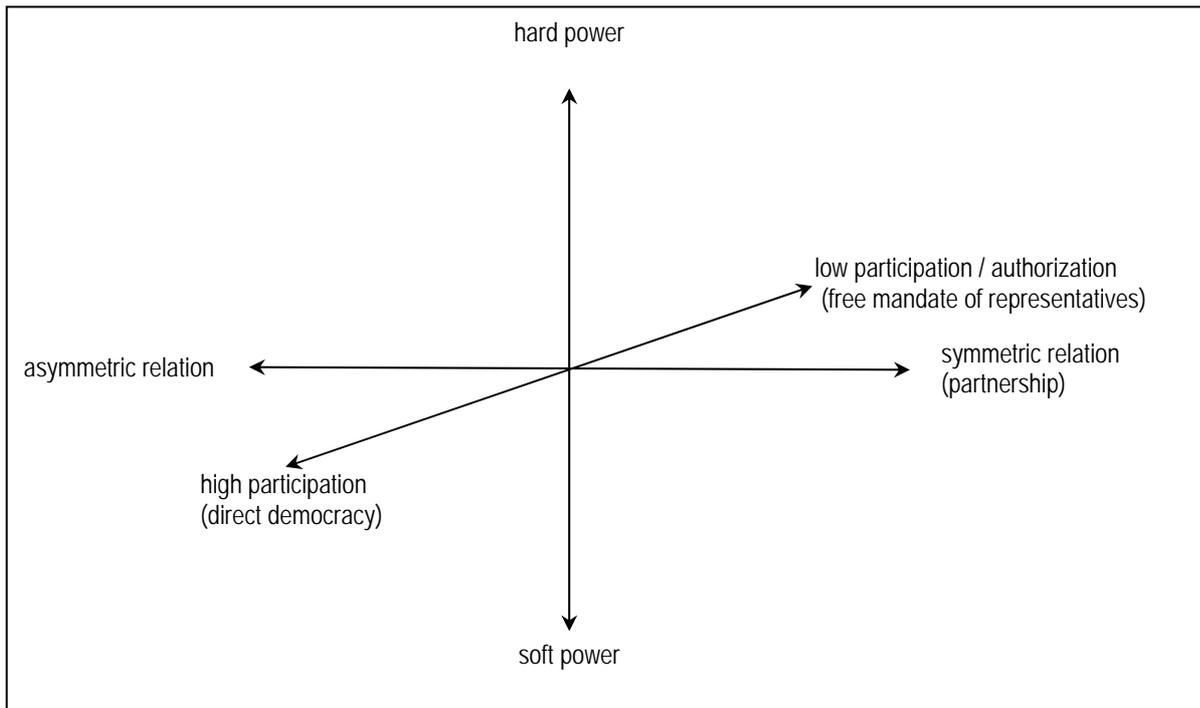
The dimension of *power-type* refers to the source of influencing each other. In this regard, one can distinguish between “soft” power (communicative power based on words, arguments and/or symbols) and “hard” power (non-communicative power ultimately based on material, physical or similar kinds of sanctions, e.g. expressing a veto, threat of exit, rule of the majority).

These dimensions allow us to locate any process of decision-making within a three-dimensional space<sup>1</sup> as shown in figure 1.

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<sup>1</sup> It is possible to add a further dimension, namely the aspect of a cooperative or competitive way of communication with regard to a conflictive matter. This dimension has been included in a paper by Haug and Teune (2008).

**Figure 1 - The 3D-sphere of democracy and decision-making processes**



When crossing the dimension of symmetry/asymmetry of the speakers and the kind of power they use in the discourse (power of arguments/power of other means than arguments), one can draw a four-fold table that displays different ideal-types of discourses. Each of these types represents a distinct way of handling conflicts and its inherent outcome (Table 1).

**Table 1 - Types of discourse**

type of power \ relationship of participants	Asymmetric	symmetric
	“hard” power	pressure (dominance)
„soft“ power	agitatory persuasion (acclamation)	deliberation (consensus)

*Pressure* is a process in which one actor (or conflict party) exerts hard power on another actor (or conflict party) in a fundamentally asymmetric relation. Because hard power ultimately rests on non-verbal means of sanction, the dominant actor can implement his/her will or interest against the other. Thus dominance is both the background situation and the concrete outcome in the discourse. A typical speech act of this type of discourse is a directive. In a radicalized version, pressure is exerted by an order to which the inferior actor obeys to avoid hard sanctions.

*Bargaining* is a process under conditions in which all conflict partners are interested in a common solution while at the same time having potential power whose actual use would negatively affect the others. Bargaining usually results in a compromise which, by definition, is accepted by all

partners although it does not fully correspond to their original interests and positions. A typical act of bargaining is to make offers and counter offers. In its purest version, there is a balance of power between the actors so that the compromise is fixed half-way between their original positions.

*Agitatory persuasion* (in German: “überreden”) is the process in which one actor, without really putting the superiority of his views or arguments into question, influences the other by means of assertion and/or agitation. If successful, the others accept the view of the persuader by acclamation without having thoroughly scrutinized his or her position. A typical act of agitatory persuasion is the use of rhetoric tricks and the manipulative appeal to emotions.

*Deliberation* is a process in which actors who consider each other as being equal and reasonable rely on arguments to identify legitimate claims and make decisions. Ideally, deliberation results in a consensus, i.e. a decision or proposition of which every participant is fully convinced. In its radical version, deliberation neutralizes all other factors that might restrict the power of arguments.

As said, these are ideal types. They may serve politically engaged individuals and groups as guidelines to orient their behaviour and/or reference points to criticize others. In the real world, they tend to exist in less clear and more diluted forms; also, they may be used combined or subsequently in a given setting. Moreover, the outcome attributed to each type is not a necessary one. As long as we refer to conflicts in democratic settings or conflicts in which, for instance, hard power is limited, actors have an exit option which, under certain conditions, will result in a situation of stalemate, non-decision, and the like.

### 3. Design, methods, and operationalization

According to the contract,

“we foresee 1 case study for partners. **Participant observation** will focus at the local level on the working groups dedicated to the local organizations of a national/supranational campaign (such as the GATs)...At both the local and supranational levels, participant observation will be complemented by in-depth interviews (at least 10 for each case study)...Using techniques of focus groups (at least 1 for each case study), we aim to clarify unclear or unexpected sides of the previous analysis and to discuss with activists and institutional political actors the main problems in practices of deliberative processes emerging from the research.” (p. 19)

On the basis of both theoretical and practical reasons, we have implemented the research project as follows:

#### 3.1 Units and duration of observation

Each country team selected two groups (instead than one) in order to have also the possibility to compare groups within each country. It was recommended to focus on a “regular” group instead of a campaign because it was unlikely to find comparable campaigns within roughly the same time period in all six countries and, in addition, close to a place where the researchers live. The field work was expected to last from six to nine months. Ideally, one of the groups to be studied was to be a “heterogenous” or “mesomobilization” group, i.e., a group that has a co-ordination function and is composed of members/delegates from different “homogenous” or “micro-mobilization” groups. The other group had to be an homogenous one, preferably a small group of similarly-minded members that strongly identify with this group as such – contrary to a heterogeneous group that is accepted by the participants as a necessary tool for coordination but is not considered as their political “home”.

### 3.2 Participant observation

The research focused on the ordinary and extraordinary meetings and activities of the two groups in the period under investigation. It was not deemed necessary to attend all meetings but to be there on a fairly regular basis. This is also important to reduce the impact of the observer's presence on group behaviour. This effect will lose considerable weight over time. As a rough guideline, the participant observer should attend meetings every two weeks, provided that the group does not meet more rarely than fortnightly.

Trust is a crucial resource in this kind of research. Therefore, the researchers did not work undercover, i.e. hiding or even denying their role as researchers. Rather, they negotiated an agreement with the group in which they made their interest, role, and demands clear from the very beginning. In turn, the group may also set conditions, for example in wanting to keep some intimacy by excluding the participant researchers in certain situations or wishing to see the researchers' hypotheses/findings. Such conditions were to be accepted.

The participant observation<sup>2</sup> consisted of attending most of the time situations that, in the narrow sense of the research question, are of little interest because they exhibit the routine process of the group life, e.g., exchanging information, chatting, making jokes, performing organizational tasks etc. Participating in these ordinary group life, however, is important to become familiar with the group, understand the relationships, roles and personalities within the group, and make the researcher familiar to the group so that he/she, after some time, might be considered as a quasi-member.<sup>3</sup> Embedded in these ordinary situations are potential or actual situations of (attempted) deliberation and related participation. The recognition and documentation of these situations have been crucial for the research. They may last from a few minutes to a few hours and not easily be recognized because of a smooth or subtle transition from one kind of communication to another. Yet these situations are most central for the analysis because they unveil the standards and actual practices of (attempts of) deliberation.

Typical elements and facets of such situations are the following:

- attempts (failed and successful) to participate
- complaints about inequality and (hidden) power in the group
- attempts to separate personal conflicts from substantive conflicts
- reflections on the standards and ways of interaction and communication (e.g. consensus principle, need to compromise, suggestions to postpone decisions)
- appeals to group solidarity, protection of minorities, needs to reach a decision
- proposals or refusals to further arguing; propositions to vote, to exclude or disregard a minority opinion; summary of arguments or opinions in a more or less biased way,
- insistence on feelings or opinions instead of arguments
- implicit negligence of certain speakers or arguments

The instruments of participant observation have been:

- A "general group description/portrait" which is based on the whole period of participant observation. It usually gradually emerged during the observation but will be finalized only towards the end of the period of observation. The report was organized according to

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<sup>2</sup> For an appraisal of this method in social movement research see Lichtermann (1998).

<sup>3</sup> Participant observation is different from action research. In the latter case, the researcher identifies with the group and actively supports the group. In participant observation, the researcher does not become, or pretend to be, a regular group member but maintains his/her role as an observer.

a check list of items that should be covered (see Appendix A). The group descriptions provides an overall view on the groups under study so that a non-observer has a rough idea about the origin and development of the group, its aims and basic values, its composition and internal structure, its challenges and activities, etc.

- “Session reports” on the character, content and course of every meeting. These reports had to be written immediately after each meeting following a common scheme (see Appendix B). They allow to get a more general picture of the group meetings and to put the instances of discourse into context. The report information were usually entered into a structured form (on paper). Whether or not parts of this information were transferred into an electronic data base was at each team’s discretion.
- “Discourse Protocols” that register participation, symmetry/asymmetry, the kind of power used in the discourse and a range of other variables for moments of discourse only (see Appendix C).
- At a later stage of research: tape-recording of “critical discourse moments”. These moments, or at least some of these, are analysed in greater detail in a kind of hermeneutic qualitative analysis. They serve to illustrate the four practices of discourse and combinations of and passages between these four forms.

### *3.3 Interviews*

Interviews were kept as informal as possible. They occurred during breaks, after the meeting, or based on a special appointment. They ranged from a casual conversation of few minutes to a focused in-depth interview of several hours. The aims of an interview were, for example,

- to get explanation about why an individual, a sub-group or the group acted as it did (anger, silence, leaving the group, etc.)
- to learn more about the background of a unique or recurrent conflict in the group (e.g., hidden agendas)
- to clarify situations that the researcher did not well understand or of which s/he has competing interpretations
- to learn whether an individual who has not clearly expressed him/herself is satisfied with the handling and outcome of a conflict.

### *3.4 Group-researcher discussion*

We opted for focus groups (or group interviews) not as artificial groups “constructed” by the researcher<sup>4</sup>, but instead as one or several sessions of the “natural” group which have been confronted with the observations and interpretations of the researcher(s). This kind of session were to occur at a late stage of the research and were to be documented by another a fellow researcher or a tape-recorder. The researcher confronts the group with findings, assumptions, and questions. The group members’ reactions help to better interpret aspects that are still unclear or ambivalent. Of course, the view of the group is not the last word on what is “true” or “false” but is an empirical fact that again has to be considered and interpreted by the researcher.

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<sup>4</sup> Artificial focus groups with people who are hardly known to the researcher tend to develop their own dynamics due to the arbitrary composition of the participants. In addition, such a focus group will not be suited to comment on findings of the researchers on a particular natural group most members of the focus group do not know.

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# **Deliberation and democracy in two local global justice movement groups in Kent, England**

**By Clare Saunders**

*(University of Kent, Canterbury)*

## **1. The methodological choice**

### *1.1 Selection of groups<sup>5</sup>*

Initially, the aim was to select one homogenous and one heterogenous group to study. With this in mind, I had selected to study the London Social Forum (heterogenous) and Thanet Friends of the Earth (homogeneous). However, before the observation instruments were finalised, London Social Forum began to collapse as a meeting space for GJM activists. The forum had become diminished to a meeting place for just a handful of activists who appeared to have highly conflicting views on group organization, and equally discordant ideologies. When a trade unionist activist began to take leadership by default – as no one else was interested – he was accused of forcing his own agenda at the expense of others. In April 2006, meetings ceased because nobody wanted to take responsibility for the website or the organization of meetings, and some of its key campaigners had become too

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<sup>5</sup> Note on observation of Canterbury MPH. By Christopher Rootes

Here we report only that part of the Kent team's work on WP6 that was conducted according to the protocols devised during 2006. Not included is any account of the observation conducted by Chris Rootes of the Canterbury Make Poverty History local group, which was undertaken in the spring and early summer of 2005. That research was undertaken in line with the original plans for WP6 – i.e., that it should be focused upon local groups during periods of preparation for major GJM events. Since it appeared that MPH was likely to be (and as it has since been proved to be) the major GJM event in Britain during the life of the DEMOS project, the opportunity was taken to study this local group at an unexpectedly early stage in the life of the project. Over a 3 month period, 7 meetings and one public event were observed. Notes were taken, but the elaborate protocols subsequently devised were not available, and the observations could not retrospectively be reconstructed to fit them.

Canterbury MPH was notable for its heterogeneity; people affiliated to the Socialist Workers party (SWP), the World Development Movement (WDM) and an evangelical church were present throughout, and there was variable and discontinuous involvement of various young people, mostly students at one or other of the local universities or colleges. The SWP provided the chair – and most of the organising capacity – throughout.

A key issue was the management of tensions between SWP and WDM. At a much larger meeting prior to the start of the period of observation, there was reported to have been a major confrontation between a senior figure in WDM and people affiliated to local church groups, on the one hand, and SWP on the other. The former played no part in subsequent meetings of the MPH group (although the church groups did independently hold concerts to raise money for MPH nationally), and during the period of observation, there was no such confrontation. At first, the SWP chair rather brusquely addressed issues (mainly about political party participation in public events, WDM objecting to the presence of Respect, though not, apparently, to that of the Greens), whereas other SWP participants sought to avoid confrontation by quietly going ahead and doing what they always intended to do, but without making a major issue of it or rubbing WDM's noses in it. Later meetings were skilfully chaired by the SWP's local political officer, a school teacher, in such a way as to avoid any apparent conflict, the former SWP chair no longer attended meetings, and the WDM personnel at meetings had changed (the original two having moved to another city having graduated) and there was no longer any sign of tension. However, by then the potentially contentious public event had passed off successfully as an example of peaceful co-existence, and attendance at meetings immediate prior to and following the MPH rally in Edinburgh was markedly reduced.

Probably the most useful result of this investigation was the demystification of the SWP and its role in local 'united front' activities. SWP activists are both more intensely, even exclusively, committed to their 'political work', deploy considerable energy and organisational skill and experience, and so make things happen that would not otherwise happen. SWP make no attempt to conceal their concerns to be active 'to bring some politics into' local campaigns, and 'to keep them moving to the left'. As a self-consciously revolutionary party, they see themselves as players in the early stages of developing revolutionary consciousness. They were, privately, sceptical of the value and durability of MPH, but saw it as providing an opportunity for the pursuit of their own ambitions. In the event, transport difficulties meant that most of the SWP people did not travel to Edinburgh for the MPH nationally rally, whereas the WDM and church people (and our observers) all did.

There has been no follow-up, and no apparent local legacy.

thoroughly immersed in a local campaign to Save Kings Cross from what they considered to be inappropriate development.

In the absence of an alternative heterogeneous campaigning group within a sensible commuting distance, the University of Kent Conscious Consumers' group was selected as a group in which to conduct participant observation. Although not heterogeneous to the extent of London Social Forum, the group did participate in campaigns on a range of issues from environmental and ethical, through to campaigns to prevent human rights degradation. This report compares and contrasts the histories, organisational forms and decision-making procedures of Thanet Friends of the Earth and the Conscious Consumers.

## *1.2 Methodology*

The report is based on participant observation in TFoE and Conscious Consumers, and analysis of group literature and interviews with key campaigners. Fourteen Conscious Consumers' meetings were 'formally' observed using a 'session report' and 'discourse protocol' between 10 January and 31 March 2007. During this period, 87 agenda items and eight moments of controversy were analysed. Six of the meetings were audio recorded for more in-depth analysis. Formal and informal interviews were conducted with activists, including four audio-recorded ones. Eight TFoE meetings were observed using the same, formal, methodology between July 2006 and February 2007. Fifty-seven agenda items were analysed, including six moments of controversies. Three meetings were audio recorded for in-depth analysis, and four key campaigners were interviewed.

## **2. Group histories and activist biographies and demographics**

Both of the groups are relatively newly established - Conscious Consumers was formed in October 2006 and TFoE in July 2006. They were both established by a small number of keen individuals, who were mostly novice campaigners. Conscious Consumers was inspired by the more politicised nature of student life that its three founder students had observed during the year they spent studying in Spain. Co-president, Dave, claimed that:

I think if we hadn't gone to Spain we wouldn't have done it. So it was a bit of an eye opener and we realised that we had to do something, really. (interview, 28 February 2007)

They decided to focus most of their efforts on the International Campaign to Boycott Coca Cola after watching a Mark Thomas comedy show on the topic that had highlighted Coca Cola's unethical human rights and environmental record. Although they had signed petitions and made lifestyle changes, the founders had never been actively involved in campaigning groups before. David, who took over the presidency of Conscious Consumers in June 2007, when Max and Dave left university, joined through social networking with fellow students studying environmental issues. He found out that the Society was trying to boycott Coca Cola on campus and to promote recycling and thought 'oh, that's brilliant' (interview 15 February 2007) and got involved straight away.

Whereas virtually all Conscious Consumer (CC) participants were new to small group politics, several of TFoE's participants had previously had fairly extensive involvement in activism. Thanet Friends of the Earth's (TFoE) founders had more diverse backgrounds: Marie, who was, for the first eight months, the coordinator, had previously been involved in East Kent Friends of the Earth in the neighbouring district of Deal, and wanted to set up a Thanet group. Peter had, out of his growing concern for environmental issues, actively sought a local group in the Thanet area, and met with Marie and a campaigner from East Kent Friends of the Earth to kick-start the group (interview, 19 September 2007). Peter's brother, Jeff, who became involved a few months later than Peter and who later took joint coordinatorship with his brother, had previous campaign experience in the local Green Party, where he had met Candy, another member of TFoE. Candy, and the treasurer, Sidney,

had also been involved in a previous edition of TFoE that was established in the 1980s, but had faded away by 1995. Neville and Cathy saw the advert for the first public TFoE meeting, and soon offered the services of their hall as a meeting place, which was duly accepted.

The demographics of the two groups contrast significantly, mostly because one is a student group and the other is a community group. The oldest Conscious Consumer participant was 26, in contrast to the oldest TFoE member, who was retired. TFoE struggles to attract young people, and its youngest participant during the period of participation was 33. Unsurprisingly, Conscious Consumer's participants were all students, and most of them would describe themselves as middle class, although one participant was adamant that this label did not apply to him and his 'humble background'. Similarly to *Ecologistas en Accion* in Cordoba, the older activists seem to prefer traditional ecology issues that resonate with TFoE, whereas the youth in Conscious Consumers have greater preference for anti-globalisation and consumption issues (see Calle and Robles report).

TFoE participants also largely fit the white, middle class stereotype of activists. The group is essentially a coming together of individuals concerned about environmental issues. At the start, there was broader participation from others, including representatives from other campaigns: Westwood Cross, local animal rights protesters, Manston Airport group, Kent Mammal Society, Kent RSPB. However, many of these individuals no longer attend the meetings. All are British except for Marie (French) and her husband, Calvin (German). Several participants are teachers, one cohabiting couple work in the educational film industry, and there are also crafts people, a computer 'techie', a 'house husband' and a retired couple. The gender composition of the groups contrast almost as much as the age ranges and professional backgrounds - in Conscious Consumers, the male to female ratio is 60:40, whereas in TFoE it is 40:60.

### **3. Aims of the groups**

The aim of Conscious Consumers is 'to inform and spread awareness on the consequences of our consumption – *socially, environmentally, economically and politically* – looking both at the local and global picture' (CC statement, October 2006). Thus, its remit squares directly with that of the global justice movement, which we have defined elsewhere as 'the loose network of organisations (with varying degrees of formality, and even including political parties) and other actors, engaged in collective action of various kinds, on the basis of the shared goal or advancing the cause of justice (*economic, social, political and environmental*) among and between peoples across the globe' (della Porta 2007, emphasis added). However, despite its network links with other student unions seeking to boycott Coca Cola, and with the Boycott Coca Cola campaign itself, the group does not readily view itself as part of the GJM. The closest I could get to a recognition of the group as part of the GJM was by reading out the definition and eliciting an 'I suppose we're part of it' from an informant.

The group emphasises lifestyle changes that people can make as individuals, and sees this as an important means for bringing about change on human rights and environmental issues. Because the group is small, there is a tendency to focus on a single issue at a time (this has been mostly Coca Cola, and an unwanted O2 mobile telephone mast that appeared on the edge of campus), although the group does have the heterogeneous frame of anti-consumerism in general. The group seeks mostly to denounce major multinational corporations, reduce student apathy, promote ethical consumption on campus, and promote the 'Boycott Coca Cola' campaign. It has sought to do this through posters, flyers and newsletters, documentaries and films, talks and forums, and a few protest events (mostly collecting signatures for petitions). Internal group affairs are not regarded as political acts in their own right but instead as a means of achieving political acts. The level of conflict is mostly very local (university based), although the society is part of an international network of student (and non-student) groups working on the Boycott Coca-Cola campaign. The group used the political opportunity of the Union (Kent University Students' Union) AGM (annual general meeting) in order to raise a motion urging the boycott of Coca Cola products on campus,

and so is not averse to involvement with (very localised) political institutions. Attempts to engage with or infiltrate the Students' Union have increased throughout the course of the group's history, culminating in an unsuccessful attempt to get a member elected as part time Union Environment and Ethics Officer. However, the group is keen not to let Union politics dominate its agenda.

There had been much discussion at meetings over whether the Conscious Consumers should become involved in a Left-Wing Alliance, in cooperation with Student CND, with the purpose of trying to create some left-wing opposition to the apparently right-wing Union. There was some reluctance towards being associated with the label 'left-wing', and an overall desire to remain politically neutral. After the formal period of observation, the Ethnic Minorities Officer from the Union, who feels marginalized by what she perceived to be the Union's right-wing stance, came to a meeting to persuade Conscious Consumer participants to stand for elections in the Union Council to prevent it from becoming 'a bunch of right wing cronies'. She claimed that the right-wing fraternity were dominating the Union simply because they were getting their friends to vote for them. She encouraged participants to stand for the elections and to get their friends to vote for them. There was only a little support for this idea because Conscious Consumers participants were concerned that if they followed her advice they would end up being conceived of as 'a bunch of left wing cronies' and could have the same charges levelled at themselves from the right-wingers as they had directed towards the Council and Union.

The principal aim of TFoE is to 'campaign on environmental and sustainability issues and support the work of Friends of the Earth' (FoE 2003:3). Its relationship with the global justice movement is even less clear-cut than Conscious Consumers', and local campaigners are doubtful of their organisation's place within such a movement, and are even more uncertain of what the GJM actually is.

**Clare** Have you ever heard of the global justice movement? And what does it mean to you?

**Jeff** I'm not sure about it or not.

**Clare** What did it conjure up, then. What do you think it is?

**Peter** Exactly what it says! I suppose that the immediate group that would spring to mind would be Amnesty International. And a lot of other international groups, you know, pressure groups.

**Clare** Do you think that you are a part of it, with what you do with Friends of the Earth?

**Peter** Um, I suppose. Personally I think it feels very small scale and local ...

For Cathy, another member of TFoE, the GJM conjures up something more radical than what FoE does locally, and Neville, her husband, conceives of the GJM as a small part of the anti-globalization movement. However, both Neville and Cathy can see how national FoE could be regarded to be part of the GJM because it had helped them in the making of a film they produced on the poor environmental record and double standards of the oil company Shell. FoE at a national level does clearly have an agenda that matches that of the GJM (see in particular Rootes 2006). In its briefing booklet on Poverty, Justice and the Environment (FoE 2006), for example, it discusses environmental injustices and directly attributes them to corporate led-globalisation: 'Corporate led globalisation is draining the wealth and resources from the poorest countries and concentrating it in the hands of a very few in the richest' (FoE 2006:6), although seemingly this GJM rhetoric does not filter down to its local activists particularly readily.

TFoE decided early on that one of its main foci would be on planning issues, especially opposition to inappropriate waste management facilities, a controversial local housing development, and further development of the local airport. The group also agreed to support national Friends of the Earth's Big Ask Campaign, a campaign against climate change that sought to introduce a climate change bill in the Queens Speech in 2007. This has been achieved, but now the group is working hard to make sure that the climate change bill insists upon annual emissions limits and that

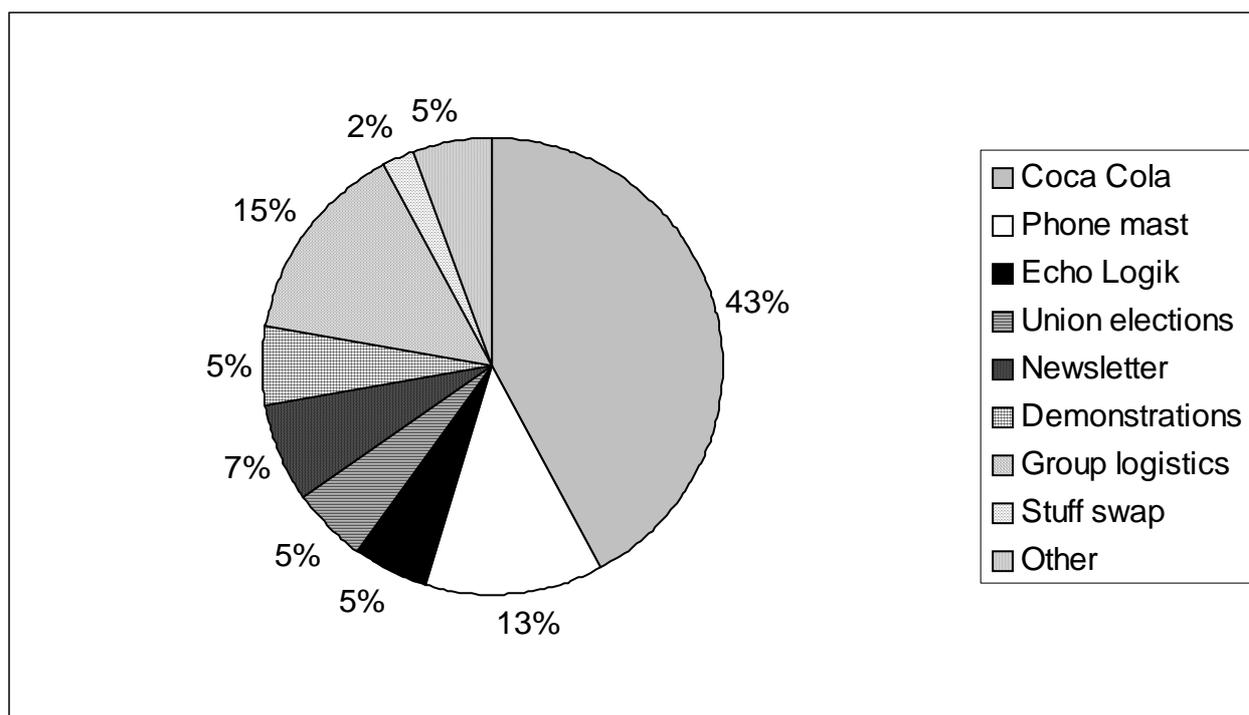
it includes shipping and aviation, by lobbying local MPs (Matthew 2007:3). The focus of the group is on spreading awareness of environmental issues, and on trying to engage the public and group members in actions to prevent environmental degradation. The group tries to raise awareness by engaging with the local press, holding stalls and having open meetings to which guest speakers contribute. The issues the group tackles are multi-issue by nature.

There is a general feeling amongst group members that it is 'too late' to solve climate change, and that nothing will be done about it by the government and members of the general public until we're paddling in inches of flood water. One participant argued in a meeting that the group's attempts to solve the environmental crisis were nothing more than 'pissing in the wind'. Nonetheless, overall passion for the environment keeps a handful of group members committed. Although group actions are usually decided by consensus, or by tacit agreement, individuals vary a lot in their ideas of the best way to solve environmental problems. Some think that campaigning is the way forward, others have suggested practical projects (e.g. implementing a Thanet-wide cloth bag scheme for local independent traders in an attempt to move away from plastic bags and prevent waste), whilst others still think that education and public talks are the solution. The presence of heterogeneous frames means that group discussions are often very broad, and that what is seemingly decided at one meeting gets forgotten at the next, especially if an argument's key adherents are missing. The diversity of frames also means that participants have different ideas about strategy. This is well demonstrated in group debates about sources of funding. Marie, the (ex)group coordinator, for example, was going to seek funding from the pharmaceutical giant Pzifers for the cotton bag scheme (which never materialized), but others in the group were adamant that this should not be allowed because of Pfizer's dubious environmental and ethical record.

#### **4. Campaign actions and networking**

The campaign actions of Conscious Consumers have been more varied and more frequent than in TFoE, partly in consequence of the more frequent meetings and also as a result of the higher levels of enthusiasm that Conscious Consumers participants have. Free from full time work and parenthood, students have more time to become active in political campaigning. Conscious Consumers has held fundraising parties, screenings of awareness-raising films (such as *The Corporation*), an ethical 'big stuff swap' ('got stuff you no longer need or want? Want stuff you can't afford' [Conscious Consumers 2006d]), a library book swap stall, numerous stalls collecting signatures to boycott Coca Cola on campus or to ask for the mobile telephone mast that appeared about 25m from Darwin College to be removed, handing out of leaflets, and raising a motion calling upon Kent Union to stop selling Coca Cola from its outlets in favour of more ethical alternatives. It has also produced regular newsletters for which it has sought and achieved sponsorship from local ethical businesses. The group has never directly copied the actions of other groups, although it did consult the motions that other student societies had raised in an attempt to boycott Coca Cola at their own institutions in order to help it write its own. In practice, Conscious Consumers is very independent of Kent Union (its parent organisation), mostly using money it raised through fundraising parties in order to fund its campaigns. The campaigns of Conscious Consumers and their relative importance can be assessed by considering the amount of time that was spent in meetings discussing them (Figure 1).

**Figure 1 - Conscious Consumers – time spent discussing each campaign**



In Conscious Consumers, the two key campaigns (Coca Cola and the phone mast) were the most discussed agenda items. Agenda items that were mostly ‘inputs’ (i.e. contributions from single people) were the shortest. Actions under the control of particular individuals or experts (for example, Freeda was in charge of the stuff swap, and Bob organised the Eco Logik party) tended also to have less discussion (Table 1).

**Table 1 - Conscious Consumers agenda items and spent discussing them**

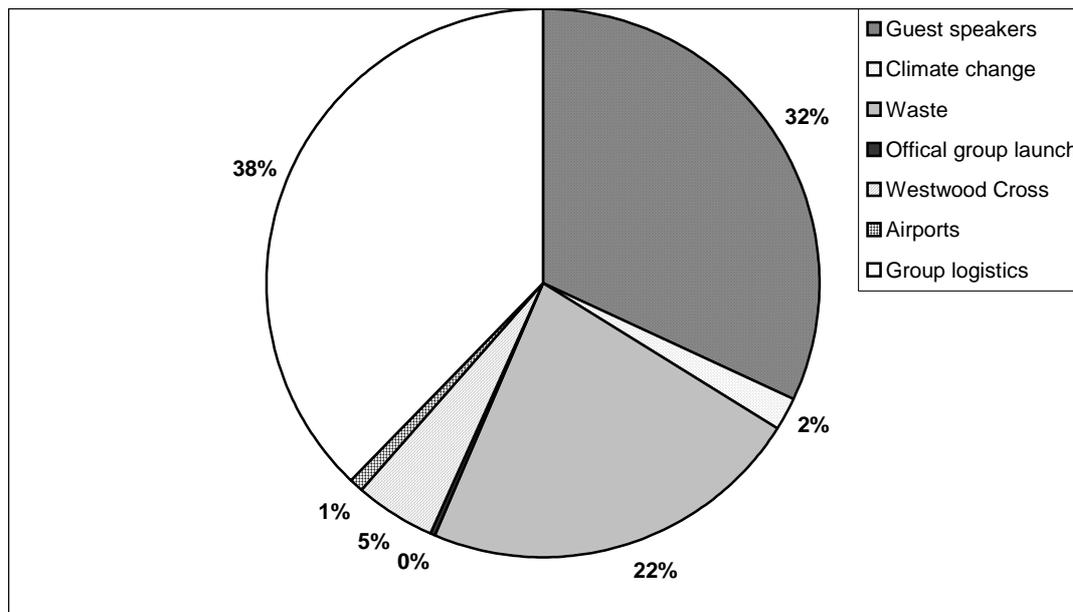
Campaign	Proportion of agenda items	Proportion of time spent
Coca Cola	25%	43%
General group logistics	18%	15%
Demonstration announcements	13%	5%
Phone mast campaign	10%	13%
Union elections	9%	13%
Newsletter	8%	7%
Echo Logic	7%	5%
Stuff swapping	3%	2%
Other	6%	5%

With regards to networking, Conscious Consumers has had some contact with other student Unions that have been successful in passing motions to boycott Coca Cola (e.g. Sussex). The major difference seems to be that Kent’s union is much more conservative and centre-left, whereas Sussex is ultra-left-wing. Mostly though, there is little contact with other social movement organisations

except for other Societies on campus. In particular there has been regular and welcome exchange with the Fair Trade Society, the Amnesty Society and Kent Union CND.

Very clearly, both groups spent most of their meetings discussing a small number of campaigns. In TFoE, the clear priority was the waste campaign. This was largely because Marie, the group coordinator, was heavily influenced by Jim, a campaigner from Southeast Action Group for the Environment (SAGE), who had, in 2004, been voted Friends of the Earth local campaigner of the year. Jim began his activist career as an anti-incineration campaigner and waste has remained his priority environmental issue to date. Since Marie stepped down as facilitator, the influence of Jim diminished, and more general planning issues have begun to come to the fore.

**Figure 2 - Thanet Friends of the Earth. Time spent discussing each theme**



TFoE would like to be outward oriented, but its efforts are hampered by a lack of willing volunteers. Even its lobbying and awareness raising work is limited by lack of active supporters. However, it is not afraid to use creative tactics when enough people are willing to help engage in an action. For example, group members collected their unrecyclable waste packaging and returned it to Tesco supermarket to highlight the need for recycling and the problem of over-packaging. The group engages both in its own actions, and also in actions that are designed by FoE national. The Tesco waste action was devised entirely by the group itself, whereas its lobbying as part of the Big Ask climate change campaign, was a pre-structured action set by national FoE.

TFoE is part of two networks: Friends of the Earth (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), and East Kent Friends of the Earth. There has been a small amount of cooperation with the latter over plans to engage in joint lobbying of MPs for the Big Ask Campaign. There are no formal links with other local or national SMOs, but two of the main members (Cathy and Neville, who loan their hall to the group and are in charge of media relations) are also heavily involved in East Kent Stop the War coalition (this is not a formal group, but it occasionally organises film showings and coaches to national anti-war demonstrations).

In Thanet there has been a high profile campaign against plans to build 1,000 new homes in an already over-congested area of Thanet, at Westwood. Many Westwood campaigners came to the formal launch of the group, having been invited by Cathy and Neville, who had themselves been actively involved in the Westwood Cross campaign. At that meeting, Jim (from SAGE), the facilitator, had said ‘that’s an unwinnable campaign, and apart from some rather marginal things,

we can't do anything about it'. The regional coordinator from national FoE, and Marie, the group coordinator, appeared to agree, leaving many Westwood campaigners feeling disillusioned with FoE. Consequently, they did not return to subsequent meetings. Although this could have potentially created a long-term faction between TFoE and the Westwood Campaign, there has been some attempt to revive a working relationship. The group is also developing working relationships with green construction companies. If the 1,000 planned new homes are to be built, the group would like them to be constructed as environmentally friendly as possible.

## **5. Visions and practices of democracy in the group**

### *5.1 Organisational forms and rules*

Both organisations have official roles and responsibilities that are prescribed as a result of their affiliation to a higher level organisation – for Conscious Consumers this is Kent Union (the University of Kent Student Union), and for TFoE, it is Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FoE). In the Conscious Consumers, officially, there is a president, a secretary and a treasurer, but these formal roles are to satisfy formal student Union procedures and play no role in the overall running of the group, except for the fact that the president and secretary usually chair the meetings. Similarly, TFoE has a coordinator and a treasurer. Cathy and Neville (the film buffs) are the informal press officers. As in Conscious Consumers, the coordinator facilitates the meetings. In TFoE, however, the position of group leader (called 'president' in Conscious Consumers and 'coordinator' in TFoE, but essentially both are leaders) has been under some tacit dispute. Marie, the original founder member became pregnant, and had to relinquish her position in the group. There was general reluctance to fill the space, but eventually Peter and Jeff Jones, 45-50 year old brothers, took up the position of joint-coordinators. No one took minutes in Conscious Consumers, although several students took notes to which they referred back at later meetings. In TFoE, I became the minute-taker, which I found to be supportive to my work as participant observer and to be a useful function to perform on behalf the group, sparing others from duplicating the effort.

In both groups, those with particular competences fulfil niche roles; Neville and Cathy, who are educational film-makers, became default press officers for TFoE, for example, and in Conscious Consumers, a participant with competence in IT has become the group 'techie' – designing the group website and facilitating online petitions and e-postcards (see <http://consciousconsumers.org.uk/>).

Neither group has formal membership rules and they are both open to any one to participate. However, for Conscious Consumers, Kent Union insists that the Society must have at least 20 formally subscribed members (at a cost of £3 each) for it to be eligible for Union funding. In the academic year 2006-7, the group had exceeded this target, having 32 paid up members at its peak. In TFoE, participants can sign up for annual membership at a cost of £8 for a couple, £6 for an individual or £3 for concessions. Around 30 people had paid for membership, but only one fifth continued to frequently attend meetings. Membership of TFoE entitles the members to a free copy of the local groups' magazine *Change Your World*, and in theory to a year's membership of the national organisation, for which a copy of *Earth Matters* is sent. Although I've been a formally paid member for over a year, I have only received one copy of the monthly *Earth Matters* magazine from national FoE. In both groups, all participants are unpaid volunteers.

Besides insistence that both groups have formal officers, they must also adhere to other rules that are a condition of their affiliation to higher bodies. Conscious Consumers had to agree to be open to all students regardless of their background, and to remain within the law (Matt Smith, interview). Similarly, TFoE is required to 'ensure that all of its activities are lawful and/or in line with FoE policies and guidelines'. It must also hold 'regular, accessible meetings that are open to all members and to the public' (FoE 2003:3). Although both groups are bound to the rules of higher bodies, this

does not prevent individuals from either group engaging in illegal actions as individuals rather than under the name of the group.

## 5.2 *Internal democracy*

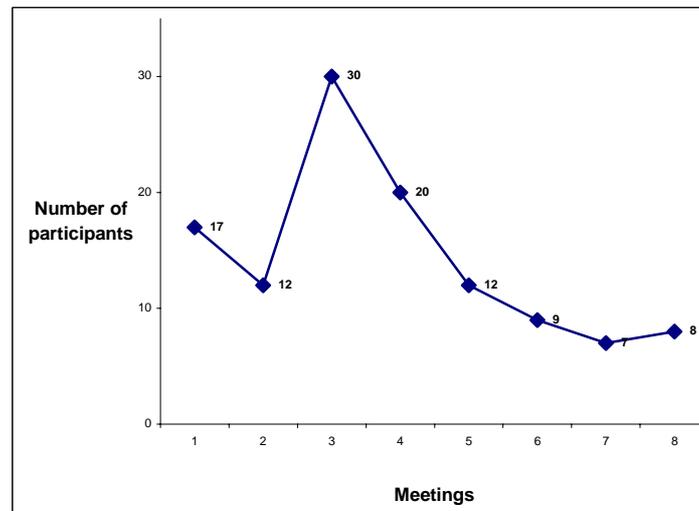
In both groups there is a distinct lack of meta-discourse that confronts the decision-making processes of the group, even though, in TFoE, there was a significant level of dissatisfaction with the group's ability to make decisions and act upon them. The main reason for the dissatisfaction with decision-making in TFoE was because it did not really happen much. When Marie was the coordinator (July 2006-February 2007) most of the decisions were made by her behind the scenes, and it often felt that she was trying to persuade group members to help her materialise her own ideas for campaign actions without first discussing the logic of the action with the group. The other main problem with TFoE decision-making was that many of the decisions were 'white elephant' ones, i.e. they were decisions that did not materialise. Examples of things which were decided, but which weren't followed up with any action include the planned climate change stall, the meeting to put together a funding bid for the cotton-bag proposal, and the survey of prices of farmers market versus supermarket produce. Despite the obvious shortcomings of the decision-making process of TFoE, surprisingly the issue of internal democracy only arose through informal interviews with participants. When I informally presented the findings of the research, TFoE participants were very pleased. Candy commented on 'how we are very lucky to have someone like you', and Cathy thanked me, but claimed to be 'a bit cheesed that you didn't tell us about it any sooner!'.

Similarly, Conscious Consumers did not reflect much on decision-making practices. At the end of the natural focus groups setting in which I presented my research, at least two Conscious Consumers' participants came up to me and said 'that was really interesting, what you were talking about, I hadn't really thought about it before'. In interview, Dave, co-president said to me 'we'd like to have more people come up with criticisms and say "this is the way we should be doing this", but people are quite passive, generally ... I'm assuming people are happy with the way things are being done. Either that, or they can't be bothered to say it, or they're too scared to say it' (Dave, interview).

### 5.2.1 Meetings – how did they work?

Whereas Conscious Consumers has consistently attracted around 10 participants to its meetings, TFoE has witnessed a gradual trailing off of numbers (Figure 3). The trailing off of numbers could be a result of two things: the manner in which the agenda of the group was forced away from the biggest local issues of concern (by Jim from SAGE, Marie and the FoE South East Network Developer brandishing the Westwood campaign a 'waste of time' and 'unwinnable'), and general dissatisfaction with the running of group meetings. The average number of participants in Conscious Consumer meetings is 11.4 (mode, or 12 median) compared to 12.4 (mean, median of 12) for TFoE. But the mean for TFoE masks a huge range from 30 participants at the group launch meeting, down to seven at its lowest during the observation period. The most recent TFoE meetings (post-observation) have, however, only been attended by half a dozen participants or fewer. Both groups send out emails reminding members and interested members of the public to attend meetings. On the occasions when coordinators have forgotten to email round a reminder, there have been fewer attendees (Figure 3).

**Figure 3 - Declining participation in Thanet Friends of the Earth**



Inevitably, a proportion of group members in any political group will, from time-to-time lack the time or commitment to regularly participate. In Conscious Consumers, the usual cause of non-attendance was essay or dissertation deadlines. One can also suspect that irreconcilable political viewpoints played a role in some participants' exit from both groups, most especially in TFoE.

In TFoE there was a marked drop in participant numbers in August 2006, the Network Developer for Friends of the Earth in the Southeast, had appeared to be a little bit rude to participants who had come along from the Westwood Cross Campaign (WCC) (against a local housing development), by suggesting that their campaign was a lost cause. The WCC had expected FoE to offer its help, but instead FoE encouraged the local group to focus on other (arguably less urgent and important) issues. In February 2007, there was another big change in group dynamics. The coordinator, Marie, was heavily pregnant and needed to find another coordinator to take over short-term. In the end, Marie decided not to attend any further meetings during the period of observation, and she handed the coordinatorship over to Peter and Jeff. Two group meetings were cancelled because of a general lack of support, but they recommenced in July 2007.

In Conscious Consumers, participation peaked in the run up to the Union AGM. The group's plans had sparked off a lively debate on the Internet debating forum, The Student Bar, and several new participants came along as a consequence. For both groups though, crucial campaign moments have attracted new participants: a meeting at which FoE's South East regional coordinator spoke, which was widely advertised to local campaign networks by TFoE, and the preparations for the boycott Coca-Cola Union AGM motion for Conscious Consumers, advertised on the Student Bar both saw a significant (if short-term) rise in the numbers of participants.

One significant difference between the groups is the frequency of meetings. Conscious Consumer meetings are held weekly in Rutherford Bar, Rutherford College at the University of Kent, Canterbury on Wednesday afternoons from 4pm. All decisions (with minor exceptions) are taken at these meetings. Around 40 people are signed up to Conscious Consumers' email updates, but only about one-tenth of this number frequently attend. In contrast, TFoE meets only once monthly, on the second Thursday of the month, at Red Hall, a meeting space that used to be owned by the Red Cross, but which was bought by its present owners, Neville and Cathy, the educational film-makers, for use as an office and public meeting space. In between the sessions, there are occasional 'sub-group' meetings (e.g. the sustainable architecture group met to discuss how to write a letter to send to MPs asking for the Westwood development to meet strict sustainability standards), and there is limited email discussion. But the infrequent meetings reduce the continuity and the development of

familial bonds that are so obviously present in Conscious Consumers. The time of day that the meetings are held may also make a difference to attendance rates. Wednesday afternoons are timetabled for sports and other extra-curricular activities, making it convenient for most students to attend, especially considering that many may already be on campus for lectures and seminars on Wednesday mornings. This is very different to going out to a hall on a cold and wet winter's evening to attend a TFoE meeting.

Possibly because they were more frequent, Conscious Consumer meetings tended to be shorter than TFoE ones. The average meeting time for Conscious Consumers is 55 minutes, compared to 155 minutes for TFoE. The shortest Conscious Consumers' meeting was 28 minutes, and the longest was 90 minutes, compared to a range of 59 to 160 minutes for TFoE. Conscious Consumers like their meetings to last approximately one hour because many participants are also involved in the CND Society, which meets directly afterwards, and because, as students, the participants also have assignments and reading to work on. It is preferable for TFoE participants for their meetings to take no more than an hour and a half – beginning at 7.30pm and finishing no later than 9pm. Meetings are often longer, though, because discussions tend to be unfocused. As Jeff claimed in interview 'I mean, in an hour and a half we could we could get a lot of things done. I mean half of the time is wasted by going off the point, isn't it?'

Agendas are set mostly by the coordinator / presidents of the groups, but Conscious Consumers changed its style to a written go-round after I had presented my research and suggestions for how the group could improve its decision-making. As the groups are both fairly small, it is easy for participants to be seated in a circle. It is not clear, however, whether either group does this on purpose. In both meeting settings (Red Hall and Rutherford Bar) the seating is laid out in a manner that allows the circular form to be adopted without moving furniture. On the two occasions when guest speakers have visited TFoE meetings, and consequently the numbers of participants has been higher, the seating layout has been in rows facing the guest speaker.

In addition to meetings, both groups have an email list. TFoE has been trying to set up a phone tree for a few months, but this has not yet materialised due to misunderstandings between individuals and a lack of commitment. TFoE communicates with the outside world through occasional press releases, and posters in public places. There has been discussion in the group about taking up a regular column in the local paper, the Thanet Gazette, however, the change of editor at the local newspapers has prevented this from materialising to date. Since taking the coordinatorship, Peter and Jeff have created a display in Broadstairs public library to raise awareness of the group and encourage library visitors to sign Big Ask climate postcards (calling on MPs to support a strong Climate Bill). In comparison, Conscious Consumers are more internet savvy than TFoE, perhaps by virtue of their youth and their consequent willingness to embrace digital media. Internal and external debates take place on the internet networking sites of the Student Bar and Face Book. TFoE sometimes has small subgroup meetings in between the monthly meetings, and because meetings are so infrequent, the coordinators make small decisions between themselves in between meetings.

Because they are both small groups, they welcome newcomers with open arms, and seek to get them involved from the outset. Commenting on his experience as a newcomer to the group, David, for example, stated that:

Yeah, I walked in, and someone said 'has anyone got any ideas for articles for our Christmas [newsletter] issue?' and I just said 'what about Christmas trees' and they said 'oh yeah, great idea, do you fancy doing that?' And I had just walked in, like.

Peter commented on how he would like to get more new members with diverse skills involved in TFoE:

It's almost like spying the right kind of people when they come along to meetings and cornering them and saying 'come back', and 'what do you think of this' and 'would you like to do that' – getting them involved.

Yet advice from national FoE warns of the dangers of pouncing on newcomers too soon, stating that it's important not to 'patronise, pander or rush people' (de Zylva 2005).

### 5.2.2 Internal group communication at meetings

All agenda items at observed meetings involved verbal communication, and some of them involved written communication. Six types of communication were observed at group meetings: inputs, proposals, discussions, go-rounds and output production.

An input or proposal involves an individual participant providing some input, or presenting a proposal. Examples of inputs in Conscious Consumers meetings were when Max explained the difference between boycotting Coca Cola and opting for dispensation, when Ted told us about the Exxon Mobil demonstration and Freeda informed us of the Literature Society's book swap. Proposals in Conscious Consumers included when Dave suggested that we have a vote on whether to boycott Coca Cola or to go for dispensation and Jane suggested that the group should buy an electrosmog detector as part of the phone mast campaign. Thirty-five percent of Conscious Consumers' agenda items were inputs / proposals. All of the agenda items on the stuff swaps (the Great Stuff Swap and the library bookshelf) included inputs or proposals from Freeda and eighty two percent of the demonstration announcements were inputs, with occasional discussion (e.g. about how to get to the Trident demonstration and whether coach tickets needed to be booked).

In TFoE, an identical proportion of communication in meetings consisted of inputs or proposals (35%). Examples include when Marie informed the group that it was formally constituted, Peter provided an update on the Westwood Cross Campaign, Neville proposed to write a press release to advertise the group, and Marie suggested setting up a phone tree to improve group communication. Most of the inputs or proposals in TFoE meetings were contributions about improving group dynamics.

In a discussion, at least two participants talk about a specific issue (or several issues at the same time). Excerpts of discussion in each of the two groups are given in Tables 2 and 3. In these two examples, each of the speech acts is relatively short, and participants seem to bounce ideas off one another. In the excerpt of a discussion in Conscious Consumers, Dave and Max are mostly seeking information about the phone mast campaign from Jane and David (Table 2). In the excerpt from a TFoE discussion, the group are discussing the prospect of having to find a new group coordinator to take over in Marie's absence (Table 3).

**Table 2 - Discussion in Conscious Consumers**

<b>1. Jane</b>	25 metres in Britain ...
<b>2. Max</b>	From homes
<b>3. David</b>	That's really silly, like, Russia have 1,500m
<b>4. Dave</b>	It's probably more than 25m from Darwin?
<b>5. Max</b>	May be.
<b>6. Jane</b>	For people who live above my office it's about 25m
<b>7. Dave</b>	May be that's not that helpful for us because it's within the law
<b>8. Jane</b>	I've got a letter here ... it says that the University opposes the present proposal.
<b>9. Max</b>	When was that?
<b>10. Jane</b>	September 2006. They are against that particular mast.
<b>11. David</b>	Good

**Table 3 - Discussion in Thanet Friends of the Earth**

<b>1. Marie</b>	We need a coordinator for the next two meetings because I am going to have my baby soon, and won't be able come in February and March.
<b>2.</b>	
<b>3. Peter</b>	I think we should nominate in people's absence
<b>4. Marie</b>	You think
<b>5. Peter</b>	I can think of some good people. How about a councillor?
<b>6. Marie</b>	Elizabeth Sproul). She said she would come. She is for, which ward, is it in Ramgate? She's supporting our Westwood Campaign.
<b>7.</b>	
<b>8. Peter</b>	No, I think it's a Broadstairs ward.
<b>9. Marie</b>	I think you're right, it's where Julia lives.
<b>10. Jane</b>	I'll write it in the minutes that you've requested a replacement coordinator for the next two meetings.
<b>11.</b>	
<b>12. Peter</b>	It's a bit much facilitating it, and doing the minutes and doing your research, isn't it?
<b>13.</b>	
<b>14. Jane</b>	Yes.
<b>15. Peter</b>	I think Sidney would be good, although he's reluctant.
<b>16. Marie</b>	He doesn't feel very comfortable talking in public
<b>17. Peter</b>	I'm terrible at names ...
<b>18. Marie</b>	Sidney said he'd be happy to, if there was any need to, contact national Friends of the Earth about anything ....
<b>19.</b>	

In Conscious Consumers, most of the agenda items relating to the group’s campaigns (Coca Cola and the phone mast) ended up being discussions (over three-quarters of them). Two thirds of agenda items on the elections were discussed, and half of the agenda items dedicated to preparing the Echo Logik party were discussed too. There was little discussion on stuff swapping and demonstration announcements (Table 4). In TFoE 47.5% of agenda items were discussions. The things most frequently discussed were waste and group logistics. Every single agenda item on waste ended up being a discussion (Table 5). Waste was the key issue for the group for a while because of the influence of Jim (as discussed earlier) and has now been usurped by planning issues as the group’s most important campaign.

In a go-round, everyone at the meeting gets the opportunity to give their opinion on an issue or on group logistics. This is usually a method purposefully chosen by the meeting facilitator to include everyone in the running of the meeting. In practice it was rarely used by the groups under study. In Conscious Consumers, written go-rounds were used only to construct the meeting agenda (and only after reflection on my feedback to the group), and to set the rota for manning campaign stalls and stewarding the Echo Logik parties. Verbal go-rounds were never used. In TFoE, go rounds were only used in the early days when participants were beginning to get to know one another and were invited by the coordinator to introduce themselves one-by-one.

In an output production, participants exchange about the production of a tangible output, i.e. the text of a flyer, or the image for a banner. Although the newsletter is an ‘output’, its agenda items were coded as inputs, proposals or discussions because the discussions did not cover the minutia of content (which was decided by individual authors), as did discussions on Coca Cola leaflets and banners. Output productions did not happen in TFoE because these were the sort of decisions that were made behind the scenes by coordinators or other individuals who took initiative.

**Table 4 - Conscious Consumers: type of communication for each main topic (% for rows)**

Type of agenda item	Type of communication				n
	Input or proposal	Discussion	Go-round	Output production	
<b>Coca-Cola campaign</b>	36.6	77.3	0.0	9.1	22
<b>Phone mast campaign</b>	22.2	77.8	0.0	0.0	9
<b>Echo Logik</b>	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	6
<b>Union elections</b>	37.5	62.5	0.0	0.0	8
<b>Newsletter</b>	57.1	42.9	0.0	0.0	7
<b>Stuff swapping</b>	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3
<b>Demonstration announcements</b>	81.8	18.2	0.0	0.0	11
<b>General logistics</b>	18.8	50.0	31.3	0.0	16
<b>Other</b>	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>34.5</b>	<b>57.5</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>87</b>

**Table 5 - Thanet Friends of the Earth: type of communication for each main topic (% for rows)**

Type of agenda item	Type of communication				n
	Input or proposal	Discussion	Go-round	Separate contributions	
Guest speakers	20.0	0.0	0.0	80.0	5
Climate change	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	2
Waste and recycling	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	7
Official group launch	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1
Westwood Cross	33.3	66.7	0.0	0.0	3
Airports	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1
General logistics	42.9	42.9	14.3	0.0	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>35.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>37.5</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>40</b>

### 5.3 Decision-making

Whereas the majority of Conscious Consumers' participants frequently input into a conversation if they disagreed with what someone else was saying, there was a tendency in TFoE, with the exception of one particularly vocal person, for participants to 'bite their lips' and remain quiet. For example, several participants were unhappy about the decision to deprioritise the Westwood Cross Campaign, but they kept quiet so as not to offend others or to jeopardise the group whilst it was at an early stage of development. As Neville stated in interview:

*"I mean I was very passionate about the Westwood thing and the Westwood issue. In the end I thought, 'well, I can make a huge fuss about this.' But I thought I could tell from the way that the meeting was going that essentially the chair, the facilitator, in consultation with national Friends of the Earth had said 'oh that's an unwinnable campaign apart from some rather marginal things, we can't do anything about it'. So I thought 'I can make a huge fuss about this, or I can just see how things go'. May be, very, very wrongly I just let things go because I didn't want to bust up the group. But I didn't get a sense that there were a lot of people there who would go with me if I did make a big fuss."*

In contrast, most participants are happy with the decision-making processes in Conscious Consumers – as Kylie said 'it's fine for me, I wouldn't really expect it to be any more democratic than that' – whereas participants in TFoE are much less satisfied.

The majority of agenda items ended up with a decision being made in both groups (over 80% for Conscious Consumers over 70% for TFoE). In Conscious Consumers, three main types of decision-making were used: tacit agreement, majority voting and unanimity. In TFoE, only tacit agreement and unanimity were used.

When the agenda item was strictly just a proposal or an input, there tended to be no decisions made. For example, in Conscious Consumers 40% and in TFoE 30% of announcements of forthcoming demonstrations were not followed by any decision-making.

According to Dave, president of Conscious Consumers, this is how the group makes decisions:

*"It's pretty informal. I mean basically I prepare the meeting with Max and we come with topics that we want to talk about so in that sense we already determine what to talk about and I think, I mean when it's an important decision to make, sometimes we vote. Sometimes we just discuss things and come to an agreement that everyone is happy with. But a couple of times we've had a vote because there wasn't agreement."*

The four TFoE interviewees all agreed with Cathy, who stated that ‘well, we don’t really make decisions, do we?’.

Nodding and tacit agreement was by far the most common form of decision-making in both groups (around 60% of agenda items were decided in this fashion in each group). This occurred when everyone nodded or smiled in response to a proposal and it was fairly clear (though not certain) that everyone was happy with the decision. It was quite often the case in Conscious Consumers’ meetings that several participants at any one time did not notice that a decision had been made because they were too busy fiddling with their hair or drifting into a private conversation with the person seated next to them. However, provided that they didn’t raise an objection, tacit agreement was assumed. When asked how the group makes decisions, Kylie said:

*“[It’s a] general consensus thing. If anyone objects to anything which has been proposed then I think they feel able enough to say ‘I don’t agree with that’. If no one says anything I guess we’ll go ahead with something.”*

In Conscious Consumers, all decisions regarding the phone mast campaign were made by tacit agreement. This could be for two possible reasons – either because the subject was not particularly controversial, or because there was not universal support for the campaign (several participants were not convinced of the need for such a campaign given their own heavy reliance on mobile phones in their social lives). The plans for the fundraising Echo Logik party were also mostly decided by tacit agreement (66.7%), but there was at least one decision made by unanimity.

Majority voting was not used at all by TFoE during the period of formal observation, but was used on rare occasions by Conscious Consumers -- when formal (usually Union dictated) procedures needed to be fulfilled, or when the group had difficulty making a decision by any other means. Max, for example, said in interview that ‘when we had real decisions to make we had votes and we had quite long debates’. And David said: it’s [voting’s] just an easy way to resolve things, because otherwise you’re just going to be talking forever, and for me it isn’t a society about talking. It’s about getting things done and trying to achieve things... it’s the easiest way.’

Only five of Conscious Consumer’s observed agenda items were decided by majority vote. The first was whether to boycott Coca-Cola, or go for dispensation (the provision of alternatives). This was a difficult decision to make because the co-presidents could not agree with one another Kylie said in interview that:

*“Max and Dave didn’t agree on the boycott thing. Max said ‘we should just ask them to put in an alternative’ and Dave said ‘no, we should just get them to get rid of it altogether’ and so we did the vote. And that seemed fair enough. And even Max afterwards wasn’t annoyed or anything, he just seemed like ‘OK’”.*

The second and third agenda items decided by voting were whether to support Valerie for Welfare Officer, David for Environment and Ethics Officer and Kevin for Mature Students Officer in Union elections (Union procedures) (the voting for Kevin was a separate agenda item). Fourthly, the group voted on the decision of whether to purchase some Killa Cola stickers to stick on vending machines using group funds. This was a controversial matter, which had been the subject of a previous contentious debate [pre-formal observation]. David described this contentious debate:

*“Well, one disagreement was about doing ‘this Coke machine is ethically out of order’ signs everyday on the Coke machines, and one person ... seemed to have a problem with it, and so we had a vote, and she was outvoted, and that was how it was resolved. She said how, like, it was biting the hand that feeds us, like, and sort of going against the Union. Well, we just totally disagreed, and we thought, ‘well, if we’re going to get anything done here we need to do action and not pussy foot around and try to please the Union. Otherwise we’re in the wrong society. And I never saw her here again after that, funnily enough.’”*

And finally, in line with formal Kent Union policy, the election of new Conscious Consumers' Officers at the end of term was decided by votes.

Unanimity was achieved when there was no doubt that there was explicit consent by everyone present, or when unconvinced dissenters no longer objected. Unanimity was reached by either a vote in which everyone agreed, or by everyone explicitly verbally agreeing. Unanimity usually took when the subject of discussion was non-controversial. In Conscious Consumers, for example, everyone agreed to nominate David for the part-time Environment and Ethics Officer Union position, and everyone signed his form. In a small 'working group' for writing the Coca Cola motion (Steven, Dave, Adrian and I), we looked at the motions written by other Student Unions and explicitly agreed on the arguments that were indispensable for our own motion. In TFoE, the only unanimous decision was to call the group 'Thanet Friends of the Earth'. In the focus group that took place to report these research findings, Peter commented: 'well, it was hardly likely to come under question, was it?!'.

#### *5.4 Power (or lack of!)*

Neither group displayed any gendered hierarchies whatsoever, even though women were a clear minority in the Conscious Consumers. Both groups were blessed with very vocal women – notably Freeda, a radical socialist feminist, in Conscious Consumers, and Candy in TFoE, an experienced campaigner in the local Green Party (until it broke up in the early 1990s) and in the initially successful but ultimately doomed 1980-1995 attempt to get FoE off the ground locally. Nonetheless, although some of the most vocal participants in both groups were women, it is certainly also true that the quietest participants in both groups were women.

In Conscious Consumers, there were two postgraduate students with greater academic expertise. Neither dominated the meetings or assumed the role of leader or advisor, but it naturally fell on these students to assume the task of writing the motion against Coca Cola for the Kent Union AGM. Although the group had agreed by majority vote to write the motion with the aim of seeking an outright ban on Coca Cola on campus, it was pragmatically deemed necessary to re-write it to make the banning of Coca Cola products something that happened incrementally rather than as an immediate and final outcome. The postgraduate students made this decision outside of the main meeting space, but nevertheless almost everyone was happy with the outcome even though it did compromise the group's original firm stance against Coca Cola. Kylie, for example, stated that 'sometimes it's fine for experts to use their initiative even if it does go slightly against a majority vote' (Interview, July 2007). Steven, who helped to write the motion was probably the least satisfied with assuming the role of expert because it had contravened the majority vote. In a private conversation, he told me: 'that's the reason I don't like voting. Things should be open to continual discussion'.

The coordinators of both groups were reluctant leaders, and not willing to assume a role of power. They fulfilled certain tasks mostly because of a fear that no progress would be made if they sat back and relaxed. In both groups, the leaders were not voted in by the membership, but instead assumed *de facto* leadership. I wondered whether the taken-for-granted assumption of leadership was construed as undemocratic by its membership. But the lack of formally elected officers was not important to either group, both of which were happy to be led by almost anyone willing to assume the role:

**CS** To be properly democratic, they [Dave and Max, co-presidents of Conscious Consumers] would have had to have been voted in by the membership, but they are not. Do you see that as a problem?

**David** No, because, it's totally silly because they started the Society from scratch, so there would have been no one to vote them in. You could say that all the members did

vote them in because they were the only members. And if we're going to take that sort of attitude, the Society would have never happened.

Dave, one of the coordinators of the group, agreed that their non-elected leadership could be construed as 'pretty undemocratic', but justified it by stating that:

*"I think we went along on the basis that the positions of president, secretary and treasurer weren't that important in terms of what we were going to do with the group ... As presidents we haven't played at that role so much. We haven't taken major decisions."*

It is certainly true that there were no apparent hierarchies, even though some participants seemed to do more work than others (David, interview).

Nonetheless, the mere fact that leaders did contribute to the work of the group behind the scenes and made some exclusive independent decisions, often constructing the meetings' agendas independently of the rest of the group, could be construed of as a source of hidden power. Dave said in interview that 'Max and myself sometimes take decisions for the group, for sure. I don't think we've ever taken any controversial decisions, things that people wouldn't go along with'. I asked what kind of decisions he meant, and he said 'Silly little things, like, shall we buy this for the group, or the things we do with the newsletter. Just because we can't always bring it back to the group'. With regard to constructing the agenda, Dave explained: 'basically I prepare the agenda with Max and we come with topics that we want to talk about, so in that sense we already determine what to talk about' (interview). Another Conscious Consumers' activist suggested how this could be viewed as a source of power in interview:

*"What's more important than consensus is what is actually suggested in the first place, and how it is suggested, because that is one of the deciding factors about what gets done and what doesn't. And I think most of the suggesting is dictated by Dave and Max. (Kylie, interview July 2006)"*

But it certainly wasn't by choice that Dave and Max sat up past midnight working on the newsletter and other important tasks. As Dave said:

*"I think that me and Max felt that we were doing more work than anybody else and we spent a lot of time doing things. It's like we didn't have enough time and so we had to push people to do things. There are so many things to do and people say 'you should do this, you should do that', and I'm like 'well, you should do it because I haven't got time'."*

Max agreed, stating that 'I get the impression that we don't do enough delegation' (Max, interview).

There are certainly no hierarchies or power structures in TFoE. As Cathy said in interview 'we are all equal in not wanting to run it really'. The general reluctance of participants to assume the role of coordinator can be seen from the excerpt of discussion in Table 3. In line 3, Peter suggests nominating new coordinators in their absence, he then says 'I can think of some good people' and finally, in line 14, nominates Sidney. There was no indication at this stage of the group's development that Peter and his brother Jeff – who was present during that discussion but silent – would assume the role of joint coordinators. They themselves claimed in interview that they only assumed the role of coordinators because it was essential, and Neville felt that:

*"Peter and Jeff ... had ample opportunity to try to sort of ... become more dominant more early on. They didn't take that. They've only done what they've done because there has been nobody else. They've passed the test of not being people moving in to take power."*

Similarly to in Conscious Consumers, the TFoE coordinators make decisions on their own in between meetings. Recently, they organised publicity for a stall in Broadstairs public library, which they saw as a 'constructive and positive contribution to the group' (Peter, in interview). Having a few people working behind the scenes is simply an effective means of keeping the group moving, as Peter expressed in interview:

*“Yeah, I mean short of multiplying the task over and over, you’ve got to email out every proposal and get replies from everybody, I mean it’s not operating like that. To some extent you have to say ‘if you don’t like it, you might as well forget it’, because you’ve got to do things to a certain extent. Unless it’s something really controversial and then you should have a discussion and a vote. But you know, doing a publicity stall for the group is not controversial in the slightest, is it?”*

### *5.5 Conflict emergence and resolution*

A controversy consists of an explicit and extended verbal disagreement in the group. It starts as soon as a dissenting voice is followed by a reaction (e.g. a justification) and consists of at least three speech acts or of a reaction that lasts more than three minutes. A controversy begins when a dissenting point is raised, and ends when the matter moves on to a different subject, or when everyone is satisfied with the arguments.

Six moments of controversy were recorded in TFoE, and eight in Conscious Consumers. In TFoE, there was controversy over when meetings should be held because some participants were concerned that a regular Thursday night slot might make it difficult for those with other commitments to attend. There was also some discussion about the choice of bank account. Some participants were not clear on the ethical advantages of banking with the Cooperative. Probably the biggest moment of controversy was when the network developer for FoE in the southeast suggested that the Westwood campaign was pointless. Unsurprisingly, Westwood campaigners failed to attend other meetings after that. Also, not everyone understood the point of Marie’s proposal to implement a cotton bag scheme for independent retailers across Thanet, and she became defensive over the plans. The idea of holding a regular TFoE information stall was the subject of debate, and whilst everyone agreed that it was a good idea in theory, there was a heated discussion about its practicalities. And finally, Theodore seemed to think that the waste action that the group engaged in at Tesco in Thanet was a, excuse the pun, waste of time. Theodore, who was a dominant participant with some very strong views, triggered three of these controversies. Compared with the general discussions (see Tables 2 and 3), some of the speech acts in controversies tend to be longer. Note how Theodore dominates the discussion about TFoE’s waste action (Table 6), making several longer speech acts, and how he seems to be playing devil’s advocate – questioning every stage of the campaign. Marie tried to defend the action, but at the end of the discourse conceded that more could have been done to get the action into the public sphere through a press release. Theodore’s frequent domination of meetings can be partly blamed upon poor facilitation of meetings. Reflecting on Marie’s facilitation of meetings, Peter said in interview that:

*“I was sometimes sitting in a meeting really willing her to interrupt, praying that she would just say ‘stop’ to whoever it was. And it was usually one person [Theodore], but others as well. And she didn’t do that at all. So that would be my biggest criticism.”*

At a particular meeting, which I missed, Theodore and Calvin became involved in a very intense debate. As Cathy later told me in interview:

*“There was a meeting you weren’t at which Calvin chaired, I thought they were going to get into fighting each other. I mean it was ridiculous.”*

**Table 6 - Example of controversy in Thanet Friends of the Earth**

<b>1. Theodore</b>	I feel that a thing like packaging, the decision on packaging, cannot be taken by local people. I mean the manager of the big Tesco must be a very important man, but he can't make any kind of decision on that.
<b>2.</b>	
<b>3.</b>	
<b>4. Jane</b>	But if everybody is taking their packaging back ...
<b>5. Marie</b>	The manager of Tesco is a woman
<b>6. Theodore</b>	Yeah, but no, but ...
<b>7. Jane</b>	She will say to her bigger boss 'we've got to do something about over packaging' /
<b>8. Theodore</b>	Yeah, I agree, but I think that as somebody said, it takes a lot of guts to do anything, even if you're a bit kind of committed, like us, and a bit tough like us, perhaps. Ordinary people in the end are not going to do it. Things like that, I would have said, have to be directed at the public in the form of some writing, or speeches on the corner, or something like that. Or even a little demonstration, rather than trying to get them to do something immediately. It's got to, in order for them to do that, it's got to become so, such a common idea, such an accepted idea that they don't feel that they are daft doing it.
<b>9.</b>	
<b>10.</b>	
<b>11.</b>	
<b>12.</b>	
<b>13.</b>	
<b>14.</b>	
<b>15.</b>	
<b>16. Marie</b>	The more people doing it, the more it's going to make a difference. The Women's Institute have been doing it for years. I think it's quite a long campaign.
<b>17.</b>	
<b>18. Theodore</b>	But as you were saying, it's colossally difficult. You're saying that you should buy a lot of stuff and then take it all back. But nobody knows where to put it then, do they?
<b>19.</b>	
<b>20.</b>	

Although the example given in Table 6 looks like a controversy, some participants don't let Theodore's 'rants' get under their collars. According to Jeff, for example:

*"In the time I've been there, well it wasn't really a conflict, it was just that meeting really about taking the waste back. And Theodore made a fuss about it, didn't he, really. And it's difficult to sometimes understand what he's taking about, isn't it? So it wasn't really a conflict, it was only really him, wasn't it? But I don't know if there's been any others at all."*

Peter stated that he often doesn't pay much attention to some of the things that Theodore says because 'they are just so silly'. Cathy, on the other hand, believes that Theodore has got some sensible things to say, and that the best way to prevent his interventions from erupting into a

conflictual situation is to sound him out ‘until he runs out of steam’. This is certainly what happened at a meeting I chaired (in an emergency because Marie was ill):

**Neville** I mean Theodore was particularly bad at your meeting and you sorted him out, which was quite good.

**CS** I don’t remember how I did that

**Cathy** Just like you would with a stupid student. You just sort of listened carefully, didn’t give him any feedback on it and then sort of pushed on the meeting to the next thing. And he was quite content because he’d run out of steam. Theodore says very sensible things if you don’t try to stop him from saying it.

In Conscious Consumers, the conflicts were over how to write a speech in a small group setting, whether the group should call for a ban of Coca Cola, or go for dispensation, why Valerie (a Welfare sabbatical candidate) failed to support the campaign to ban Coca Cola, whether the group should purchase Kill Cola stickers, the best date to hold the Echo Logik party, the purpose of the mobile phone campaign, what to do with the phone mast banner, and whether to show the film *The Corporation*. Unlike in TFoE, the controversies were not attributable to a single strong personality.

In both groups, the controversies were related to actions, evolved naturally from the agenda, lasted 3-9 minutes and involved at least half of the meetings’ participants. They tended to involve the use of ‘soft’ rather than ‘hard’ power (i.e. arguments and emotions rather than threats of disruption, or strong personalities) to resolve debates, were at least semi-focused, and were caused by the dissent of a very small minority or an individual – suggesting that there were no obvious factions within the group. However, the relations were more symmetrical in Conscious Consumers, whereas the controversies in TFoE tended to be dominated by a particular individual. Nonetheless, the use of hard power was restricted to just one occasion, and happened during a Conscious Consumers meeting. Freeda, for example, claimed ‘Oh well, I won’t not come, then’ to the planned showing of the three-hour long film *The Corporation*, as an, albeit mild, form of threat of disruption. Nonetheless, Conscious Consumers, participants were generally more satisfied with the resolution of conflicts than they were in TFoE, where participants tended to remain silent even when they had strong feelings on an issue in order to maintain harmonious group relations. According to Jeff, TFoE members approach, of going out of their way to not upset others, is partly to blame for the lack of actions / protests that the group gets involved in:

*“Well, because people, the general impression I get, which is probably very similar in most groups is that people don’t want to commit themselves or upset other people by voicing their opinions strongly and so things tend to not be acted on, don’t they?”*

Once participants become more familiar with one another, they may be able to express their thoughts to one another more frankly. Peter agreed that more social bonding would allow participants to be ‘more comfortable to disagree and speak more openly’.

Both Neville and Cathy had regretted not airing their views more clearly, particularly in the early days of the group when, due to advice from national FoE, the local group was encouraged not to focus on the Westwood Cross campaign. The ideal would be to seek a balance between expressing ones views as part of an open debate, whilst avoiding overt personal criticism. As Peter said in interview:

*“We should be, as adults, capable of that any way. You know, having mature, open democratic discussion. We should be able to do that. And disagree completely but reach a conclusion.”*

Poor facilitation might also explain the lack of cohesive group dynamics in TFoE. Many participants felt that although Marie was an excellent coordinator who was very committed to the

cause, she was ‘not a naturally good chair’ (Cathy in interview). Communication was to some extent stifled because of Marie’s very quiet voice and strong French accent, which sometimes led to misunderstandings within the group. According to Cathy, Marie ‘might not have been picking up in nuances in peoples’ behaviour and language which might have told her that people were a bit discontented with what was happening’ (in interview).

Certainly it is the case that Conscious Consumers knew one another to a greater extent than TFoE members. But, in the case of Conscious Consumers, a lack of familiarity between newcomers and regular participants did not prevent either party from airing their views. Perhaps it is the case that younger people have few scruples or sensitivities in social settings. It may also be the case that they have developed discussion skills in academic seminars that they continued to practice outside of the seminar room. In contrast to TFoE, debates in Conscious Consumers meetings were much more open. I asked David if what he would do if he was not convinced of the outcome of a debate, and he replied:

*“I like to think I’d have a convincing argument. It’s the sort of society where they would take it into consideration, if not like totally. They wouldn’t just completely ignore you and say ‘right, we’ll do that’.”*

Even when a critic had stuck posters up around the University openly criticising Conscious Consumers, the group remained open to debate. The critic had claimed that the group was a middle class and therefore exclusive initiative, promoting expensive and supposedly ethical goods that can only be purchased at great cost. The critic claimed that fair trade was a worthless endeavour, that the group was encouraging inaction and was over-reacting to ‘scare stories’ about Coca Cola’s ethical record. The group responded in a newsletter article, justifying its approach, but also stating that:

*“We welcome these and any other criticisms as we are aware that the topics dealt with are complex, without right or wrong answers; this creates a healthy climate for ongoing dialogue. (Conscious Consumers 2006c:4).”*

There have been few conflicts in both groups, but for different reasons. In Conscious Consumers, conflicts were rare because participants largely shared viewpoints on campaign targets and tactics. There was less certainty over the choice of the mobile phone mast as a campaign, thus, it became the subject of contention – with half the group believing it to be a crucial campaign focus, and half remaining sceptical. Excepting the mobile phone campaign, when conflicts did occur in Conscious Consumers it was generally over what were perceived by some to have been overly radical campaign strategies. As with the Westwood controversy in TFoE, the conflict over whether to fly-sticker Coca Cola machines had the side effect of offending at least one participant, who failed to turn up to subsequent meetings. In TFoE the conflicts were the result of an individual’s ‘ranting’, or an unarticulated reaction to the poorly chaired meetings.

In Conscious Consumers, voting was the most common means of resolving controversies. In TFoE, voting was never used, although interviewees recognised that voting does have its advantages. None the less:

*“In a very small group, it does seem very odd to vote. But actually at the last meeting if we’d voted then I think that would have been quite important really.”*

Jeff agreed that:

*“If there is something that we think is controversial and we think people might disagree then we should definitely give people a chance to vote if they want to.”*

Voting is seen as an effective way of making decisions in both groups even if it is rarely used in practice. David from Conscious Consumers commented that ‘it’s just an easy way to resolve it [conflict], because otherwise you’re just going to be talking forever ... I think it’s just better to get a vote out of the way, really, it’s the easiest way’. According to Dave ‘if you can’t get agreement then

it's kind of the only way' (interview). Max, similarly agreed that 'otherwise I don't see how [you can come to a decision]. I mean we could have hidden ballots so that everyone could still vote'. But generally, consensus is the preferred way of reaching a decision if it can be made without too much ado or without taking up too much time. Max, for example, said 'we are quite a quiet bunch. And I get the impression that people are really willing to let themselves be heard even if they know it's not in the general sort of opinion.'

## **6. Solidarity – cliquy?**

Both groups were aware of their need to be internally solidary to make them cohesive enough for effective debates and protests, whilst avoiding an appearance of cliquy in order to continue to attract new members (Saunders forthcoming).

In the Conscious Consumers Society, most group members know one another well. The core members were anthropology students, who travelled to Spain for the third year of their four-year degree and are very close friends. Other students seem to mostly be studying environmental social science or politics. There was a lot of group solidarity – the core members often socialised together on Wednesday evenings, and there have been end of term get-togethers and parties. The group has an egalitarian and open culture. The group decided on the name Conscious Consumers because it allows the group to tackle a broad range of environmental, social and political justice themes. In meetings, participants frequently use the pronoun 'we' – 'we should do this...' etc. reflecting shared principles. The group is very friendly, and offensive words are rarely spoken, if at all. Most group members are pretty passive, and meetings can sometimes be a little lacking in energy / initiative. Most of the participants seem to have fairly radical views, although these are tempered by several more reformist participants.

Because TFoE only meets once a month, the sense of 'we' is fairly weak. Different members turn up each month, and the sense of agreement between participants varies depending on who is there. The group was at its strongest under the leadership of Marie, who worked hard in between meetings to ensure that the group achieved things. Once Marie was unable to attend the meetings, the group began to achieve much less. Marie and her husband, Calvin, did seem to be the key figures. However, others do work hard on particular issues. Nonetheless, the group does seem to lack solidarity, partly because there are few joint social events to bind the group together. All TFoE participants seem to have busy lives, and usually want to retire to their homes rather than to the pub after meetings. As Peter said in interview:

*"That's the problem, isn't it. You know, physically. A two-hour meeting of a lot of droning and ranting, or whatever, you just want to go home sometimes."*

The challenge is to introduce social events that don't feel like a burden to group members in order to achieve more affective bonds that allow for honest and open debate to develop unhindered.

Neither group appears to have become cliquy to the extent that they are inaccessible to newcomers. Generally, activists from both groups respect one another's views and rarely use the exclusive communication techniques of slang, acronyms and intellectual terminology, making them fairly accessible to outsiders.

## **7. Suggestions for improving group dynamics**

In both groups, decisions are mostly made by tacit agreement, and it is not always clear when a decision has been made. In order to improve their decision making, they both need to make it clear to meeting participants what has been decided. The facilitator could check that the group is happy with a proposal and summarise what s/he thinks has been decided at the end of the meeting. Meeting participants should only suggest campaign actions that they think are feasible and/or in which they intend to participate themselves, thus reducing the tendency for 'white elephant'

decisions. There was some debate in the feedback session to TFoE about this point, and it was suggested that the recommendation be applied with caution so as to not stifle innovative campaigning ideas. In both groups, the general discussion tended to drift from the point. Therefore participants should be aware of the need to remain on track in order to get closure on agenda items before pressing on to the next agenda item. Go-rounds could be used more frequently in both groups in order to get participation from all group members, and to prevent one or two individuals from dominating the meetings. Everyone's view is important, and should be heard even if it is only through voting, which might be used more frequently, especially in TFoE in order to give participants a sense of involvement in decision-making. However, explicit consensus may be preferable.

Both groups relied very heavily on their coordinators, and greater delegation of tasks would help – simply rotating the role of facilitator would reduce the pressure on key individuals. TFoE in particular should perhaps focus on smaller and more manageable campaign actions to prevent 'white elephant' decision-making. These should be designed to attract as much public attention as possible. Such actions could play a number of important roles: motivating current group members, getting publicity, and attracting newcomers. Finally, minutes should be taken, and should be written in the form of action points. Progress on these action points can be checked at the next meeting. This would give the groups a sense of continuity, and, particularly with TFoE may prevent white elephant decision-making.

Drafts of the key content of this document were informally presented to the Conscious Consumers Society and to TFoE in natural group settings. No one disagreed with what was presented. One Conscious Consumers participant was a little concerned that it made his contribution to the group sound naïve, and that it made the decision-making procedure seem much more formal than it really was. Overall, though, both groups were very pleased to hear the results of the work, and seemed willing to take on board the suggestions for improving their decision-making. The recommendation to make more frequent use of go-rounds, however, was generally unpopular in Conscious Consumers, with group members expressing the concern that they would make the procedure seem too formal, and too much like an academic seminar. TFoE were much more willing to make use of go-rounds.

### *7.1 External democracy*

Both groups have been explicitly critical of democracy at the level of governance that most closely resonated with their campaigns. For TFoE this was the local council, and for Conscious Consumers it was Kent Union. Nevertheless, there were also criticisms of democracy at the national level and beyond as expressed in meetings, literature and interviews. Cathy from TFoE, for example claimed in interview that 'democracy is being able to take part in decision-making processes and be heard. So, for example, I don't think Britain is very democratic, I don't think it's a democracy' (Interview, July 2007).

Conscious Consumers is especially critical of the role that corporations play in distorting democracy at the national and international levels. The Christmas edition of their newsletter stated:

Happy Christmas. Time to celebrate the cherished and honourable ideals of universal peace and goodwill by being subjected to a relentless barrage of pathologically devious and distorted advertisements, while compiling loathsome testimonials of greed; whereafter – in a effort to finance this delirious spectacle of overindulgence – we borrow trillions from obscenely profitable banks and transfer it to unspeakably prosperous corporations: effectively ensuring their totalitarian conquest over humanity (Conscious Consumers 2006b:1)

## 7.2 Local democracy in Thanet

There is a lot of scepticism about the efficacy of lobbying local MPs, especially Stephen Ladyman (conservative MP for South Thanet), who is transport minister of one of the most congested areas in Britain! He was been variously described by TfOE participants as ‘a slimy toad’, ‘an incompetent minister’ and ‘a joke’. Peter Jarman (coordinator of TfOE) claimed that ‘the opportunities to participate feel like they are a bit distant and not great, basically’ and Jeff said that ‘certainly round here, there is a general attitude that our local council always seems to have a bad name ... and local elections have an even lower turn out [than national ones]’

## 7.3 Democracy in the Kent Union AGM

In particular, for Conscious Consumers, there was much criticism of the lack of ‘democracy’ at the Kent Union Annual General Meeting. It seemed to most participants to be undemocratic for a number of reasons: that the Union controls the flow of information, that participants had unequal degrees of experience in the Union’s formal democratic procedures, and that the process seemed generally unfair and was non-discursive and non-representative. As David explained in interview:

*“People with insider knowledge, the people at the Union Council, they always had the final say, it didn’t seem very fair at all. Usually the people governing a vote are meant to be neutral, they are not meant to be on either side. Yet it looked like they were against us, and also I didn’t like the fact that members of the Union Council ... stand against you ... Apparently they can veto a decision, so it doesn’t seem fair that they should be making speeches... It seemed like they had their own agenda, and it didn’t seem fair at all” (David)*

The panel also tried to stop the Conscious Consumers’ outside speaker from contributing to the AGM, even though he was a National Union of Students member who was allowed to speak under the AGM constitution. The outside speaker was Dave Glass, the president of Sussex Student Union, who had prepared to talk about the success the Coca Cola Boycott that was active at Sussex University. Max thought the attempt to bar him from speaking was the most undemocratic thing that happened at the meeting:

*“What really horrified me was when they tried to stop Dave Glass from speaking. And that’s probably the worst thing in terms of democracy – not letting people speak.”*

Although he concedes that most of the running of the meeting was ‘democratic’, Max thought the way that information was controlled by the Union was undemocratic:

*“The Union had a chance to read the motion, to prepare their speeches. They even wrote their speeches beforehand. And something that could have easily been done would be to put the motions on the website, for example.”*

It was clear to participants that the Union had actively organised against the motion prior to the AGM:

*“There were guys going round being given copies of speeches and being told when to clap, that wasn’t quite democracy.” (David)*

The Conscious Times newsletter reported along these lines that ‘Kent Union controls the spread of information, and thus manipulates the AGM to their advantage. Ultimately you end up with something closely representing a biased system of governance’ (Conscious Consumers 2007:4).

This made it particularly undemocratic, not least because it was non-discursive. But the issue was not just about the debate’s non-discursive nature, but also about the manner in which the Union seemed to control the whole process. Even if the motion had been successfully passed at the AGM, the Union Council would have sought to overturn the decision by using a referendum. In interview, Mark Leach, Education Sabbatical, who was against the boycott Coca Cola motion claimed that:

*“if the motion had passed then that would have been fine. I would have made a resolution to call a referendum and we would be doing that this week, and that would have been quite exciting actually.”*

When I told Max, from Conscious Consumers of the plans to introduce a referendum should the motion have won, he replied that:

*“then at the end of the day it’s not democratic because the people who truly decide are the people in the Union. Because if the motion passes at the one democratic opportunity and then the Union decides to fire against it and they’ve got all the means for information - they’ve got web pages, they’ve got printing, they can use our money to print their propaganda ... It’s a small Society fighting against the Union in terms of information, it’s totally unequal.”*

There was definitely no evidence of deliberative democracy at the AGM, but instead evidence of students having pre-formed opinions that they stuck to rigidly. As Max expressed in interview:

*“I think people came knowing what they were going to vote. They didn’t come to listen to a debate. They came to vote for and against, and ... may be a small majority were willing to change their mind, but really I think that the majority came to block the Coke motion.”*

Conscious Consumers participants would have preferred a more open and discursive debate, and for the rules of the debate to be applied in a fairer manner. Each speaker was given two minutes to get across his or her own points. David commented that:

*“It would have been nice if we were told more about it. I mean we had no idea about the thing, we had no idea about the balance of arguments, we thought it was going to be an open debate, and they didn’t seem very helpful towards informing us. It was all like, ‘well, you haven’t used the Union before, tough luck’ sort of thing. And that didn’t seem to be fair at all, like.”* (David)

And Dave thought:

*“I thought they were going to ... have a debate and pass the microphone around, and be very open and flowing ... But you know ... it was really awkward and an inflexible way of doing it. You couldn’t really argue properly. And also it’s unfair when they put you in that situation where you have to stand up in front of everyone at a lectern and make your points.”* (Dave)

Several Conscious Consumers’ participants commented on how the two minutes allocated to the opposition seemed to last a lot longer than the two-minute slots they themselves received. David, for example, stated that:

*“Each speaker was supposed to have two minutes. I don’t think we had two minutes, did we? Let’s be honest now ... you know that older guy, with his two points [against boycotting Coke]. He seemed to go for ages about those two points. For absolutely ages, like.”* (David)

As well as being critical of the lack of discursive debate, Conscious Consumers also critiqued the representative democracy process of voting, in particular what they conceived to be the nonsense of 200 people present at the meeting legitimately making a decision on behalf of approximately 14,000 other students. According to Mark Leach, Education Sabbatical in Kent Union, the supporters of the motion to Boycott Coca Cola were a minority interest. The Union allows every student to have their say, but if a particular issue comes up, students can be mobilized to vote on it. He argued that the boycotters were favourably represented. David agreed that they were a minority, but even so that more students should have taken part in the decision-making process:

*“More than 200 people should be making such an important decision for their Union. I mean, I am sure there’s a lot of people who don’t want Coke on campus, and totally disagree with its ethics and yet they weren’t there to speak about it ... I suppose from our point of view, we represent a biased minority as well, we were all there for one reason and one reason only, I suppose. We could have done with a much wider group of people.”* (David)

## 8. Conclusion

The two groups studied are very different, and yet they have a number of similarities in their decision-making structures. They are both bound to formal organisational rules of a higher organisation, they have few participants, reluctant leaders and have mostly middle class participants. They both mostly make decisions by tacit agreement and seem reluctant to vote. However, it is their different characteristics that can account for some of the differences in their decision-making practices and the degree of satisfaction with internal democracy.

Conscious Consumer participants are generally much younger, commit more time to the cause, and know one another fairly well. In contrast, there is much less commitment and less social bonding amongst TFoE members. The result is that Conscious Consumer participants are willing and able to have open debates, they freely express their views and they can easily identify when a vote should be taken to resolve difficult issues. As Andretta, Bandler et al, and Calle and Robles suggest in their reports, friendship confers respect and makes open debate easier, giving, in the words of Calle and Robles, 'greater adherence towards the local group'.

In TFoE, participants generally have much less time to commit to the cause, or to getting to know one another socially, and as a consequence they tend to remain quiet when they disagree with something so as to not upset other participants with whom they are only just beginning to form friendly relations. The infrequent meetings and lack of socials are partly to blame for the lack of cohesion between TFoE participants. The problem is that groups with little internal cohesion (rather like Attac Florence, see Andretta's report) do not consolidate, and can as a result lose participants. This could also partly explain the tailing off of participants in TFoE.

In TFoE there is, generally, a greater degree of dissatisfaction with decision-making processes, partly due to the fact that, through no fault of her own, Marie was not a very facilitative coordinator. The Swiss team found some similarities in this regard: a lack of formalised decision-making structure can lead to conflict and discontent. But in the case of TFoE the discontent was not vocalised because participants were being conciliatory. In contrast to the apparent dissatisfaction with Marie's facilitation, Dave and Max's approach was highly respected by Conscious Consumer participants. The other major difference between the groups is the presence of a strong and 'awkward' personality in TFoE, that several participants struggled to easily accommodate, often becoming defensive and objectionable in their responses rather than sounding him out before quickly moving on to the next agenda item. Conscious Consumers did not have to juggle personality management with a lack of social cohesion in the manner that TFoE has been forced to, resulting in a much more cohesive and deliberative group culture.

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## Interviews

The following **Conscious Consumers** participants: Dave (co-president 2006-7), Max (co-president 2006-7), David (president 2007-8, seconder of Coca Cola motion at the Union AGM), Kylie (proposer of the Coca Cola motion at the Union AGM).

Also interviewed Matt Smith, Educational Sabbatical officer and Kent Union Council member. He opposed the Coca Cola motion.

The following **TFoE participants**: Peter (founder member and co-coordinator since April 2007) and Jeff (co-coordinator April 2007), Cathy and Neville (press officers).

All interviewees and meeting participants are referred to using pseudonyms rather than their real names in the interests of confidentiality.

# Attac-France and No-Vox

By Nicolas Haeringer

(CRPS Paris I)

## 1. Introduction

Both Attac-France and No-Vox are organizations that easily can be attributed to the Global Justice Movement mobilizations. They take actively part in most of its encounters, such as counter-summits and social forums, not to mention that they sometimes initiate some of them.

Attac, for instance, has been one of the key relays and resources for organizing the first World Social Forum (see Cassen 2003)<sup>6</sup>. It had even organized an international meeting in 1999 that many consider as being the first step towards the Porto Alegre encounter; whereas No-Vox has been one of the main organizers of the last “European Marches against unemployment, precarity and exclusion” that converged to Heiligendam, where the counter Summit to the 2007 G8 meeting took place.

The two groups actually share most of the GJM's features: reticular organization-appeal, including attraction for a project-based organization<sup>7</sup>; socialization at the international level; claims in terms of democracy, etc. However, important differences should be stressed between both organizations, enlightening the relative heterogeneity of the GJM as such. No-Vox and Attac-France diverge in their official status, their resources (including financial ones), their role and place within the public sphere and the GJM, their action repertoires, etc. Such divergences have also to be stressed while analyzing the way they both handle the democratic issues.

No-Vox was launched in 2002, during the first European Social Forum, whereas Attac is only four years older. As many other “young” organizations, neither Attac nor No-Vox have a stabilized organizational structure. Hence, conflicts and debates are recurrent in their ways of handling internal democracy. The organizational activity is dominant (Alter 2000: 139), Their members dedicate a lot of time to discussions on how these organizations should be working, try to implement decision making processes (Attac) or discuss the organization’s project (Attac and No-Vox), etc. It can even turn into open conflicts, such as the one that provoked Attac's recent crisis – linked to a massive electoral fraud in 2006 eventually lead to the resignation from 4 of its board members (on the 22nd of October 2007). Reflexivity being one important way of engaging in these organizations, there is no doubt that such conflicts are emphasized. They also acquire relevance, as they are occasions for a full deployment from both critic and justification of organizational choices.

This chapter is based on participant observations. From March 2007 to August 2007, I attended four meetings of Attac-France’s board. From April 2006 to October 2007, I participated in 14 of No Vox coordination group’s meetings.

The general introduction to this Workpackage report underlines that participant observation is not a monolithic methodology – a feature that these observations have confirmed. Participation was as low as possible as far as Attac is concerned: There were no other interferences than my physical presence in the meeting’s room. As every meeting I observed was also attended by several observers (between 4 and more than 30), my presence did not change the course of the discussions. Very rarely, people turned to me, intrigued by the noise of my fingers tipping extensive notes on my laptop<sup>8</sup>. The fact that I personally knew, through other researches and/or engagements, several

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6 Even if other (oral) sources let believe that Cassen exaggerates his role (presenting himself as the main ressource person for setting up the first WSF) he played a central role in this invention.

7 Boltanski and Chiapello have shown that projects enable to bound a network, ie. to let it turn into a collective actor. Boltanski, Chiapello (1999:157).

<sup>8</sup> After a long speech, a board member even asked me if I could send him the transcription of his intervention.

members of the board created confidence. I could sit with other board members during lunches, listen to their side discussions, and make informal interviews to understand better what was at stake, etc.

Observation was much more participant within No-Vox: My engagement in the group's dates back to WSF 2006 in Bamako, Mali. From then on, I participated in the group's life, under a form that can be compared to a low-degree action-research, as part of my research on Social Forums. Being an active member shapes the observation: For instance, bringing a laptop into the squat where No-Vox's coordination group usually meets would have changed the atmosphere created by the few participants. Actually, making hand-written notes seemed also irrelevant to No-Vox's microculture. Hence, notes are much less exhaustive, which leads to a more general analysis than for Attac. I made a few interviews, both formal and informal, to implement the observation.

This report is not structured by organizations, but around some features or problems that are relevant for both Attac and No-Vox – and probably for most of the GJM organizations. The first chapter focuses on the organizations' main features: The objective is to draw a common frame to analyze and possibly compare these two groups. The second step of the report consists of an overview of the tests that Attac and No-Vox face or have been through: Open conflicts and electoral fraud (Attac) or the challenge of articulating low-resources and extraversion (No-Vox). Finally, the report focuses on the groups' meetings themselves and addresses decision-making processes. Even when the report does not specifically concentrate on the groups' sessions, its basis and main material come from participant observation.

## **2. A tale of two organizations: Similarities and specificities**

This section starts with a presentation of Attac's and No-Vox's birth, composition and constitution. Then, it focuses on their action-repertoires and their forms of membership. Finally, it presents how both of them intend to build an autonomous public space.

### *2.1 Attac France: "an organization unlike any other"*<sup>9</sup>

Attac's birth dates back to June 1998. The association was officially set-up in June 1998, as the result of the success of an article from *Le Monde Diplomatique*, a French monthly. Indeed, in its December 1997 issue, Ignacio Ramonet, Chief Editor, proposed a strategy to "*disarm the markets*". He explicitly suggested to create a new NGO: the *Association pour une taxe Tobin d'aide aux Citoyens*<sup>10</sup>. Connected to "*trade unions and associations with a cultural, social or ecologic finality, it could act as a tremendous civic pressure group*", that would lobby governments, in order to "*push them to demand*" such an international tax.

This editorial already singles out two territorial levels of intervention on which to invest through the forthcoming association: Attac is meant to handle both at the transnational level (where regulations should be implemented) and the national one(s) (where governments should be lobbied, so that they engage in the implementation of new regulation mechanisms)<sup>11</sup>.

Attac is presented as an "association unlike any other". Its originality doesn't lay in the fact that it offers two forms of membership: for organizations so as individuals - a feature shared by many other associations. It is rather to be found in the importance of two original bodies, namely the 'founders' committee and the 'scientific council'. Attac distinguishes active members (individuals or organizations that pay the membership fees) from "founder members". Founder members are, as one can imagine, organizations or individuals that were involved in the association's birth.

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<sup>9</sup> Bernard Cassen, quoted by Capdevielle, in Crétiez, Sommier (2006).

<sup>10</sup> Which turned into Association pour la Taxation des Transactions financières et l'Aide aux Citoyens.

<sup>11</sup> See for instance "lettre aux adhérents d'Attac, 28 septembre 1998, <http://france.attac.org/spip.php?article641> accessed on december, the 27<sup>th</sup> of 2007.

However, it is possible to become a founder even after Attac's creation - being appointed requires a two-third majority from the founders' college.

Members of the founders' college are:

- Several "resource"-persons, i.e.. intellectuals, artists, journalists, activists and trade-unionists : José Bové, Manu Chao, René Dumont (who died in 2001), Viviane Forrester, Susan George, Gisèle Halimi, Bernard Langlois, Daniel Mermet, Daniel Monteux, René Passet, Ignacio Ramonet, Jacques Robin, Pierre Tartakowsky. Jacques Nikonoff was appointed as a "founder college member" in 2002, Jacques Cossart in 2006, Jean-Marie Harribey and Aurélie Trouvé in 2007;
- nine newspapers or reviews : *Alternatives économiques*, *Charlie Hebdo*, *Golias*, *le Monde Diplomatique*, *Pétition*, *Politique (Revue européenne)*, *Politis*, *Témoignage Chrétien*, *Transversales/Science/Culture*;
- thirteen trade-unions : Fédération des Banques CFDT; Fédération des Finances de la CGT, UGICT-CGT, SNPTAS Équipement CGT; FSU and some of its components: SNES, SNESSup, SNUipp; the "Groupe des 10" and two of its components: SUD-PTT, SNUI;
- two farmers' unions : Confédération Paysanne, Modéf;
- five organization from the "have-nots" movement: AC!, APEIS, DAL, Droits devants!!, MNCP (the first four of them are also members of No-Vox);
- eight NGOs, coordinations or platforms : Artisans du Monde (fair-trade), CADAC (feminist group), Confédération Générale des Scoop (cooperatives platform), CRID (NGO platform), ESCOOP (cooperative platform), FFMJC (federation of "house for youth and culture), Friends of the Earth (les Amis de la Terre), Réseau Services Publics Européens (Network for european public services), UFAL (laygroup);
- 3 experts groups : AITEC, CEDETIM, Raisons d'Agir.

These organizations have been involved in the definition of the association's project and nature. They have been resourceful, offering time, money, networks, expertise, experience, and action repertoires as much as Attac has been for them a space where to access, mobilize or develop new resources. Attac also relies upon a 'scientific council'. In an association that wants to be a "movement for popular education", it was assigned the mission to guarantee the "scientific rigor" of the associations studies' and documents' It offers a possibility for intellectuals, mostly economists, to use their expertise as a form of political commitment.

Attac's founders' committee is the association's most important body: it provides 18 of the 30 board members. Moreover, board members from the founders' committee are appointed on a closed list with 18 names. Attac's members cannot choose which founder they want to be represented by within the board, but only accept or reject the one and only list that is submitted.

Attac's president is supposed to "lead the association and to dispose of the most extended power to insure [the association's] representation, in France as well as abroad, to public institutions so as to third persons". He/she "leads the discussions within the steering committee and the board meetings so as during the General Assembly which he chairs"; "watches and makes sure that status are respected", "signs all the acts, measures and deliberation statement that concern the association, opens accounts". Though the president, founders' control on the association is therefore secured.

The other important body already mentioned, namely the scientific council, recruits also through cooptation - members have to be appointed by a vote from Attac's board.

## 2.2 No-Vox: Voicing out the voiceless

No-Vox, whose birth dates back to the European Social Forum 2002, is an international network of grass-roots organizations that define themselves as the voice “have-nots”. It claims for a “*new stage in the building of an alternative to neoliberal capitalism*”, that would place “poor” and “have-nots” at its center<sup>12</sup>. It focuses on Social Forums and other GJM encounters, calling for the “*mobilization of financial resources to fund the journey of popular movements’ representatives, instead of the ones and only executives*”. Of course, the objective is not only to ensure the participation of « have-nots » to Social Forums: their participation should enable them to build common initiatives, strengthen their struggles, etc.

“Have-nots” invisibility in the first social forums led to the creation of the network. Farid, member of both AC! and Marches européennes explains: “*I was at the first World Social Forum, in Porto Alegre. And... you know, there were around 1200 French here. Only the 5 of us were have-nots. Do you realize it? Only 5, among 1200. This is a problem, this is not acceptable. Because social forums, they are meant to be spaces for us. We are supposed to meet, to decide...*”<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, researches have shown that the GJM does not gather globalization’s losers, but rather “*rooted cosmopolitans*”, “*high skilled activists*”<sup>14</sup>.

The members of No-Vox are:

- 10 French organizations: Agir Ensemble contre le Chômage (AC!), Droit au Logement (DAL), Droits Devants!, Marches Européennes, Association Pour l’Emploi, l’Information et la Solidarité (APEIS), Comité Des Sans-Logis (CDSL), Droits Paysans, Vamos!, Stop Précarité, Génération Précaire, to which one guyanese organization should be added: Blou Blou Fini Guyane;
- 2 portuguese organizations: Solidariedade Imigrante, Direito a Habitação;
- 2 belgian organizations: Solidarité Nouvelle, Comité du Quartier Midi;
- one indian organization, the National Campaign for Dalits Human Rights
- three japanese organizations: NOJIREN (homeless), Kamagasaki Patrol (unemployed and precarious workers), Sanya (precarious workers)
- one malian organization: Association Malien des Expulsés
- three brasilian organizations: Movimento Nacional de Luta pela Moradia, Gamins de l’Art Rue, Movimento Hip Hop Organizado do Brasil
- most recent members are: the People’s Parliament (Kenya) and an organization from Bénin.

Isabelle Sommier has analyzed the specific features of these movements: They are engaged in a struggle for their own autonomy, as a social actor, and associate resource-persons, mobilizations’ entrepreneurs and “victims” (Sommier, 2003:131ff).

They aim at organizing a population that is largely excluded, and not well represented even within social movements. “Have-nots” organizations seek for the mutualization of resources, in order to implement their visibility, strengthen their struggles and possibly achieve their claims. No-Vox has engaged in a very critical relation to actors from the political institutions. As shown by Mouchard (2002), “have-nots” organizations have built a space autonomous from the political sphere: They have changed their relation to the state, from dependency (on its subsidies) to a negative vision of the State, considered as an opponent. However, they have not abolished the

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<sup>12</sup> “No-Vox, déclaration de mai 2002”, <http://www.novox.ras.eu.org/site/spip.php?article7>, accessed on december, the 28<sup>th</sup> of 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with the author, 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2006, in Athens, before the ESF, same for other quotes.

<sup>14</sup> This is one of the output of the Demos research. See also Agrikoliansky, Sommier (2005).

dependency of individual situation on the state's policies. In order to prevent this dependency to reduce radicalism, these organizations have been very attentive to protect the autonomy of the space they engage in.

The dynamics is, to some extent, similar regarding the GJM. Participating in the movement, so as being an activist in an organization fighting for global justice requires skills and resources (such as: commanding foreign languages, ability to network, and, of course, funds to travel, etc.). There resources are not equally available, nor are they equally shared. "Have-nots" have then considered that their exclusion from GJM encounters were the consequence of a choice made by organizers: While refusing to take into account poor people's specific needs, they would contribute to the reproduction of social exclusions. Thus, for Farid: *"they were speaking about us, in our name. But they don't represent us. To understand how a blind man lives, you have to be blind yourself, being an intellectual doesn't help. We are the voiceless in the society, but we are also the voiceless of the social movement. We are the Social Forums' voiceless"*.

"Have-nots" organizations depend on grants from GJM organizations, among other founders: For instance, No-Vox's participation in Social Forum is partially funded by the CCFD (Comité catholique contre la faim et pour le développement). In order to avoid remaining at this level of relation, and moving to a more equal one, No-Vox has engaged in a critical relation with the GJM: It acknowledges its importance, its achievements, but always stresses, at the same time, what it has not achieved – and points out responsibilities at the same time. In this perspective, the absence of the "Have-nots" from Social Forums is not only the consequence of the cost of a plane ticket, but rather results from the choice not to create a solidarity fund.

### 2.3 Action repertoires

Attac and No-Vox's action repertoires are quite complex and broad. Attac, as a movement for popular education, develops as a collective of expertise: It analyzes (through its scientific council) the main characteristic of neoliberal globalizations so as its consequences. It releases books, flyers, briefs, etc.; organizes debates, discussions and conferences, such as a Summer University. It however also engages in lobby, at the national level, so as the European and international ones. Finally, it participates or initiates protests and demonstrations, etc. Until now, the association has never officially been involved in any direct action, but has supported anti-GMOs activists.

No-Vox is very eager to initiate or join direct action. Indeed, No-Vox, among other organizations, participates in Social Forums "one step inside, one step outside". The network participates both in the official forum and in "autonomous spaces". No-Vox contributes to the building of margins to Social Forums. Building margins to the "open space" is a way to prove that the space has still boundaries and gates.

The following dialog is an excerpt from No-Vox last meeting before the WSF of 2007. Doubts have been shared about the organization of this forum: Many NGOs (as opposed to grass-roots movements) would attend it, threatening its radicalism<sup>15</sup>.

*J.: It is better to be involved in grass-roots campaign, to be with... like the CADTM, people we resemble to.*

*D.: We still have to be there, we go there and we will bug them [NGOs]. What you explained, it doesn't surprise me. I'm not surprised when I'm told that it will be an elitist forum. But what the fuck? Nevermind, we go there, as soon as we arrive, we start confronting them.*

*A.: it is still a good opportunity for us to meet among us, to build concrete solidarities, etc.*

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<sup>15</sup> December, 16th 2006.

This form of “critical membership” multiplies opportunities for voice. Thus, what can be at first considered as an Exit strategy turns into a means to increase the voice, expand its audience, etc. As explained by Farid, “*we’ve always had one foot inside, one foot out. Or actually, we had two feet in, two feet outside, so that we don’t fall. This is our way not to renounce to the voice*”. This position is not as much a threat to leave than an attempt to multiply potential resources (for instance in terms of visibility). The network has been involved in different squats (WSF 2003, ESF 2003), joined and gave visibility to a demonstration to which WSF 2006 Malian organizers were opposed to; contributed to the actions at the gates of WSF 2007’s venue, etc.

Nevertheless, it is also active in the ESF preparatory process, playing the complex game of negotiations within the European Preparatory Assemblies or its program group. It facilitates the ESF’s “exclusion” thematic network<sup>16</sup>. In fact, at the Forum’s scale No-Vox unfolds a set of action from civil disobedience to the most elaborated forms of lobbying.

#### 2.4 Hybrid membership

Both Attac and No-Vox can be defined, at least partially, as “organizations of organizations”: they do not (or not only) gather individual members, but their core is made of organizations. However, Attac’s success completely changed its organizational nature, transforming the organization in a mass-movement: Attac has nowadays more than 11,000 members (and had up to 20,000 members), whereas some participants in the No-Vox’s meetings do not represent any organizations.

Attac is a formal organization: individuals have to register and pay fees. In return, they receive a membership card, mentioning their “member’s number”, which also allows to know if membership is recent or dates back to the association’s birth. On the mailing-lists, so as on some forums, Attac’s members very often give this number: The lowest it is, the more impact it is supposed to give to the one speaking, as it proves an involvement in the whole association’s history.

No-Vox, on the contrary, is an informal network. It has a legal umbrella, the association “Les Amis de No-Vox”, used to take legal and official steps – such as seeking for grant. “No-Vox’s members” are not members of the “association des Amis de No-Vox”: There is no General Assembly, no board meeting, etc. Membership is not formalized: it is not required to pay fees or to sign a platform, but is rather based on a common experience and a shared vision. In fact, it is possible to participate in the group’s meetings without being aware of the Association des Amis de No-Vox. The Association’s treasurer attended only three of the 14 meetings observed. In the meetings’ reports, “Amis de No-Vox” was then mentioned as one of the participant-organization, as if the association would be a member of the network like the others.

After WSF 2007, the Kenyan grass-root organization “the People’s Parliament” has become a member of No-Vox: Contacts were built during the Forum, No-Vox members so as members from the People’s Parliament participated in the same seminars, organized protests, etc. No-Vox’s aims were explained to the Kenyan group, which was then informally appointed as a member of the network, without any further approval process. Ten months later, No-Vox raised funds to enable a member of the People’s Parliament to come to the alternative UE-Africa summit: even if informal, membership is not abstract but has very concrete consequences.

Hence, it is possible to define membership in the two organizations as hybrid. In Attac’s case, hybridation is deep and complex: The association’s constitution defines procedures to represent both types of members (founders and individuals), even if it is still looking for the right balance<sup>17</sup>. No-Vox’s informality and transnational dimension open possibilities for a very plastic participation

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<sup>16</sup> On the issue of this complex game, see the chapter by Haug, Haeringer and Mosca in the forthcoming book based on Demos WP6.

<sup>17</sup> Founders can also be individuals, adding a level of complexity in the membership’s hybridation.

in the French coordination group: While some organizations clearly mandate a representative, some participants informally represent their organization, so as others join on an individual basis. No difference is made during meetings between participants, whether they are or not mandated by an organization.

Attac and No-Vox not only share some formal features, such as hybrid membership, but also some members: 4 organizations directly involved in the birth of Attac are also members of No-Vox. Annie Pourre plays a central role in the definition of No-Vox's project and is a member of the Attac's board.

These similarities are not specific to Attac and No-Vox, but typical for Global Justice Movement organizations, at least for the newest ones<sup>18</sup>: activists from the GJM are multipositionned and connected, while GJM organizations associate different types of membership and recruitment, so as they articulate formal entities together with loose forms of participation.

## 2.5 Building an autonomous public space

We would like to stress here our two organizations they could be compared from another perspective. The two organizations contribute to the emergence of what Lilian Mathieu calls the "social movements space" (Mathieu, 2007:131ff)<sup>19</sup>: they intend to give autonomy (from the other spheres of engagement and their actors – political parties, trade-unions, economic actors, medias, etc.) to the space that is created by the "*relations of interdependences that tend to unify different mobilizations*" (Ibid:132). They aim at participating in the building of this space as having its own challenges, temporalities, rules and "*evaluation principles*" (Ibid.: 133f).

Indeed, both organizations establish themselves as autonomous from political parties. Bernard Cassen, Attac's first president (now Honorary President) has explained for a long time that the association was "*neither from the left nor from the right*", considering that these categories belong to a different space than the one Attac is part of.

No-Vox, as such, tries to maintain a critical distance towards actors from the political sphere, including parties. The network intends to strengthen the "*autonomy of the social movement*"<sup>20</sup>. Annie Pourre explains, "*No-Vox was created for the self organization of "have-nots". We are... we are grass-roots organizations, we are working with grass-roots organizations, we don't want to be... With political parties, we always face the risk of being instrumentalized*".

However, positions are not clear-cut. Attac's members, so as other GJM activists very often belong (or belonged) to several organizations. There are no figures available on the sociological profile of Attac's members<sup>21</sup>. However, it seems quite obvious that some of them belong also to a political party. For example, a local section of the Greens had even decided, back in 1999, to become member of Attac, as most of their activists were also involved in the newborn association. Founders of the association themselves are connected to political parties, such as the PCF and the Trotskyite party LCR. Bernard Cassen himself is a personal friend of Jean-Pierre Chevènement, former Minister of Interior from 1997 to 2002. Jacques Nikonoff, president of Attac from 2002 to 2006, was a member of the PCF executive committee until 2001. As a proof of the complex relation between Attac and the political sphere, members of the association (among whom Bernard Cassen and a member of the staff) decided to set up lists for the European elections 2004: "100% altermondialistes". They were opposed to the idea of joining an existing political party, but wanted to invent new political forms. Because of this decision's conflictual potential, the lists were eventually cancelled.

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Demos project, workpackages 3 and 4 reports.

<sup>19</sup> Quotes are our personal translation.

<sup>20</sup> As explained by Annie Pourre, informal interview with the author. Same source for the following quote.

<sup>21</sup> For an empiric analysis, see Wintrebert (2004) so as Wintrebert (2007:69ff).

The situation is similar regarding No-Vox. I have already stressed the group's conflictual relation to the state – obviously, it is translated into distrust in political parties, as proved by the quote above. However, one of its members, the APEIS, is bounded to the PCF. The representative of two organizations used to be an active member of the LCR. Active members of the No-Vox network have been involved in José Bové's candidature to the last presidential elections, participating in meeting or even joining his staff<sup>22</sup>. In fact, disagreements emerge very soon when the issue of political parties is addressed, as in the following discussion (the issue was the budget of the ESF 2006):

*“J-B: The main space was occupied by political parties, they don't respect the Forum's Charter. The risk... the risk is that it ends up as a closed space, a space for conflicts or alliances between parties.*

*A: The budget deficit will be met through trade-unions, they won't agree much longer with the current situation.*

*J-B: Ok, but I think that... regarding the Charter, we should be intransigent. We should call for a strict and abiding respect of the Charter. We won't let us be instrumentalized neither by political parties nor by trade unions.*

*(...)*

*M: I agree with you, parties should probably stand back. But you cannot say that there would be the good on the one side ( the DAL, No-Vox, and others), and, on the other side, the bad ones (parties and trade-unions).*

*A: But wait... parties have retrieved the forum's importance and achievements. We have managed to set up forms; we have set up a culture, a way to make us visible. What we have set up a little and fragile baby.*

*J-B: No-Vox is not a Support Committee... We've not created No-Vox for that”.*

No-Vox and Attac keep up very different relations to both medias and trade-unions. The dialogue already quoted proves No-Vox distrust of trade-unions, at least the biggest and most institutionalized ones<sup>23</sup>. The network has mostly built links to “outsiders” trade-unions, such as SUD. It has no direct connection to medias, but rather tries to build its own ones – No-Vox has a “picture” subgroup, that has already issued a DVD.

Attac's founders' committee is composed of trade-unions and independent medias. Actually, the association aims at framing the anti-neoliberal fields as a whole, in all its dimensions. It is seeking for the building of a space where all forces opposed to unbidled financial transactions could meet and act collectively<sup>24</sup>. Thus, the association itself is a space for the convergence of actors from different spheres, whose common point is the will to challenge political actors.

The same tensions (between autonomy and embedment, individual and collective membership, lobby and confrontation, etc.) thwart Attac and No-Vox, even if they handle them in different ways.

It is possible to explain Attac's and No-Vox's birth and features by the political opportunity structure, if we include the transnational level as a space in which political opportunities exist. Attac and No-Vox would offer “proposals for commitment” (Boltanski, 1993:52). as an answer to a democratic deficit at the transnational level as well as a way to contest the powerlessness of national and transnational institutions and actors. Indeed, Attac can be defined as being “a collective action directed neither to a national political system, nor to national political actors”. Thus, the following reasons would help explaining its birth and massive success: “beyond the French national

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<sup>22</sup> Including the author.

<sup>23</sup> On this issue, see both Sommier (2003) and Crétez, Sommier (2006:327ff).

<sup>24</sup> On this issue, for further developments, see Wintrebert (2007:24ff), so as Crétez, Sommier (2006:483ff).

*context, the international situation has clearly created the conditions for protest movements to appropriate such issues" (Wintrebet, 2007:17 and 20).*

However, studies have shown that neither the GJM in general nor particular organizations such as Attac can be fully explained in these terms<sup>25</sup>. Nationally-rooted actors, as structured by their resources, cooperation logics, possible conflicts, etc, also, if not mostly, produce them. The transnational level appear then as a space where to mobilize resources unavailable within the national fields.

Attac and No-Vox are spaces where to access transnational networks, when not to initiate them - or, at least, to connect previously unconnected networks. Moreover, they dedicate to a specific kind of work, which does not match social movement organizations' daily life: Attac concentrates on the analysis of neoliberalism, while No-Vox tries to build transnational forms of solidarity among grass-roots organizations. Both of them can thus be analyzed as spaces where to put together rare resources: For instance expertise (Attac) and transnational connections (No-Vox).

These two organizations borrow some of their principles and features from reticular universes, as they aim at being spaces where organizations from different natures, sizes or cultures can cooperate around shared projects. They strive for building consensual positions, as much as they look for common visions, and consider diversity as a wealth much more than as a threat<sup>26</sup>.

### **3. Global Justice Movement Organizations at test**

Hybrid membership, wide action repertoires, ambitious projects, and ambivalent relations to actors from the other spheres of engagement: Attac and No-Vox are complex organizations. Their evolution offers many opportunities to put their projects, principles, workings or cohesion at test.

Indeed, Attac has been confronted to its unexpected success that opened a gap between its members' demands and the association's constitution (first part). All along with personalities' conflicts, it opened an intense crisis<sup>27</sup> (second part). No-Vox challenges are slightly different: The network faces the difficulty to organize low resources grass-roots organizations on a transnational level – it has to find ways to invest in an expensive space (third part).

#### *3.1 Where is participation happening?*

Attac's "active" members are not nationally represented otherwise than through the 12 boards members. Attac's constitution does not mention any body for the coordination of local groups, nor does it plan any way of involving them in the association's decision making processes. The constitution was not drafted for a mass organization. Indeed, Attac's founders, including Bernard Cassen, did not foresee the success of the association. As much as 1000 monthly memberships were registered during the association's first months. In December 1998 Bernard Cassen announced that the association had more than 5 500 members. Soon after, membership will rise up to 20 000 making even more urgent the need for new democratic formulas different from those proposed at Attac's birth.

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25 See Agrikoliansky, Fillieule, Mayer (2005) for the french case, so as Andretta, della Porta, Mosca and Reiter (2002), for the Italian one. Agrikoliansky and Sommier (2005), on the second European Social Forum, also contribute to this approach, that tends to explain transnational mobilization (also) on the basis of the national fields and through organizational resources theories.

26 Consensus is a privileged form of decision making for pragmatic reasons much more than for normative ones - as a consequence to the actors' heterogeneity. See Aguiton and Cardon (2005).

27 For a more complete analysis of the crisis, see Wintrebet (2007:175-300).

If local groups were never considered as being secondary in comparison to the founders' committee, as far as decision-making is concerned they were however separated from national instances for a long time.

Responding to a recurrent demand, in 2002 the board decided to create the Coordination Nationale des Comités Locaux (National Coordination of Local Committees) which gathers representatives from every local group. The founders however defined the role and features of this new body (that is still not mentioned in the constitution, due to its frozen structure), that is not meant to be a second board. Hence, the impossibility for the CNCL to contradict the board's decisions.

Creating a new authority is participating in the proceduralization that is typical for reticular organizations confronted to the democratic issues: democracy is not (only) addressed as a political problem but as a procedural one.

New instances, devices or tools have to be created in order to face these issues, rather than engage in debating the normative consensus that underlies these groups. Democratic demands do not find their answers in a new state of the forces, nor does it lead to a direct discussion of the consensus that permits the group to stand together. Strangely, democracy, that GJM organizations manage to frame as a fundamental political question, turns into an organizational one within their own structures. Democratic claims are transformed into opportunities to develop new devices, rather than to question the role and the place of established actors. This indicates that the organizational dimension is a central one within such spaces, whose main features are a common use of collective reflexivity as well as a very distant (i.e., critical) engagement. One hypothesis is that such a procedural vision of democracy is typical for reticular spaces and groups<sup>28</sup>.

The pressure from local groups' members (that are Attac-France members, not local membership of the national organization) will be used as a resource by some protagonists of the open and heightened crisis that Attac will go through.

Attac was built on a pragmatic consensus on both its objectives and working procedures. The association's status fixes this consensus and turns it into a normative one. The constitution results from debates between a few organizations that aimed at creating a space they could engage in to cooperate with other organizations. It ended up opening new perspective for engagement, and helped addressing new types of demands - in terms of citizenship and democracy. At some point, both logics have clashed with each other.

The growth of the associations, demands from its members, so as modifications in the national fields - social and political - will modify the state of forces and break the pragmatic consensus.

Attac's constitution was inappropriate to demands from its members. This situation has soon been presented as an organizational incoherence between the association's objectives and its working methods and procedures. Considering that, for many GJM activists including Attac members, the GJM is meant to prefigure their claims, critics were difficult to face. They had to be answered on a very concrete level.

The multiple commitments strengthen the distance that activist maintain vis-à-vis their organizations, being able to move from one to the other when frustration is too high, or to struggle for importing "new" practices from one organization to the other. Hence the urgency, for GJM organization, to be constantly "innovative" - i.e. to transform their work and procedures over the time - as opposed to bureaucratic<sup>29</sup>.

However, the crisis mostly developed around the issue of internal democracy, and the "presidential style" of both Bernard Cassen and his successor, Jacques Nikonoff. Their

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28 For a first approach of this hypothesis, see the conclusion of both Cardon, Haeringer (2007); Haeringer, Pommerolle (2007).

29 Whereas this urgency can lead onto a new form of bureaucracy, whose name would be proceduralization.

authoritarianism was denounced, so as their incapacity to delegate and work in a collegial way. Nikonoff was chosen by Cassen as his successor in 2002<sup>30</sup> - the board's habit was to avoid having several candidates: electoral campaign within the board for its presidency would have created troubles and weaken the founding consensus.

A few weeks before 2005's elective General Assembly, Bernard Cassen and another board member, Michèle Dessenne, issued a text stating that Attac's founding consensus was over. They claimed that most of the founding organizations did not want Attac to be something else than a space for social movements convergence, which should remain under their control. They then proposed to change the way the organization should function, considering that the founders' role was to be shrunken. No agreement could be found, however: founders did not want to change the way elections were to be organized a few months before the next elections.

This led to postponing elective Assembly, which was scheduled for summer 2006. Jacques Nikonoff decided to be candidate as an active member, instead than as a founder, and campaigned for rejecting the founders' list. Susan George, a very popular founder, released information about which were the active members' candidatures she supported. Hence, the nature of the election was transformed into a hybrid one: Whereas it remained a one-turn election, the campaign was lead as if it was based upon a single list. Without changing the status, board members agreed on opening the board to 24 active members (instead of 12). Susan George's choice to publicly state whom she was in favor of transformed the nature of the campaign, making open the confrontation between two camps.

Both Nikonoff and the founders' college were elected: founders received 66% of the votes (only 20% voted against their list), whereas Nikonoff managed to come to the same result. However, there were suspicions of a massive electoral fraud, which was then proved by independent studies - even if a related judicial case is still to be ruled. There are no evidences, beside an anonymous testimony<sup>31</sup>.

New elections were then organized in December 2006; under the condition that J. Nikonoff would not candidate. The founders' list was voted. Active members decided to group in lists. Two of them had no elected members. "Avenir d'Attac", Jacques Nikonoff and Bernard Cassen's supporters' lists got 4 members elected. The last list, "Attac: altermondialisme et démocratie", composed by opponents to both Cassen and Nikonoff, got 20 members.

Active members were meant to participate in the association's life at the level of their local group, rather than at the national one: National bodies, or events (such as the Summer University), so as the association's books or flyers, were under the responsibility of founders or members of the scientific committee, i.e. two bodies composed through cooptation. Restricting participation to one place raised frustration and was perceived as a form of narrow democracy: Active members demanded for the right to participate at all the association's levels.

### *3.2 Attac's democratic dilemma*

We have already underlined one of the main features of the "social movements' space" that both Attac and No-Vox intend to build: Its boundaries, and in consequence, its relations to other spheres are flexible and contested. We have stressed slight divergences between these organizations visions of and contributions to the autonomy of this space.

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30 Wintrebert (2007:200) explains very shrewdly how Cassen strategized.

31 Anonymous testimony from a board members who pretends to have seen 7 members of Attac while frauding. Nikonoff answered that eventually, the fraud (that made him won) lead to his opponent victory (after the new elections were organized), insinuating that the fraud was an element of a complex strategy from those who contested him. He also admitted that some of his supporters could be responsible for the fraud - but that he never initiated it.

However, divergences also exist within each organization. What was at stake in Attac's crisis was (also) the association's relation to the political sphere. Indeed, at some point, the coexistence of different perceptions was no longer possible. Hence, two camps intensively confronted each other.

Bernard Cassen, Jacques Nikonoff and their supporters accused the association's founders to pursue hidden interests, i.e. their respective organizations' ones. They were charged to use the association as a back-office for the LCR. In Cassen and Nikonoff's opinions, founders were precluding the association to turn into a "force of proposal", that could broaden its audience. On the contrary, founders would transform Attac in a "gauchist" entity, which they would use for the convergence of radical struggles. They opposed founders of the association to active members; using a rhetoric that underlines a gap between "old politics" (based on a force balance between organizations) and new forms of democracy (leaning on a direct participation of active members).

On the other side, founders and their supporters accused Cassen and Nikonoff to look for the transformation of Attac into a new political party instead of integrate the association within the GJM. They also denounced the fact that the identity and specificity of Attac were to associate organizations and individuals.

However, these tensions are inherent in the association's project. Different elements can explain why they increased so dramatically that the two camps confronted each other.

First, the association's constitution was not fit for mass membership: Attac's founders did not believe that the association's project would gather so many activists – up to 20 000. As these activists had very high democratic demands, the gap between the possibilities offered by the association's constitution and its reality of the association increased. Due to its success, Attac became an important stake. In the competition for the leadership in the association (sanctioned by the vote of members) these demands had to be addressed. Dramatizing the differences between two visions was bound to competition. Moreover, Attac, so as other GJM organizations was confronted to the issue of its efficiency: It was urged to express what it was for, instead of only mobilizing against. Polletta has shown that the tension between the efficiency of a group and the appeal for its prefigurative dimension can create dilemmas and be the source of conflicts (Polletta, 2002:6ff and 12-15).

Both these explanations resonate with an approach in terms of Political Opportunities structure. On the one hand, demand for more internal democracy, confronting to the association's frozen constitution would turn into frustration. Frustration would eventually lead to a crisis (in this case an internal mobilization of two different camps). On the other hand, the insertion of the GJM within the French field and the international regulation system would determinate opportunities for mobilizations. Being urged to express positive alternative, Attac would be forced to change its project.

Indeed, Francesca Polletta has shown that transformations of social movements (from "flat" and horizontal structures to more hierarchical or pyramidal ones) can be analyzed as resulting from the interactions with the structure of the political space they intend to confront with and to invest in.

Using the outcomes of Polletta's research, we would like to propose a complementary explanation. Polletta shows that forms of decision-making can be associated to values (radicalism, whiteness, etc.) (Ibid:4 and 22f). In fact, setting out forms of decision-making in terms of values inducts a switch in what is at stake: It is not anymore only dealing with forms of association and the group's working, but with the normative consensus that creates the conditions of the group's cohesion and existence. Disagreements turn into gaps, important if not unsolvable conflicts arise and deeply shake the "relational underpinnings" of one group.

### 3.3 Extraversion and grass-roots organization

No-Vox, among other organizations, participates in Social Forums “one step inside, one step outside”. The network intervenes both in the official forum and in autonomous spaces. No-Vox contributes to the building of the borders of the Social Forums. Building margins to the “open space” is a way to prove that the space has still boundaries and gates. As already pointed out, No-Vox’s strategy multiplies opportunities to “give voice”. It also increases the possibilities to meet similar organizations and is a way to exploit as much as possible the opportunities offered by transnational spaces.

Indeed, No-Vox can be defined as an organization dedicated to the mutualization of “extraversion”. This concept, borrowed to Jean-François Bayart reports a feature of African politics: The insertion in transnational networks determinates national possibilities and importance (Bayart, 2000).

Here, “extraversion” refers to No-Vox’s aim: building a transnational network of “have-nots” and create “concrete solidarities”<sup>32</sup>. Transnational spaces have been GJM’s privileged spots of sociability, expression and sociability. Access to these spaces is supposed to be open. However, it requires different resources that are unequally available. “Have-nots” movements do not possess most of them. In order to be able to join, without having to negotiate their identities, they have to share both costs and resources – a task that No-Vox is endorsing.

Sharing resources in terms of extraversion shapes the group’s meetings. They are dedicated as much to decision-making as to the circulation of information gathered in other networks, mostly transnational ones. Indeed, a few members of the network are quite well connected.

Annie Pourre has been involved in the creation of the SUD trade unions, as well as Droits Devants!, the Droit au Logement, Agir contre le chômage. As a former employee from Air France, she can travel throughout the world for very low fees. Thus, she can participate in most of the European Preparatory Assemblies and other preparatory meetings. She is a key resource for maintaining links within the network between social forums, traveling to Japan, Guyana or Brazil in order to support struggles lead by local members of No-Vox – even if she doesn’t speak foreign languages, her possibility of traveling almost for free makes her the most mobile member of the network. Michel Rousseau is one of the facilitator of the European network “Marches against precarity, unemployment and exclusion”. He is also a former SUD trade-unionist, and has contacts through the 4<sup>th</sup> International he used to be active in.

The two activists somehow monopolize the group’s speech: Annie introduces almost every point on the agenda with long explanations. She reports a meeting, analyzes the context, explains the forces’ balance, etc. Her interventions last more or less a half of a meeting’s time. Adding to hers the interventions made by Michel Rousseau, the rate comes up sometimes to three quarters<sup>33</sup>. However, it comes out that other members do not consider her interventions as a way to exclude others from speaking. Informal interviews made with several members of the network prove that participants in the meeting appreciate and need this information, that they can eventually share later within their own organizations. Moreover, No-Vox tries to introduce some rotation in the presence in international meetings. Annie’s former job offer her the possibility to travel with somebody, which she does as much as possible.

No-Vox is not oriented towards decision-making. Rather it is a space for a form of participative enlightenment, where everybody can shape a common culture and identity. No-Vox meetings could appear as inefficient, in the sense that every few decision made take a lot of time to be build, it is discussed in an erratic manner: The group jumps from one point to the other, then comes back to a former issues, ends up discussing a new point, starts side discussions, while a passing mate

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<sup>32</sup> As explained by Annie Pourre, informal interview with the author.

<sup>33</sup> However, counting remains very empirical: Meetings being made of many side discussions, interruptions, etc. it was never possible to precisely time a whole meeting – nor even a single item of the agenda.

interrupts the discussion, etc. However, these meetings are efficient in the sense that they contribute to the building of this common micro-culture, they create a common experience and make the identity of being a “have-nots” concrete, collective and positive.

The first meetings observed were dedicated to transnational issues: The group was discussing its participation in both the World Social Forum and the European one. Discussed was the political agenda of the forums, their main issues, reports from the different EPAs and the program group, as well as from the “exclusion” network. It made decision on which amount of money to devote to each encounter, i.e. to define how big the “No-Vox delegation” would be.

Recent meetings have been more focused on French issues. Indeed, even at the national or local scale, No-Vox members have few opportunities to meet and coordinate otherwise than through multi-positioned activists: The organization and coordination relies less upon the “victims” than the resources persons and mobilizations entrepreneurs (Sommier, 2003: 131ff). No-Vox’s coordination group’s meetings could thus be used as opportunities for the coordination of its members. Actually, No-Vox’s members have started to report their actions, while the network discussed how to support them. *Droits Devant!* and the CDSL have for instance set up a camp in the summer of 2006, in order to raise the issue of homeless people. They were working together on a daily basis, negotiating with the authorities, taking care of the camp’s organizations, together with other organizations. During the few No-Vox’s meetings that took place in that period, this common action and project was evidently discussed. The group addressed tactical issues and the state of official negotiations. However, it mostly dealt with personal impressions on the struggle, how hard it is, how time consuming it can be, etc. No-Vox’s meetings were in fact an opportunity to take some distance from the daily and hard struggle, while building it as part of the group’s common experience and history: past struggles were evoked. During one of these meetings, the DVD of No-Vox’ history was partially shown, strengthening this process of building common reference and a micro-culture.

In that same period, inhabitants from what was considered as France’s biggest squat were expelled. The DAL, among other organizations, engaged in a street occupation (later moved to a sport-hall) in order to protest against the absence of any plan of housing. This struggle had a strong media impact, got much support from well-known personalities, etc. Hence, both struggles could turn being in competition. A member of the CDSL actually pointed out that “*we should be careful, that there are not some struggles that... that ward off other struggles. The problem is not really the absence of the network... but of its members*”<sup>34</sup>. During another meeting, the group discussed a demonstration organized by all the French unemployed organizations. When one member reported that the organizers had to choose between different mottos, the following debate started<sup>35</sup>:

*G.: I don’t want that this turned into something boring... I want more action; we should plan actions instead of just a march... Otherwise we’ll be no more than 800...*

*A.: 800 would already be good.*

*G.: you’re right, but what’s the impact? What does that bring about? Compare this to those who occupied the UNEDIC... They had much more impact.*

*A.: It’s not our role to discuss this here... No-Vox doesn’t prescribe anything. It’s up to the organizers to decide, and we will support them, we will spread the information.*

*G.: Well what are we doing then??*

*D.: As of now, we just know when it will happen, nothing more.*

*J.: But is it being prepared?*

*D.: Yes, yes.*

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<sup>34</sup> October, the 3rd of 2006.

<sup>35</sup> October, the 10th of 2007.

*A.: And this year, the MNCP also participates.*

*G.: I don't want that we say "it's only unemployed organizations", we should open it.*

*D.: that's exactly what we do: We issue the call and then we enlarge.*

*G.: and the CGT, well, I hope they won't bug...*

*A.: Wait, wait, you can have a row in your own meetings, I don't care, but us, it's not our purpose...*

*G.: It's a concern for all of us. Otherwise one will have to explain me and tell me what is that for that we meet here...*

*A.: Of course it's a concern, but this is something we will discuss altogether in the Network of Social Movements, to see how No-Vox can contribute.*

*J.: But we can share it in principle, don't you think?*

*A.: We'll do for sure when they'll ask*

No-Vox's few organizational resources, to the extent that it has such resources at all, restrict the possibilities for the involvement of the group in long struggles. In fact, No-Vox would have to choose in which struggles to involve, creating competition among its members. Hence, No-Vox tries to focus on extraversion and transnational connections. No-Vox refuses to be considered as a body for the coordination of local and/or national struggles. When supporting an action or a mobilization that is initiated by its members, the network still supports it at the transnational level: It issues calls or petition, organizes demonstrations, etc. Brazilian and Japanese members of the network have organized protest in front of the French embassy to support ongoing struggles, whereas French members of the network have, for instance, occupied the city of Osaka's official representation in solidarity with a Japanese movement of homeless people.

## **4. Two forms of internal democracy**

### *4.1 Sessions*

Attac's board meets every month or every month and a half. The board meets on Saturdays, in Attac's headquarters, located in a suburb of Paris. Most of the members don't live in Paris. This is not without an impact on the meetings: Members who travel often arrive late and have to leave earlier.

Meetings are planned to last from 9 or 9.30 am until 5.00 to 6.00 pm. Exceptions are meetings held during the summer university or the General Assembly - those meeting lasting only half a day. Only one break, for lunch, is planned. The area of Attac's HQ being empty during the week end, board members often end up in the same restaurant, using the lunch for working groups or to elaborate strategies when a conflict occurs.

The room where the meeting takes place is big enough to welcome all board members as well as a few visitors. However, not everybody can seat around the table. Meetings attendees are supposed to be as many as 42 - to which one or two staff members should be added. The board regularly invites some externals, to participate in one specific debate: Members from Attac's working commissions or any other resource person. Bernard Cassen attended one of the meeting we observed, so as Jacques Nikonoff and Christophe Ventura (former employee, he was dismissed in February 2007).

Observers, including sociologists, are required to sit in the back. Where people sit is not without meaning. The four members from "Avenir d'Attac" always sit close to one another, near the chair and a door. They can easily leave the room to coordinate, lobby, etc. There don't seem to be any other strategy in the sitting, except for logistical reasons: Smokers seat near another door, so that

they can quickly leave. Laptop users seat on the side of the room were sockets could be found. Employees, active members so as founders sit randomly.

Custom is that meetings are open. In some cases, conflicts can develop about the participation of some persons. This happened for instance when Jacques Nikonoff attended the fist meeting we observed. Below is a transcription of the notes made during the observation<sup>36</sup>.

*Jacques C.: I have to say - and I want it to be included in this meeting's report - that I am opposed to Jacques' presence here. Now that he is here we cannot exclude him but he should be given the right to speak.*

*(...)*

*Chloë: I just want to say that I don't understand why Jacques is sitting here and allowed to speak. He is not a board member, he shouldn't be here.*

*Jean-Marie: the rule is that non-board member can attend the meeting, but they shouldn't sit at the table, so please, invited attendees so as uninvited ones, please move back.*

*Jacques: I'm pleased to obey, but then Pierre has to do the same (smiling).*

*(Pierre doesn't really move back).*

No-Vox meets every month or every month and a half, except during summer. The 14 meetings observed took place in three different places: 8 of them in the DAL headquarters, three in the CICIP (some of a social center) and the three last ones in the “Ministère de la crise du Logement”, a squat opened by the DAL together with two other organizations. All these places are very busy ones. As the doors of the meeting rooms are never shut (when there are doors!), the atmosphere is quite noisy. People come in the room to greet friends, etc. Both in the DAL HQ and in the new squat, meetings are interrupted by people looking for information, help, etc., a room is not separated from offices or common spaces.

People sit randomly, stand up very often, sit down again, etc.. Meetings are conducted in a very informal way. They always start late, from 30 minutes to almost an hour. People use this time to exchange information, discuss different projects, etc. Even when the room is supposed to be a non-smoking one, people just move a little backwards and smoke a cigarette, while participating in the discussion. Very often, there is food or drink available. Whenever new members join, the meetings start with presentation, so that everybody knows who participates and which organizations are represented.

#### 4.2 The agenda

Attac's agenda offers a plethora of items. It is always obvious that the meeting will have to last longer than planned - or that items will have to be dropped down. Time is a resource that the chairperson mentions to end up a discussion - with a low effect: members involved in the discussion raise the fact that they don't have enough elements to make their decisions (*'come on, guys, let's be serious, we can not make a decision this way'*). This turns meetings into marathons, de facto excluding from the last discussions those who have a train to take.

Different factors can explain why Attac's board meetings have such a huge agenda. The association itself: with more than 13 000 members and an important impact in the public sphere, Attac is expected to take position on many issues. This, however, is not sufficient as an argument. Indeed, Attac is building its own political agenda gradually, as it goes ahead and deepens its analysis. Attac is dedicated to help constitute globalization as a framework of interpretation and the statement of injustices. While it deepens its expertise, it is also tempted (or asked) to broaden its perspectives. As a gathering of both individuals and organizations, Attac is supposed to be the place

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<sup>36</sup> April, the 28 of 2007.

to build and share a common understanding of the globalization's processes and their social impacts. This object is quite undefined - its boundaries are a matter of discussion and controversy. Attac deals with the GJM and "altermondialisme". It aims at building "altermondialism", so as to give the GJM a political ground. It is a space for socialization so as an actor aiming at producing political contents.

This makes endurance a very useful resource to fully participate in the board's discussions. It is linked to experience, and to the capacity to save energy not discussing items that are seen as of secondary importance, notwithstanding the long discussion they can raise, in order to keep concentration for items of more importance. In consequence, it reinforces the role of professional activists within the board: they are used to "endless meetings". The following excerpt from a transcription of one of the meeting observed show that being able to manage the agenda is a skill required in order to participate fully in the meeting. Some in order to be heard, threaten to withdraw cooperation<sup>37</sup>.

*Gérard: we should mention income.*

*Wilfried: this is the next point;*

*Gérard (angry): if I cannot talk, then I vote against.*

We have tried to identify whether there was a difference between active members and members from the founders committee. Most of the founders are actually professional and experienced activists, whereas active members are volunteers. However, they also are high skilled activists: They are engineer, professors, teachers, etc. They have a very good knowledge of the association's life. Moreover, the association's recent crisis seems to have been a very dense experience and learning process, as confirmed in informal interviews with several board members.

In fact, most of the board members consider that there are very few positive lessons to draw from the past, and intend to set up "new forms of debate", "new ways of working". In this perspective, being an ancient member of Attac does not mean that one has a good vision of *how the association should be working*, but rather *how it should not*.

Very few points are addressed really fast, in order to move on to other points that are identified as needing some more debate. Indeed, there are many important decisions to make. In such a board, which engages very fast into political debates, one agenda item can raise endless discussions. Reflexivity, references to the past of the association as much as visions of its future project increase the length of discussion.

These discussions are ambivalent: They prove that the work is achieved collectively, and that freedom of expression is guaranteed. However, they tend to specialize the political work. They require high competencies and experience, as well as patience (one meeting lasted for about 10 hours, with only a one hour break) and the capacity to understand which points are the most important and conflictual ones so as to 'save energy' on points that are understood as of less importance. The absence of differences between active members and founders could also be a consequence of a former self-censorship, that would happen in the elections, or even while candidating: only high-skilled members would consider candidating.

Most participants have quite high competencies in this kind of savoir-faire: they sometimes leave the room during a discussion, come back precisely when it moves to another items, and engage in the discussion as soon as they are back. Whereas others don't, and will get exhausted discussing points that most of the others will consider as being less important, or not dealing with a specific item - which is shown by statements such as "*well, this is the next point*"; "*we won't address that now, I think we have to solve that first*".

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<sup>37</sup> July, the 21st of 2007.

The use of Attac's life command is oriented to prolong a conflictual atmosphere. It is also a resource to understand many implicit discussions, when the board engages in what we could call "diachronic debates", i.e. debates that are dealing with the associations past debates and decisions.

Attac's agenda is supposed to be sent in advance. The document can be up to 96 pages long. Very often, meetings are extended (up to 3 hours more than planned) in order to discuss all the mentioned items.

The first No-Vox's meetings observed had no agenda sent in advance: The agenda was build together at the beginning of the group's session. Recently, an agenda has been sent a few days before every meeting. However, meetings always start with a discussion on what should be on the agenda – most of the time without really taking care of the document sent. While building the agenda, discussion already starts. Most of the time, it is planned to start with information, and then to discuss points that need a decision. However, the agenda is never followed: Participants can jump from one point to the other without being asked to wait for the next point. Meetings end up when the group feels that everything has been discussed – between 90 minutes and two hours after the meeting started. However, participants quite often go together for a drink, keeping on discussing what was at stake.

#### 4.3 Active minority, consensus and deductive decision making

In Attac, the collective and informal agreement to bypass the associations' status, which resulted in a hybrid ballot, was not without consequences. The constitution states that board members are the candidates that got the most votes. Only one round is to be organized. Members don't choose between different lists, but vote for 12 members from one single list (or, after the new agreement, 24 members). "Avenir d'Attac" used this procedural uncertainty as an opportunity to develop a statistical calculation, which would strengthen their importance: adding all the votes, they then made the ratio for each tendency, coming to a score of 33% for their list. Hence their recurrent claim: They pretend to represent one third of the association, whereas the majority would only represent 48%. They denounce undemocratic ballot procedures, which give more than three quarters of the active members board's seats to a list that doesn't represent more than a half of the association. Considering that they campaigned against founders - and vice versa - they come to the conclusion that 33% of the association only got 4 seats out of 42.

Implicit reference to the past very often concerns the recent history, namely the supposed electoral fraud and the open conflict. The term "fraud" itself is almost never mentioned. If there is no debate about the fact that the fraud occurred, no sufficiently neutral body has stated who was to blame for. Even if a set of facts tend to prove that it was initiated by J. Nikonoff or and his closed supporters, "Avenir d'Attac" representative stress on that presumption of innocence should be guaranteed within the association.

Recent events are addressed carefully: some speak about "*the swell from last year*"<sup>38</sup>, "*problems with elections*", "*what he have been through*"<sup>39</sup>, "*what we have experienced*", "*a certain number of facts*"<sup>40</sup>, "*a situation that is specific*"<sup>41</sup>.

Below is a transcription of a discussion held during the July meeting:

*Bruno: in the first paragraph I propose that we stop the sentence after "fraud".*

*Jean: but we agree that it was in the benefit of..*

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<sup>38</sup> July, the 21st of 2007.

<sup>39</sup> March, the 17th of 2007.

<sup>40</sup> April, the 28th of 2007.

<sup>41</sup> August, the 23rd of 2007.

*Bruno: what I say is that presumption of innocence is important. To avoid misunderstandings we should stop after fraud. And this is a good symbol, actually.*

*Jean: who agrees with this proposal?*

*Four agree*

*Jean: who doesn't want to vote? Zero, ok.*

*So it is evident that we will keep the sentence as it is already.*

However the issue of the electoral fraud was once addressed clearly, in that same meeting - explaining why it remains implicit most of the time: making explicit "the swell" of the year 2006 would undermine the coexistence of both camps and destroy the possibility of the two camps to survive in the future?.

*Jean-Marie: I won't make any synthesis because I don't want that you get used to it; I'm not a wooden language specialist, but at the point where we stand, I think that we should show a new style in the facilitation of the association, and this requires that we abandon the war language, I don't want use to engage in pale imitations of Nikonoff's language. If we hammer out that there is a guerilla, then we will have it.*

*(...)*

*Pierre: it is a pure non-sense. These are formulations, words that have their political importance. If we mention "usurpation" then we have to say which one it is.*

*JMC: let's stop being morons, let's be clearer.*

*Jean: who is against changing?*

*Pierre: what is the change?*

*Aurélie: we have to vote on how we should mention Avenir d'Attac. I share what Jean-Marie said, but at the same time, if we want to give us the means to act, it is important that all the members are aware. It shouldn't be a warlike formulation, but we have to mention how we are going to address the problem with Avenir d'Attac.*

*Laure: how you are going to address the problem? I would say how the problem was born. Because if we speak of how elections went, then why not telling members the truth? That there were three lists, that one tendency is the majority and that the voting procedures makes it much more important than it should.*

*Jean: ok, she is being jealous.*

*Laure: this is unfair. You monopolize the speech.*

*Jean: because you create problems here.*

*Laure: we create problems? It's only the two of us here and we would be so powerful? Let's be clear, say things clearly and say that the majority tendency...*

*(...)*

*Pierre: we have two possibilities here. Either we consider that we have to speak about it. And there are plenty of good arguments to do so, but then the warlike vocabulary is the one we have to use because this is what we have, a political struggle, we can not say the things by halves, so we have no other choice to say the things as they are. Or we can choose not to mention it, in order not to officialize tendencies, and also because it made our work harder, it didn't prevent us from working, and whether we want it or not, Avenir d'Attac has been marginalized. So we could chose not to mention them.*

*In my opinion this is the best way. But if we make the other decision, then we have to tell things clearly, which means to tell that there is a small sect that leads hell of a war and don't give a damn about the association.*

This latent conflict is the decision-making context. It frames discussions and has a clear impact on how board members relate to each another. "Avenir d'Attac" is certainly very minoritarian within the board, but has managed to find ways to give itself a voice. It has mobilized resources such as confrontation and scandal, as a way to be heard and to tend to obtain what it is looking for - a right to the control of 33% of the association's communication and document.

Discussion precedes every decision. Vote never occurs after positions were put on the table: the board has chosen to use consensus as its main decision making procedure - even if consensus is then checked by a vote. Members can express themselves several times on one item. Usually, a first round of discussions is opened. The chair makes a list of board members asking the floor and organizes the discussion - the first to raise their hands are the first to speak; there is no system for direct answers. As we already stated, reference to the time passing is not an efficient way to shorten discussions: these references to the past aim at exploring every arguments, engage in a deep debate so that positions are made clear. This process enables to see what could be the consensus, deducting the potential common decision from all the arguments discussed.

In order to have an impact on the decision, the minority has to get organized and to engage in collaboration: if no agreement is found, a vote is organized, that they will eventually loose. Hence two choices are available to them: take the floor voice, participating, as any other board member, in the discussion, or using other resources, such as scandal, to mark their opposition and the impossibility to find a common position. Scandal is then useful outside the board meetings: "Avenir d'Attac" spreads a letter signed by its board member, in order to denounce the current state of the association so as its project. Scandal helps to show to members of the association that there are still two camps, and that every decision to be made has this confrontation as a background.

Discussion aims at reaching a consensus that has to be distinguished from unanimity. In this perspective, vote is only an indicator of the level of consensus, a proof that the discussion has been deep enough to build a common decision, which is neither a majority's dictatorship nor the lowest common denominator. Consensus is to be evaluated in the decision making process itself (the deliberation), nor in its result (the final decision, that would result from a compromise between several proposals). Participants in the discussions, like the one below, have different visions of what should be the decision, *in their own opinion*. Confronting their visions, identifying divergences, they can understand what the consensus cannot be. Hence, exchanges aim at deducting from every vision the elements that preclude the consensus. Vote occurs whenever it is believed that a good balance has been reached between clear-cut positions and a common decision that would be unsubstantial.

#### *4.4 Collective impressionism and enlightenment*

Whatever the issue, No-Vox has a similar way of handling them: No-Vox's meeting can be defined as spaces for a participative enlightenment. Discussions always start with an information point. The "mobile" members of the group, i.e. the most experienced and full-time activists, make it. Most of the time, Annie Pourre or Michel Rousseau report upon a meeting, explain the political stake, and share different analysis of a given situation. Clear sequences can then hardly be distinguished: Discussion can start during the information point, one member reacting, asking for specifications, giving his/her personal impression. However, it is possible to isolate the information sequence from the discussion, under the condition to consider a phase of transition, made of these interruptions, reactions, etc. Indeed, whereas Attac's discussions are actively moderated, No-Vox's exchanges remain much more informal. Meetings could easily be described as unorganized, not to

say chaotic: They start more than half an hour later than scheduled, the atmosphere is noisy, participants move towards a window to smoke cigarettes while speaking, etc.

At one meeting observed, during the Athens ESF (2006), three members of “Vamos”, an organization that is considered as part of No-Vox, tried to change the way meetings were led. They proposed to use non-verbal communication, such as gestures (hand waves, etc.), to manifest agreement, opposition, veto, need for clarification, etc. Vamos’ activists considered that the meeting they attended before were “*a messy loss of time*”<sup>42</sup>, that they reported in following terms: “*there are no decisions made, everybody speaks at the same time, it’s completely different from our meetings, and, well... it should be changed, we don’t have so much time, we’re in a hurry*”. Being experienced facilitators, used to this set of non-verbal devices that are typical for some GJM open Assemblies, they facilitated the next meeting, attended by 12 people. However, they never managed to achieve their goal. On the contrary, the meeting turned more chaotic, in their own view, than the former one: Participants did not make the right gesture, stating the opposite of what they intended to, argued about which gesture to use, etc. Half of the meeting’s time was spent discussing how the meeting should be working with this new facilitation. It ended up after one hour. People were both happy because the meeting was a funny one, but frustrated because they could not express themselves as they intended to. In fact, the meeting eventually collapsed after one participant expressed his frustration: He had asked to speak, but was not seen by the facilitator, whereas other spoke without being on the list. Starting to be a little angry, he expressed his feeling:

*F.: I just want to say that I wanted to speak, I’ve been waiting for more than 20 minutes, but nobody gave me the floor.*

*Vamos member 1: I’m sorry, I forgot you...*

*Fr.: Yes, but you didn’t do the right gesture; you should have done that (shows).*

*JY.: No, no, it’s the other one.*

*Fr.: oh god, I don’t know.*

*F.: Well, I wanted to speak, and I asked several times...*

*Vamos 2: What was your point?*

*F.: I wanted to suggest adding a point on the agenda, but it is too late.*

*Vamos 1: No, no, tell us now, now you have the floor. Tell us what is your point.*

*F.: Well, no, it’s too late now.*

Whereas Attac’s meetings are decision making oriented, No-Vox’s ones are socialization oriented. Of course, the group makes decisions. But their efficiency should be valued in other terms. No-Vox practices of consensus does not aim building a common decision from different position, as it is the case for Attac. It is a guarantee that every member of the group will have the possibility to speak, to give his or her opinion, to be listened, and, eventually, to be recognized.

Annie facilitates most of the decision-making processes. When a decision has to be made, she tries to separate the information from the discussion: She introduces the point, possibly explains the different possibilities, and then makes clear that a decision has to be made: “*I ask this question, but it is up to the group*”, “*I just give the information, the discussion will decide*”. Decision is build through the cumulative expression of arguments, experience, and analysis. From this addition, the group develops its position in a form of collective impressionism. Speakers refer to former interventions, answer questions, and react to what has been said. As opposed to Attac’s model, the decision is drawn by adding the interventions together – a dynamics that No-Vox’s type of decision makes possible: Whereas Attac addresses issues that concern a broad public, the scale of No-Vox’s decisions is not as broad, but concerns the daily life of the network.

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<sup>42</sup> Informal interview with a Vamos ! member, May 2006.

Meetings are also dedicated to socialization among the group itself: Their aim is not only to share information, give contacts, exchange analysis, but also to create a sense of community. Participants in the meetings conjure up past struggles; discuss former actions and protests, etc. However, they never interfere neither with the participants' own organizations nor with their personal life or intimacy. Whereas Attac's meetings are opportunities for a few side discussions on leisure, family, culture, etc., talks and exchanges held during or around No-Vox's meetings remain oriented towards social movements and struggles. Hardly can one learn that a participant's partner has been admitted to a hospital, etc. This is probably linked to the differences in participants' situations: Some members of No-Vox live in very precarious conditions. Moreover, the network aims to contribute to the building of a "positive" identity of the unemployed, "sans-papiers", homeless, etc. Hence, the group concentrates on struggles and projects instead of discussing personal precarity. As explained by Farid: "*if you call us 'excluded'... wait, what is that? It's a denial... And I refuse that, we refuse that*".

The friendly atmosphere is maintained also during the discussion, through the evocation of common struggles and experiences: For instance, while discussing the possibility that another group hijacks one of the DAL's actions, several members opposed:

There is an ongoing debate about an evening that is planned for the next day in solidarity with 200 hundred people that occupy a street and sleep there. A. fears that another group of homeless use this opportunity to join and thinks it would create problems because this group consists in people with serious addiction problems. S. thinks that there is no risk: the leaders of this group have lost their legitimacy and credibility; no one would follow them anymore. They discuss quite strongly. And end up like this:

*S.: They won't come, believe me. Should we bet? (she raises her hand towards A. to officialize their bet).*

*A.: Better come and spend a night with us [sleeping outside], you'll see (both start laughing).*

Whenever strong disagreements could occur, conflict is avoided: either discussion is spontaneously closed or the network reminds that it does not intend to interfere with its members' life. The following debate is one example. Although it is clear that there are political disagreements on the initiative endorsed by Droits Devants!, No-Vox does claim for a right to change the claims, and also confirms its support.

One member (M.) presents the call to a demonstration that her organization has planned for the end of the week. She asks if she can mention No-Vox as a support. This demonstration is in support of migrant workers who intend to be regularized. What follows is the full transcription of the debate (except when "(...)")

*A.: the doubts on this issue, which you already know because we spoke about them is that we have to narrow down the problems in the text because the question of regularization through work completely fits in the frame of a "quota" regularization. So it is addressed in a "tensions' zone" regularization (...)<sup>43</sup>. So we move towards a case-by-case regularization, so something like "workers mobility", that is never permanent, that can be suspended, so to me, it is a political problem.*

*M.: This is exactly why, in Droits Devants!, we lead an action that fights against this, this is not a case by case regularization [that we demand], we are really on the issue of workers without papers means regularized worker, and we strive for equality of rights.*

*A.: yes but this is worker, not unemployed.*

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43 A "tension zone" is a field in which unemployment is high and for which there are high quotas of migrants (green-card system).

*M.: yes but we fight against a regularization "à l'italienne".*

*A.: or "à l'espagnole".*

*M.: or "à l'espagnole", and it's been already more than 10 years that we are fighting against this.*

*A.: I know and of course don't want to deny this. (...). But we are going to create division, we will divide the "paperless". So regarding the No-Vox network, we're gonna make a "tour de table" (view all the participants opinion), I personally don't have anything against if it is an open door, and under the condition that we don't create division.*

*M.: we work a lot with labour inspectors, with trade-unionists, and what we notice is that, working with them, we raised all those questions. It is clear that our aim is not to divide.*

*Marc: yeah and... (interrupted)*

*A.: No-Vox is always on international issues; we have to remember this, because we have to take into account what our friends think. This is not only this, hence. When we think, we also think that it is an international network, because we don't want to turn into a franco-french stuff, I don't want that we get complaints from...*

*J.: yeah from friends in Portugal, you know migrants*

*A.: from friends in other countries, in Portugal, in Mali, that they say, "we read your texts, and you endorse things that weaken friends who intend to migrate.*

*J.: go ahead M., go ahead.*

*Marc: we have discussed this [in my organization] and it seems interesting to us but there's something that shocks us, something that we don't like. But we intend to be there, for two reasons. First in order not to let them divide us; saying: "employer they employ paperless peoples more than unemployed" and also because we can't be happy with the fact that paperless are employed to do jobs nobody wants to do, they have harder working conditions (...).*

*A.: the concern, this is how we articulate all of this. And please, add "travailleuse"<sup>44</sup>.*

*S. (just arriving, has not seated yet) : "travailleuse, travailleur" this sounds a little bit like Arlette<sup>45</sup> (ironic).*

*Marc: and there is the question of families and their rights.*

*A.: yes, northern countries they now have laws that regularize the work but don't allow families to come and join.*

*Marc: it's true that you insist so much on workers...*

*S.: yes, it is very problematic, your call, I'm not in support of it. And you should know that this article, that the assembly just voted, it is worse than in Italy.*

*M.: yes but we don't support it.*

*S.: oh, ok, yes.*

*Marc: after all this is an opportunity.*

*S.: no we shouldn't start thinking this way.*

*(The discussion then addresses how they chose the migrants they will support in their regularization procedure).*

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44 The female to "worker".

45 Arlette Laguiller, from a french trotskist party.

*A.: often, M., you know, we won on court. There were many victories for employees, after lawsuits, we have to take this as positive that we won, I prefer that as to go in something... Well, but in any case we don't have any right to give any order to Droits Devants! so as to any organization. But I prefer this instead of going into "we are going to support 450 demands".*

*S.: A., A., wait, wait, there is a trap that nobody knows, like in the UK, you need 5 years of presence on the territory to have your rights to social security, unemployment, etc.*

*A.: yes. On the principle; I don't see why we would sign, but...*

*S. raises another strong point of disagreement with the call: it mentions public aid to development whereas she thinks that we shouldn't mention it because "we are fighting against, it is a way to support authoritarian regimes".*

*M.: Actually it is already written, we just want to see if No-Vox agrees on signing.*

*A.: I have concerns, but hey, we can sign.*

*S.: I really have concerns.*

*M.: Listen, we take note.*

*J.: in any way it won't be changed before the demonstration, but it feeds the debates in your organization.*

*M.: But it feeds the debate, yeah. So, can I say that No-Vox supports.*

*S.: We support but there are things that really shock me.*

*A.: No-Vox-France, yes.*

## **5. Conclusion**

Attac's active minority has managed to influence debates and decisions: While representing only 4 members among 36, it has taken every opportunity to express its positions, ask for clarification, raise their disagreements, etc. If confrontation has been recurrent, cooperation has still been possible on a few issues, such as the association's communication, its G8 campaigns, etc.

Beyond personalities' conflict and debates on the "style of the presidency" or the recognition of fractions, the stake is how to frame the Global Justice Movement, to propose ideological references, etc. This can be considered as a political struggle - cooperation being possible on any item except for the definition of the political project itself. On these issues, Attac's board refuses to go far in the deductive process: It intends to preserve the political dimension of its decisions, i.e. to take positions that can be understood, have coherence, etc.

The board's refusal to recognize Avenir d'Attac as a fraction is ambivalent: it can in a legitimate way be conceived as a refusal to give a minority the possibility to express its visions with resources that she can not afford - being a minority<sup>46</sup>. On the other hand, it is a form of guaranteeing that the conflict and demands remain solved politically, not through procedures.

After the 2007 General Assembly (October 2007), Avenir d'Attac's representatives have decided to resign from the board, opening a new phase of the association's life. Nevertheless, this decision won't abolish divergences: At a board meeting that Avenir d'Attac did not attend (August the 23<sup>rd</sup>), divergences were important, confrontation was, on a few issues, quite intense: Attac's constitution, culture, customs so as its project shape the way meetings are lead and democracy is handled, probably as much as decision-making processes shape the decision.

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<sup>46</sup> Avenir d'Attac has been offered to participate in the association's steering committee.

No-Vox's practice of democracy is obviously more participative, in the sense that consensus is deeper: Decisions made have never been contested, nor did participants show frustration.

There again, decision-making processes not only influence decisions: The way decisions are made is also influenced by the group's nature, its particular features and public.

Two GJM organizations, two different forms of decision-making processes and of handling democracy: the relative heterogeneity of the GJM concerns also its forms of deliberation. In fact, the two groups are very different from one another, even if they share a lot of common features. They have similar organizational sensibilities: In Attac as in No-Vox, vote is not seen as the main democratic device. However, it is used in Attac whenever the board makes a decision, as an instrument to check agreement and let public the existence of different positions and visions of the association's project and working (a rare choice, as underlined in the report's introduction). On the contrary, No-Vox refuses to use vote: the group considers direct democracy as being equivalent to discussion. Democratic decisions can thus be made only through verbal exchanges, that aim at the building of a shared position. Nevertheless, it tends to elude deep controversies, that are left outside the group's meetings. While No-Vox's decisions remain implicit (as for Attac's Germany 'Financial Markets' group or the Berlin Social Forum<sup>47</sup>, so as Attac Florence<sup>48</sup>), Attac explicitly enables differences to remain visible even after a decision was made.

This reflects different visions of democracy: No-Vox puts the stress on the deliberation phase – i.e. on the process itself – whereas Attac includes the decision – i.e. the result – in its organizational conception of democracy. As other reports have shown, implicit decisions require strong ties among the group's members: It can occur when members know each other very well. It is thus probably a feature for rather small groups; that are not composed by elected (hence rotating) representatives. A small group of friends (of fellows) opens possibilities for very symmetrical discussions and a horizontal working that could be considered as being the ideal-type for democracy. However, as analyzed in other reports (e.g. Saunders on Thanet Friends of the Earth and Conscious Consumers), friendship or an intense fellowship can narrow the group and restrict its openness. Thus, democracy appears as a constant dilemma (Poletta 2002): Groups face different tensions, whenever they refuse to chose between openness and horizontality; diversity and mutual trust; implicit unanimity and accepted divergences, etc..

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<sup>47</sup> See the German report by Teune, S. and Yang, M..

<sup>48</sup> See the Italian report by Andretta, M..

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# **A close-up of global justice groups in Germany: visions and practices of democracy of two Berlin-based groups**

**By Simon Teune with the collaboration of Mundo Yang**

*(Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung)*

## **1. Introduction**

New social movements (NSMs) have been referred to as collective actors that strive for “democracy from below” (Koopmans 1995, Roth 1994). They demand participatory decision-making and are also vital part of democratic will-formation processes. In practice this means that citizens organise themselves on the local level to express grievances and promote political projects. Just like the NSM in the 1970s and 1980s asked for more democracy at the national level, the subsequent global justice movements (GJMs) did so at the global level. Yet the degree to which processes inside social movements follow democratic rules such as a broad participation of members, transparency, recognition of the other, etc. has rarely been explored. It is disputed, however, if democracy is an adequate category for group processes as they can be observed in social movement organisations and networks. Nevertheless, a closer look at meetings of GJMOs allows us to assess the degree of domination, of the inclusion of members and other aspects of internal organisation that ideally represents democracy from below.

To learn more about the self-organisation of citizens on the local level, we observed two groups that consider themselves to be part of the GJMs. For these in-depth case studies we pursued different qualitative methods: Participant observation, interviews and group discussions. Assuming that the ideas of democratic self-organisation are challenged most in situations of conflict we focussed our analysis on phases in which conflicts between group members became visible. However, this report covers more than the analysis of phases of conflict. It provides a thick description of two groups that are engaged on the local level to scandalise problems and urge for social and political change. Their visions and practices of democracy are portrayed to understand the process of democratic self-organisation and the groups’ contribution to a democracy from below.

## **2. Berlin Social Forum**

The Berlin Social Forum (BSF) is a local initiative that was founded in March 2003.<sup>49</sup> Inspired by the concept of the World Social Forum and the experience of the European Social Forum in Florence, people with different political backgrounds prepared the ground for a space open to different political currents at the local level. According to a participant’s answer in an interview for work package 4 of the Demos project, the main goal of the forum is to root the idea of global justice in local issues, such as public transport, poverty, and social rights. At the same time, people active in the forum aim at presenting alternatives to the current social and political situation. In this vein, the BSF aims at providing a relay and a resonant board to support the discussion and strategic planning of action concerning local problems. While most of the participants in the forum do not want to become a protest actor, occasionally protest is organised and supported by the forum as a whole. Especially for the core group of the BSF that provides the organisational framework for the forum, the Charta of Porto Alegre is an important guideline of their political work.

The BSF is not focussing on a particular thematic field. The core of the forum attendants has been active on issues such as poverty, housing, public transport, privatisation and the G8 summit.

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<sup>49</sup> Most of the information about the early phase of the BSF are gathered in a project report of a students’ research project at the Free University Berlin (Bahn & Haberland 2004).

Within the political landscape of Berlin the BSF marks a unique development. For decades leftist groups have been disunited and working apart from each other. The experience to communicate across dividing lines was novel and a pushing factor, particularly in the beginning of the forum. Different political groups acknowledged the forum as a mediating space for people from various backgrounds and with different political goals. They also saw it as a catalyst for joint action. The forum is connected to several groups from the radical left. Joint activities with more moderate actors in the city – for instance the service sector union Ver.di – are infrequent but they do occur from time to time. An example for this collaboration during the period of observation was a discussion organised by trade unionists and activists from the BSF about the health care system and its disadvantages for people living in precarious conditions.

The BSF is part of the network of local social forums in Germany. The network exchanges experiences on the local level in irregular meetings. It also launched a “local social forum day” with events taking place in several German cities in April 2007. In addition, contacts have been made with other local forums in Europe at the European Social Forum in Athens in May 2006. Even though there is also a social forum on the national level, only one participant of the Berlin group is engaged in these nation-wide activities.

The BSF was open to participant observation from the very beginning since a social forum is conceived as a space open to anybody. Joining the group as an observer was delicate not for political reasons but because the group had been the subject of scientific interest before (see Bahn & Haberland 2004). Moreover, the presence of a participant observer bothered some of the attendants. However, the aim of the study, to analyse decision-making practices within the group, was considered as interesting and raised curiosity about possible results. Participant observation included the monthly assembly but not the working groups or the coordinating circle of the BSF. Field work started in January 2006 and ended in October 2007. However, several sessions were missed during the observation period. The coding scheme for sessions and controversies was applied from April 2006 until the end of the participant observation. Quantitative data extend to this period. The observation will be completed with a conclusive discussion in which the key results of the participant observation will be presented to the forum. Due to the schedule of the social forum this discussion could not take place so far.

The BSF was founded in a political situation that was dominated by social cuts on the federal and city level. In Berlin, the situation was particularly hard for socially disadvantaged individuals and those active in the social sector since the city’s budget was burdened by dubious business conduct in the Berlin state bank. This provoked a scandal that was followed by early elections from which a coalition of Social Democrats and the post-communist Partei des demokratischen Sozialismus (PDS) emerged as the winner. The coalition proved to be a rigorous executer of an austerity programme. With this politics performed by a coalition of the left, parliamentary alternatives seemed more and more unattractive for left-leaning activists. These were confronted with increased grievances and the need for a transversal organisation of different groups that criticised the cutbacks. Attempts to unite trade unions, social and political groups had been made before, but they proved to be volatile and failed to mobilise many people. As the label “social forum” was well-known among activists and connected to mobilisation and success after the first meetings of the world and European social forum, the local forum initiative appeared to be a promising experiment that ignored long-standing cleavages within the leftist group sector and underlined the need for respect between different political currents (see the BSF guidelines of cooperation: Initiative für ein Berliner Sozialforum 2003). In March 2003 about one hundred activists engaged in social movements, trade unions and parties gathered to discuss the creation of a social forum in Berlin. They decided to meet in a monthly assembly that would – as an “Initiative for a Berlin social forum” – prepare a social forum event on a broad social basis. The consolidation phase of the BSF was characterised by an intense discussion about the organisation and the aim of the BSF. While a strong faction within the forum urged for the construction of a new political actor in local politics, many people who were engaged in the forum insisted on the maintenance of an open space that,

according to the Charta of Porto Alegre, would not make any decisions in the name of the social forum and restrain from acting as a political organisation. In the end, the group that wanted to create a new political actor left the forum to engage in the Berliner Bündnis gegen Bildungs- und Sozialraub (Berlin alliance against robbery in education and welfare) in late 2003.

Despite the reluctance vis-à-vis protests organised by the forum, the BSF was involved in several protest campaigns that were partly successful. However, the forum did never develop a strong mobilising potential. Demonstrations organised by the BSF and other groups did never attract more than 1,500 participants. The activities of the BSF that attracted most public attention were organised within the first 18 months of the forum's existence. Very early, the forum called for a social centre following the example of the centri sociali in Italy. In October 2003 activists squatted the building of a former Kindergarten and organised a party for neighbours and activists. The squat was observed benevolently by the district authorities but was evicted by the municipality. Negotiations between the municipality and the forum were stopped after an intervention of the minister of the interior in the city government. Together with other groups, the forum organised a blockade of the city parliament to inhibit the approval of the austerity budget in January 2004. In the same month forum activists initiated a blockade of the tram traffic at the central Alexanderplatz to denounce the denial of mobility for socially disadvantaged citizens. The public transport company Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe (BVG) had dropped a reduced fare after the city government made the decision to cancel subsidies that made the reduced fare possible. The public pressure by different actors prompted the BVG to re-introduce the reduced fare – at a price that was raised by 57 percent. Later protest activities launched by the forum could not attract sustained attention. On the occasion of the soccer world championship in July 2006, for instance, forum activists took part in the organisation of a demonstration to shed light on the dark side of the event and the sponsors involved. The protest was creative and well-prepared but did not attract more than a few hundred demonstrators. After several failed attempts a social forum weekend was organised by the BSF on 22 and 23 April 2007. Although the preparation was sluggish, organisers succeeded in integrating groups that were previously unconnected to the forum. The event attracted 150-200 people. Despite the interest in the forum event there was no influx of newcomers who would support the BSF or engage in the forum on a permanent basis.

Participation in the BSF has varied significantly throughout its existence. During waves of attention in the local issues and activities specific of the forum, assemblies were attended by up to eighty participants. However, this maximum was only reached during the student protests in 2003/2004. In this period, student activists hoped to find resonance within the forum and a broader social basis for their mobilisation. During the period of participant observation, the number of attendants oscillated between twelve and thirty one. Attendance was highest during the local preparation of anti-G8-activities and in the preparatory process for the first social forum event in Berlin.

In the broader political context of city politics in Berlin, there are some sympathies towards the BSF in the district government but the forum has no opportunities to directly influence political decisions on the city level. In addition, most participants of the forum have chosen not to engage in political parties and other formal organisations because they are sceptical about the existing representative system. As a consequence, influencing a government is not among the priorities of a large part of the BSF to achieve social change. Anyway, the coalition of Social Democrats and socialists, pushing their austerity programme, is not responsive to the claims of urban movements. Quite to the contrary, when an article in the magazine *Der Spiegel* disclosed the activity of police spies in the forum, it became obvious that the BSF denouncing the politics of a supposedly left government as a social failure was defined as a threat to public order by local politicians. In general, most of the people active in the forum are very sceptical about attempts to include citizens in processes of political decision-making. Experiences with the local Agenda 21, particularly the limited role of this project in political decision-making, triggered doubts about the truthfulness of the proclaimed inclusion of civil society. Also the experiment of a participatory budget that was

started in Lichtenberg, one of Berlin's districts, in 2005 has not been a big issue to the forum. On the one hand, there is criticism that the competencies of the citizens engaged in this process are very limited due to budget legislation. The most crucial financial decisions are still made without the participation of citizens. On the other hand, the lack of interest in the participatory budget may be due to the fact that the most active participants in the BSF live in other districts. However, plans for a participatory budget in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg have not been discussed in the forum either, although this district is the home of many hard core BSF activists and hosted the forum both in the early years and in an intermediary period.

Due to a government on the city level that is not open to demands from below, the BSF chooses protest as a means to denounce injustice and decisions that they perceive being wrong. As the mobilizing potential of the forum is limited, the group is reluctant with organising protest. Most of their actions stage dissent symbolically rather than counting on the power of numbers. The most successful mobility campaign launched by the forum among other social and political actors included civil disobedience, namely collective fare dodging and the blockade of a tram. The official reason of the Verfassungsschutz (office for the protection of the constitution) to observe the forum was the latter's contact to autonomist groups and the participation of people with an autonomist trajectory who were considered potentially violent. However, the forum never refers to violence as a legitimate means of political action. It does not support forms of action that are more confrontational than, for example, the blocking of public transport. According to one activist cited by Bahn and Haberland, "the blockade of a tram was the maximum of a physical confrontation with the system" (2004: Fn 37) that is accepted within the forum.

People active in the BSF are part of the activist core in Berlin's leftist political scene. They are present at discussions, join demonstrations, and most of them are active in several groups. As long-standing activists, people in the forum have been engaged in unionist, environmentalist, autonomist, anti-racist and other struggles in Berlin. Many of them are not only active on the local level, but also nationally and transnationally. Some were involved in the organisation of the so-called Monday protests against social cuts in 2004. Others are active in mobilizations of the GJMs and in the broader social forum process (translocally and on the European level). While the composition of people attending the forum was heterogeneous in the early phase, it changed over time becoming comparatively uniform in the second year of the forum's existence. Christian activists, party members and trade unionists with a politically moderate attitude did not continue to work in the forum, while participants with a radical libertarian trajectory made up the hard core of forum enthusiasts. While in the first phase the forum attracted many activists that partook as delegates of their political group, the situation changed when it became obvious that these groups could not be mobilised through the forum. Instead of participating in the forum, delegates concentrated on activities in their own groups. At the same time, the emerging core group of the forum did most of the organisational work and developed an identity as a social forum. The core group of the BSF consists of six to eight highly educated activists, some of them with an academic career up to the postdoctoral level, and one of them being professor of political science. Most of these activists know each other since a long time. Some are friends who meet also outside of the forum. Aged between 30 and 65, the forum organisers have been active in autonomist and other non-institutional radical leftist groups. Most of the other people active in the forum share these socio-structural attributes. Assemblies are dominated by participants in their forties to sixties. Younger people are less attracted as the group is not action-oriented. Men account for two thirds of the participants. However, even though women are less in numbers (30 percent), they are slightly more active as speakers (34 percent) in controversies.

Even though Berlin has a large migrant community, there are hardly any migrants active in the forum. And despite the idea of the social forum as open space for anybody who wants to engage against the neo-liberal politics, new faces are rarely seen twice in forum meetings. This may be due to several reasons: (1) The BSF assembly is not oriented towards action but rather a place to exchange information. People who want to take action may feel frustrated by the character of the

forum devoted to discussion and co-ordination. (2) Although the BSF defines itself as an open space, the forum has resulted in structures and specific ways of communication between different groups within the BSF that are hard to understand on first sight. The feeling to enter a pre-structured group may also be a reason for newcomers to drop out from the forum meetings.

The BSF is not a formal organization with formal membership or accountable leaders. Formal membership is even openly rejected. According to its self-definition as an open space the social forum is constituted anew in every session by the attendees. The only step toward formalisation was the creation of an association that would be the responsible body for the establishment of a physical social centre. However, the association remained inactive after the squatting of the Kindergarten. Additionally, the formal structure of the association does not play a role in the meetings of the forum.

The organisation of the forum follows the ideals of inclusion and horizontality. There are no explicit references to participation and deliberation, but participants make clear that they see the BSF as a forum open to anyone who is interested in developing a left alternative to local polities. Arguments to analyse the current situation and to define appropriate forms of action are highly valued whereas other forms of power are considered undesirable. Every participant is granted the same rights in the assembly and concentration of power is avoided. To reach the organisational goals, there are several principles embraced by the forum. The first basic principles are openness and transparency. Everybody who is interested should be able to follow everything that happens in the context of the forum. Ways to guarantee transparency are taking minutes during assemblies, using the Email-list to circulate information, and providing outsiders with context knowledge during the assembly. Furthermore, everybody should have the opportunity to participate in all subgroups and activities of the BSF. Principles mentioned in order to avoid an accumulation of power are the rejection of formal roles and the interchangeability of people serving specific functions in the forum. Responsibilities for facilitation of discussions and taking minutes, for instance, rotate among participants. However, in practice there are quite some hurdles to apply these principles that will be referred to in the following sections. Another principle that is quite elaborated within the BSF is the generation of rules that are respected by all participants. This is particularly visible in discussions. The facilitator generates a list of speakers that is followed very strictly. Depending on the moderator, speaking turns may also be administered according to a gender quota. Whereas the rules for discussion are quite advanced, rules for decision-making are underdeveloped. Most of the decisions are considered as accepted as long nobody in the room explicitly opposes them. This mode of tacit agreement applied to eighteen out of twenty decisions for which a result was explicitly announced.

The main body of the BSF is the monthly assembly. It is the only body that may take decisions in the name of the forum. In this meeting all important issues concerning the BSF are discussed. The assembly is prepared by a coordination circle that also circulates an invitation via the email-list and appoints two facilitators based on the rotation principle. The circle meets between two assemblies. Although in theory it is open to everyone who is interested, in practice, those who show up in the coordination circle are part of the inner circle that invests most time in the forum activities and has developed a common identity. This shared identity is visible, for instance, in the round of introductions that initiates every assembly. The core activists introduce themselves with their first names and the additional formula “social forum” while others name another group with which they are primarily affiliated. In the coordination circle, the agenda for the assemblies is prepared and urgent matters are discussed. However, according to the concept of social forums, the coordination circle never takes decisions in the name of the BSF. If the coordinating circle takes action, it does not use the name “social forum” but signs as “coordinating circle of the Berlin social forum”. Nevertheless, the coordinating circle is an important body to prepare decisions that have to be made in the assembly. Most of the time, the current tasks, for instance writing a press release, are coordinated via the email-list of the forum. In addition, direct contacts, by phone or in person,

between the core participants are important forms of communication to prepare the politics of the forum.

Other bodies of the BSF that meet regularly are three to four working groups that convene around specific issues (e.g. mobility or poverty and social policy) or campaigns (e.g. anti-G8 mobilisation or coming to terms with the police observation). These bodies cease to exist when the issue is no longer dealt with. The relation between the assembly and the working groups is ambivalent. On the one hand, intense discussions and preparations for actions are impossible in an assembly with a limited time frame. In addition, not everybody present at an assembly is necessarily interested in the issue at stake. Thus, working groups assemble those who are interested in the same issue. On the other hand, these groups develop their own dynamics and group identity. Even though all working groups are in principle accessible to anybody active in the forum, newcomers are reluctant in joining them.<sup>50</sup> Newcomers often have problems to understand the structure of the BSF, the different perspectives of activists who are part of the coordinating circle and/or one or several working groups. In addition, implicit parallel agendas of the subgroups appear in the discussions of the assembly. They make the conversation in the forum additionally opaque to outsiders. The most relevant tension within the BSF that became more and more obvious in the last months of observation resulted from a division of labour between coordinating circle and the most important working group “Social Berlin”. As the working group was very active in organising discussion and protest events, from an outsider perspective the BSF was more and more identified with the work of that specific group. Within the working group this fostered the perception that others in the forum were less active and should acknowledge the important role of the working group. Those who play an important role in the coordinating circle are only partly identical with the members of the working group Social Berlin. The main focus of the coordinating circle is to secure the structure of the BSF as an open space that is open for any leftist urban group. While the working group Social Berlin underlines the importance of visibility, action and mobilisation of poor people, other core participants emphasise the forum's role to maintain communication across different political spectrums. These participants fear that the concept of the forum as an actor would undermine its communicative function and make the BSF appear like just another actor in Berlin's political scene.

The seating order of a BSF assembly reflects the ideal of horizontality: participants sit in a circle. The atmosphere is usually very relaxed, but it may turn tense when differences of opinion become obvious. However, even if disagreements are made explicit, the tone is seldom aggressive.

A BSF assembly typically lasts two to three hours interrupted by a 15 minute break. A session includes up to three thematic discussions that are presented by one or two forum activists or externals from other groups. Usually, these agenda items focus on informing the others about a particular problem or the status of a relevant political conflict in the city. The discussions that follow the exchange of information mostly focus on the question if the BSF should (or could) intervene and if so, how. As soon as the forum as a whole is involved in an activity, for instance the organisation of a demonstration, part of a session is devoted to coordinate tasks and responsibilities. Apart from these intensive discussions, every meeting includes a series of announcements in which information about upcoming activities and protests apart from the forum is provided. Working groups are supposed to report on their activity at the assembly but this is not done in a strict way. From time to time also questions of organisation of the forum and strategic discussions are on the agenda. It is quite rare that decisions are to be made by the assembly. As the main function of the assembly is to exchange information and as the schedule is usually very tight, controversies are rare. Even though there is no time to discuss differences, these are visible in taunt, moaning and ostentatious side conversation. Retreat meetings took place in December 2003, June 2006, August

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<sup>50</sup> Access was even more problematic in a strategic working group that deliberately chose to be organised “semi-open”. Meetings were not publicly announced and participants, who were interested to join had to contact a member of the working group for details.

2006, and another one is scheduled for November 2007. They are organised as an opportunity to talk about internal problems and strategic perspectives of the forum.

After all that has been written above, it is no wonder that the forum organisers play an important role in the assemblies. They facilitate sessions and prepare the minutes. They also talk most frequently during the sessions. However, the core organisers try to minimise their dominating position not on the procedural level (i.e., by an active moderation that encourages people who have not spoken before), but on the informational level. Insider and background knowledge are normally shared with the assembly to allow everybody (particularly newcomers) to understand what is discussed. However, as decision making is rarely an explicit process following comprehensible rules, discussions and their outcomes may be opaque for outsiders.

### **3. Attac subgroup “financial markets”**

The Attac subgroup “financial markets” (Attac FM) was founded at the same time as the overall Berlin Attac chapter in 2001. As many of the members have been working in the group since years, it is quite experienced and stable. After an early phase in which Trotskyite activists tried to influence the group things are going much calmer and the work of the group is steady. After this episode, seven to ten persons continuously participate.

Participant observation in the group started in November 2005 and continues until today (October 2007). Access to the group was easy. Due to the academic background of most group members, the threshold to allow a participant observer in the group was low. Scepticism was raised nevertheless, because at the time when participant observation started Attac was exposed to harsh criticism. Given this situation the group did not want to host an observer who might have a negative attitude towards Attac.

The main focus of Attac FM is the critique of global financial relations. All activities of the group are outward-oriented. To spread their conceptions targeting financial markets, the group organises protest and aims at the political education of citizens. Lobbying is not an option for the group itself but it does not reject lobbying per se. The group dissociates itself from revolutionary politics on the one hand and politics of compromise on the other. The self-definition of members is the position of “radical reformers”. They claim that the situation of many people on the planet can only be improved by radical changes in the organisation of the economic and social order. Accordingly, they do question market economy as such. With regard to this basic approach the group is more or less homogeneous. The group distances itself from the moderate political stance of German Jubilee network, as Attac FM members think that a more radical and protest-oriented approach is needed. In looking at the radical end of the left spectre, Attac FM members know that groups such as “dissent” do not want to cooperate with them because they consider the group too moderate. Over the years Attac FM joined campaigns to call for taxes on financial transactions. In this context, trade unions, churches, and the Linkspartei (Left Party) are seen as partners for ad hoc-coalitions. International financial institutions and neo-liberal governments, on the contrary, are considered as adversaries.

The group does not believe that negotiations with these institutions may help to foster the desired changes. More generally, communication with outside institutions is seen more instrumentally and power driven than communication within the group. Group members repeatedly uttered that trying to convince conservatives, neo-liberals or power holders is useless. Instead, the group concentrates outbound communication on those who share at least some ideological ground with the group (trade unionists, church activists). These outside groups are accepted as equal discussants. However, Attac FM is oriented towards the agenda of official institutions to put forward their claims at the right time. This focus is more important to the group than agendas of other movement actors. The group produces proposals to change policies regarding international taxation and debt cancellation in order to enhance democratic control of financial flows. Their proposal for a “fair and transparent

arbitration process”, for instance, argues for a solution of the debt problem that systematically includes the voices of people in the global south.

Attac FM develops its own protest activities and participates in activities initiated by other groups. The group does not consider violence as an appropriate political means. Among other forms of action, Attac FM tries to attract attention by using creative tactics. For instance, they staged a protest event with a giant paper aeroplane to demand taxes on air fares. New technologies such as mail-bombings or net-strikes do not play a role in the action repertoire of the group.

Group activities presuppose a common collective decision of the group. Usually, they do not need the approval of the parent organisation Attac-Berlin. Generally, Attac FM is relatively autonomous. However, if the group needs substantial financial support it has to apply for funding in the plenum of Attac. Debates in the context of the assembly or with other groups of Attac prove to be more controversial than debates within the group. This is due to the fact that communication with other groups is not as well-rehearsed as communication within Attac FM and some of the protagonists of Attac Berlin are not easy to cope with. However, neither Attac Berlin nor Attac-Germany have a strong influence on the activities of the group. As long as the group roughly keeps its thematic focus and holds a very general left-progressive political line, there will be no interference from the broader Attac network.

The group has sessions of one or two hours fortnightly or, more exactly, twice a month. These are the only meetings of the group. There are no subgroups or preparatory meetings. Normally, three fourth or more of the ten members attend a session. Group sessions are always held in the office of a NGO dealing with the debt issue for which two of the participants work as paid staff. With minor exceptions, all group decisions are taken in these sessions. If there is time pressure or the necessity to react to a request between two sessions, the NGO staff members anticipate a decision by the group. For instance, they ask a speaker if and when s/he could come to the meeting before the group decides to invite him/her. There is a rough annual agenda: During the first half of the year the group deals with international taxes whereas the second half is devoted to debt cancellation. The session agenda is open to proposals from any group member but it is usually prepared by the same two persons who also circulate invitations. Group members also use their mailing list to prepare sessions and circulate information, but not for discussion.

Attac FM never specified formal membership rules. The group is open to everyone who wants to participate, both members of Attac Berlin and outsiders. The narrow thematic focus on international financial flows and markets, the necessary expert knowledge and the way the group works are major hurdles that make new members rare. When asked about their motivation to engage in the group, attendants emphasise personal perspectives rather than their feelings of belonging to a community or collective. All members engaged in Attac FM are voluntary, unpaid participants. They attend as individuals, not as delegates. As indicated above, the composition of Attac FM is quite homogeneous. All participants are academics of German descent. This is why a specific mix of every day language and highly intellectual terms is used. Those who have entered professional life mainly work in the field of international financial relations. Most of the students who are members of the group study social sciences. Only some participants lack the time to participate regularly. The distribution of gender is not balanced: Only two of the group members are female. Two persons are around forty years old. The two members who prepare the sessions are roughly thirty years old. The students who attend the meetings are aged between 20 and 25 years.

All Attac FM members know each other well. Some group members have quite close relations. They work together on political issues beyond the group. After a session is finished the whole group goes to a pub for a drink. The group has a quite egalitarian and open culture. Offensive speech hardly occurs in the sessions of Attac FM. Group sessions are rather characterised by humour and a friendly, harmonic atmosphere. Old and new members work together without frictions. In this relaxed atmosphere, it is possible to bring up private problems and frame them in political terms.

The only fixed function within the group is a delegate who represents Attac FM in the monthly plenum of Attac Berlin. Other functions are not assigned officially but it is quite obvious that the two men who work for the NGO hosting the meetings are the central figures of the group. Apart from their role to prepare the meetings they also play an important role as the facilitators and minute takers of group meetings. Adding to this functional inequality those members who work professionally on the issue of financial relations (including the NGO staff members) are accepted as experts. In case of conflict about factual questions the opinion of experts has more weight. But this is not the case for other group contexts. One of the central players used to play an important role within Attac on the national level. The other central player manages financial affairs for Attac Berlin. Apart from these two, one elder man and a young woman are quite active within the group and within Attac Berlin as coordinating members. These four people can be seen as the core of the group. They attend meetings frequently and they participate most in group discussions. The remaining participants participate less and often miss sessions. However, only for the peripheral participants is Attac FM the main political project while the core members are also engaged in other political contexts. The imbalance in the group is considered problematic by the members who have more weight. Adding to this, the key persons do not like their central role, as it implies more work and responsibility. They try to delegate tasks and avoid influencing group decisions too much. Inequalities do not result in disintegration or unequal treatment of the less involved group members.

During the period of participant observation there was a significant change in the composition of the members. While the core members continued to work in the group, some older and more peripheral members left the group due to changes in their personal life and career. In the preparatory process for the protest against the G8 summit in Germany, some new members joined Attac FM. A few of them continue to work in the group after the protests. Others did not show up again after the event.

Attac FM does not have an explicit concept of internal democracy. Neither deliberation nor participation is mentioned by the group. However, attempts are visible to integrate all members and provide them with equal opportunities to play a role in the group. The group is characterised by a high degree of social and emotional homogeneity: All participants are accepted with their differences and therefore are treated as equal participants. The continuity of the group was disturbed several times by new attendees who brought their own agenda into the group or did not match the communicative style of Attac FM. After some time all of them left the group when they realised that differences continued to exist and the group was not responsive to their claims. As a consequence, the group is quite cohesive. All participants have common goals and are quite interested in common goal attainment. Integration into the work of the group is only high for the core people since the peripheral participants lack time and intellectual resources.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The participant observation of two global justice groups in Berlin has provided us with detailed information about everyday processes of social movement groups that are the basis for the public interventions and eventually the political impact of the GJMs. Despite many differences these groups exhibit we identified many similarities in the way the groups discuss and make their decisions. Like most groups that have been observed throughout Europe, Attac FM and the BSF take most decisions implicitly. Even though the ideological backgrounds differ, both groups are very sceptical about negotiations with public authorities. Instead, their preferred form of action is symbolical protest that may be effective even if only a small number of protesters is involved. However, the focus of the group and the issues discussed result in specific group styles and problems. In the BSF, the fact that the ideal model of a social forum could not be met in a city with a fragmented leftist scene resulted in stalemate and frustration. Formally, the BSF resembles the openness of a forum. Most of the communication is the exchange of information and evaluations. Nevertheless, the forum has become a rather homogeneous group that rarely attracts new

participants. As a group, however, the BSF lacks a common project that might increase the commitment to the collective. In that respect, the BSF resembles Attac Florence in acting as a broker. By contrast, Attac FM has a clearly marked thematic focus. Group meetings are used to advance their expert knowledge and to plan joint activities. Within the BSF, this kind of discussion takes place in the context of working groups. As a consequence, those participants who are part of a subgroup might experience a dual reality of the forum. Moreover, the dynamics of subgroups are not intelligible and irritating for participants who are new to the BSF meetings.

The group observed activities are vital for two processes that are the *conditio sine qua non* for a substantial democracy: the democratic organisation of citizens and the formation of the political will. The way decisions are made in both groups is characterised by respect for different opinions, the equal treatment of all participants and the attempt to integrate everybody in the decision-making process. Thus, these global justice groups are a locus to practice democratic procedures and to define what should be considered as democratic. For most of the participants in the two groups it was a deliberate choice not to engage in a political party or in a large NGO. These organisations follow the logic of representation, majority rule and division of labour. Minorities in parties and pressure groups are dependent on a majority that may or may not take decisions that take minority considerations into account. Thus, they are highly problematic for activists who emphasize the autonomy and inclusion of each political subject. By contrast, self-organisation in rank-and-file groups facilitates decision-making in a way that involves everybody in the group and respects differences. The consensus principle which both groups embrace is a way to grant everybody the right to object a decision s/he does not support.

Participant observation has also shown the obstacles for democratic organisation on a small scale. Those group members who are more active tend to have a distinct position from those who attend the meeting without investing much energy in the work of the group. If the group does not find ways to compensate for such imbalances it is likely that a dual structure of decision-makers and followers emerges. Democracy within a small group is hard work. It requires clear rules and the activation of members who tend to remain silent in discussions. The groups that have been subject to this study are aware of their shortcomings and the inequalities that are still present in their attempts for an inclusive and egalitarian decision-making. Both groups are interested in improving their discussions and decision-making processes. Hence, evidence from our research that will be presented to them after the publication of this report will hopefully be of value to them.

Participants in the BSF and Attac FM have accumulated expert knowledge. This allows to identify administrative or parliamentary decisions to the detriment of those who are not represented in parliamentary democracy because they can not exert pressure on decision-makers (e.g. unemployed people or illegal immigrants) or they are absent in the national perspective (e.g. people in developing countries who suffer by the burden of debt regimes). Very different in scope and size, the Berlin Social Forum and the Attac Subgroup Financial markets contribute to an alternative interpretation of the status quo. Both groups emphasize the perspective of minorities and those who do not have a voice in the political process. In this way, they criticise and complement the common understanding of social, economic and environmental problems. However, the groups do not want to act as mere advocates of marginalised positions. They refer to the problems of people who are poor, marginalised, suffering from war or the devastation of the environment to question basic economic and political structures that generate injustice. For both groups, political education plays an important group. Their idea of social change presupposes the availability of information and arguments that allow an alternative interpretation of reality. In their view, the structural sources of inequalities can only be challenged if the majority of the citizens conceive them as problematic. In that sense the global justice groups are contributing to the process of political will-formation.

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# **Attac and the Water campaign: How arguments decide in two Italian GJM groups**

**By Massimiliano Andretta**  
*(European University Institute)*

## **1. Introduction**

In this chapter I will analyze the results of participant observation (see Chapter 1 and Delivery 8 for the theoretical framework, the methodology and the instruments of analysis) in two relatively different groups: Attac-Florence and the Italian network for the water campaign (hereafter Water Campaign).

By mean of comparative analysis, applying a “most different system design” (Przeworski and Teune 1970), I would like to show that despite great differences between the two groups, they both share similar conceptions and practices of democracy.

The GJM has been seen as the bearer of a new conception of democracy that tries to overcome the dichotomy between representative and direct democracy, and which has been referred to as deliberative, discursive or consensus-based democracy (Andretta 2007, della Porta et al. 2006; della Porta 2005, Smith 2004, Ceri 2003). If this is true, we should find evidence of such practices of democracies even within different organizational settings.

The two selected groups are, in fact, different in type (organization vs. campaign), level of analysis (local vs. national), size (relatively small vs. relatively big), and issues (multiple issues vs. single issue). I expected that those differences could shape the internal dynamics in different ways. First in terms of identity, it was clear that while in the case of Attac Florence participants share a common organizational identity which could facilitate the collective work and the internal decision making, in the case of the Water campaign, which includes hundreds of groups and organizations, this was far from granted. The same apply for the size, as it is easier to manage a group of 10 people, though connected with a multilevel organization like Attac, than a group of more than 50 participants. On the contrary, the multi-issues nature of Attac could imply the raise of controversies on which issue should the group spend its little energy, while the single-issue campaign has this for granted and concentrates on the means the network should use to reach the agreed goal: the “re-publicization” of the water management in Italy. Finally, the level of analysis could also impacts on the internal dynamics, since the coordination at the national level (water-campaign) implies a network of people who hardly know each other (at least in the beginning), and in any case do not share a common everyday action frame, while in Attac Florence participants know each other and do share a common experience in collective action.

Even though the two groups are relatively different, they do have many things in common: they both are involved in the GJM, at local, national and international level, they share the same antineoliberalist frame; and they have interorganizational links, since Attac is part of the water campaign.

In what follows, I will describe the two groups by reconstructing their history and identity (§2), group structure (§ 3), action repertoires (§4), broader organizational environment (§ 5), the way in which they perceive their political opportunities (§6); the way they frame and conceive both internal and external democracy (§ 7), and, finally, their internal dynamics as they emerge from participant observation findings (§ 8). In the last paragraph I will draw the conclusions of this study, by elaborating partial theoretical arguments.

Documents and interviews are especially used to reconstruct the group features (from §2 to §7), while participant observation data are mostly used to reconstruct their internal dynamics.

## 2. Groups' history and identity

As Alessandro Pizzorno (1993) contends for every group in general, identity is a matter of how the group presents itself and how it is recognised by the others. The collective identity building is in fact a matter of “meaning work”. Through “meaning work” social movements symbolically construct a collective subject (the working class, the people, the nation, environmentalists, women, etc.). If this is true at social movement level, it is not less true for social movement organizations themselves.

If collective identities are built through meaning work, then a frame analysis may be appropriate to investigate them. As Hunt, Benford and Snow pointed out, “identity constructions, whether intended or not, are inherent in all social movement framing activities”, and frames perform this difficult task by “situating or placing relevant sets of actors in time and space by attributing characteristics to them that suggest specifiable relationships and lines of action” (Hunt *et al.* 1994, 185). Therefore, a part of the framing activity is devoted to the specification of an “identity field” which defines the “protagonists”, the “antagonists” and the “audience” of the collective action.

There are several ways groups use to present themselves, or present the outcome of the framing process of their own identity: public declarations, protest events, action repertoire, etc. As we have already showed in the WP2, Internet is one of the tools used for this kind of function, usually by providing sections of the websites devoted to the presentation of the group (about us, frequently asked questions, documents, calls for actions, etc.).

In what follows in this section I shall assess the identities of the two groups by relying precisely on these kinds of document, and on a few in-depth interviews. It should be mentioned however, that the amount of material available for the two groups varies a lot: it was easier to collect material for ATTAC than for the Campaign, and many documents like the “about us” and similar website documents are simply missing for the latter. The reason is evident: in the second case we lack a clear organizational identity whose history can be told, since the history of the campaign starts with the campaign itself.

### 2.1 Attac-Florence

Attac-Florence is a local group that tries to translate at the local level the national and transnational campaigns that the national level (Attac-Italia) decides, with the contribute of the local groups (see structure of the group), and in coordination with the other national Attac-branches of other countries. The collective identity of the group is then shaped by a complex mechanism of interaction between local, national and international levels, but also with the local environment.

In the local website (<http://www.local.attac.org/firenze/>) there are a few documents, which are actually national documents, and which are used to present the group.

The short presentation of the organization reports that “Attac is not a political party, is not a trade union, is not a NGO, is not a media...It is an Association and a network of bodies, ideas, desires and knowledge to fight against the dictatorship of the markets. Attac has an international (it exists in 26 countries) and local dimension, with the presence of local committees. The radicalism of the issues and the proposals make Attac an Association that thinks and acts at the same time in the global and in the local” (document A1). As can be noticed, the nature of the organization as a complex field of interactions between local and global is explicitly mentioned from the very beginning (the document is dated on 2002). In this short document the origin of the association is explicitly mentioned by underlining that “Attac was born in France on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1998”, while in Italy it was established in June 2001 after a national assembly held in Bologna (*ibid.*).

At the same time, Attac defines itself as a ‘political animal’ different from parties, unions and even NGOs, it is instead an Association and a network. Finally, Attac’s main goal is to fight against

the dictatorship of the market by mobilizing bodies, ideas, desires and knowledge: i.e. reason and emotion.

Attac Italy was formally founded in Italy on June 30 2002 (document A8). The foundation phase is a very long process which started shortly before the Genoa protest on July 2001 (Andretta et al. 2002). Already during the preparation of the protest, a group of persons, basically the founder members, tried to build a network of individuals and associations who aimed at constituting the Italian chapter of Attac. The call was also published in several newspapers before and after the protest in Genoa, and a constitutive Assembly was set up in Bologna on 12-13 January 2002 (document A9).

According to a document published on the local website, Attac Florence seems to be established even before the national constitutive act, namely in 2001 (document A10). This must not be considered a strange thing, since the process of constitution of Attac was very long and in some places faster than in others.

After the Genoa protest, a first meeting in Florence was organized to build the local committee: “The first meeting of Attac Florence, was in a People’s House (Casa del Popolo, an old left popular institution especially widespread in Tuscany and Emilia Romagna) in Via Manara. A call was launched both on-line and off-line, asking everyone interested in this French association to come” (Interview A1).

The call was answered by a diversified set of groups and individuals, coming from different political cultures. According to Caterina, one of the member of Attac Florence, who witnessed the foundation phase, for one year and half Attac Florence had a large membership- “everyone was there”, just between 10 and 15 regularly participated in the meetings though (Interview A1).

During this period the initiatives of the association were basically of three types: a. the Tobin Tax campaign, b. the membership cards campaign, c. activities of citizenship self-education. Those three activities were intertwined, since the “membership cards Campaign” was, and still is, more a way to gather financial and “moral” support, than a old style of internal organization, and in that case it also served to publicized the Tobin Tax campaign, through short publications and leaflets. Also the activities of citizenship self-education, basically self-organized lectures on political matters, were organized to explain the Tobin tax.

In fact, when the campaign on the Tobin Tax was launched, the gathering of signatures was quite difficult, since it was not easy to explain what the Tobin Tax was about: “People did not understand well the campaign, because it implies an analysis of the financial system, and the media did not talk about it”(interview A1). The campaign was successful in making Attac visible, and a large public assembly was organized to present the results of the campaign in terms of signatures and to discuss about future activities:

“It was the highest point of resonance, because we were many, there was also the local social forum that helped us a lot with the things to do... We organized that evening, we had an interesting debate, but also a concert, and people danced, something that we should never stop doing... We invited many stands of different groups who could present their initiatives. It was a great moment” (ibid.).

But, as it often happened, the highest point is also the start of a declining phase, and the first conflict, followed by an exit, aroused. During the public assembly, in fact, many members of Attac criticised the local institutions lead by a centre-left coalition (which however exclude the Communist Refoundation Party, very active in the movement): “Some members of Attac were also supporters of the DS [the leftist democratic party that represents the majority in the city council and the major]. Since that evening they no longer came” (ibid.).

Attac in fact was articulated in thematic groups, some of which investigated into the local politics, and presented a strong critic during the public assembly:

“those were the years when we could see already where the local governments were going to. They claimed that to give a future to young people they should get a stable job, when instead what the regional and the city administrations do is to use precarious workers and everything they were proud of as the health protection system started doubling the costs... naturally they continued to say that we live in a sort of paradise, though we have many problems....

This does not mean that we were not aware of the fact that there are regions, cities where things are worse, but this does not mean either that we should content ourselves with this. Everyone operates in her own territory, despite the fact that a territory is better or worse, when you do not have the bread you will fight for the bread, when you have the bread you will fight for the roses... Well, the members who left considered this kind of criticism too radical; according to them, we should feel happy in comparison with other regions or other cities, because there is a local government that we should consider close” (Interview A1).

This was the only politically motivated exit from the association, but not the only one in general:

“The first one to leave was the founder, Ilaria, for personal reasons, then other three couples... They did not go elsewhere, they made family... Besides there were other interested persons, who were not from Florence but were here for a job or for their studies, they helped us when they were here and then they left the city: one lives in the UK now, and another girl got married and went back to her city... There were also two persons that live in the Mugello and it was difficult for them to come every week in Florence..”(ibid.).

From this period onward Attac Florence consisted of a few people, from 8 to 10 persons, who are alternatively active in the group. Caterina and Cristian are the only two members that remained since the foundation phase, though in the last year they have been less and less active. This seems to reflect the general trend of the movement in Italy, not only Attac, than questions of conflicts and political motivated exits (interviews A1 and A2).

Each year the national assembly and the conference of local committees (see below for a detailed description of the organizational structure of Attac) reflect on the fragility of the association by referring to the movement as a whole: “Attac has already reached its third year of life. Born within the movement, it shares with it elements of both strength and fragility” (document 4). While another document, by admitting the decline of active participation in the association, also confirms that this is a problem shared with “the Movement as a whole, and in particular with all the organizations recently founded (Lilliput, Attac, Disobedients) and to a different degree also the already structured organizations (Arci, Cobas, Cgil) or even political parties” (document 11).

## 2.2 *The water campaign*

Also the water campaign identity is shaped by interactions between local, global and national levels.

The water campaigns was founded shortly after the First European Social Forum in Florence (2002). According to one of the coordinators:

“the question of the water management was already an issue within the European Social Forum... We then decided to constitute a working group on this issue within the Florence social forum which was born afterward. The working group was called ‘Group against the privatization of the common goods’, and did not deal only with the water issue, but included the housing question, the public transports, etc.” (Interview W1).

One year later, the then president of the World Contract on Water, Riccardo Petrella, asked the group to organize the World Social Forum on Water in Florence. For this reason a coordination committee of 8-10 people coming from different Italian Associations (ARCI, catholic associations, consumerist and environmental associations, the World Contract, Attac and others) was set up in order to organize the Forum:

“the forum was quite successful.. and the Tuscan movements decided to organize a Regional Campaign on the Water management, whose aim was to map the situation in Tuscany, that is what was happening, which were the decisions taken at the regional and local level, if they were privatizing the services, to what extent... since the privatization of the water management was decided already in Arezzo, and we wanted to understand what were the effects on the workers of the sector and on the tariffs. It was a kind of systematic study that aimed at putting together the local knowledge and spreading it, since the people from Arezzo knew what was happening, but the other Tuscans did not know yet... The idea was to build a common coordinated action which could be based on informed arguments” (ibid.).

In this way a “Tuscan network of movements on water” was built with the aim of proposing a regional popular law (a law which is proposed by citizens themselves with 4.000 signatures) which foresees the public management of the water based upon participatory tools and on principles of solidarity.

This mobilization was really successful, since the network (composed of associations, movements, and trade unions and supported by some political parties: Communist Refoundation and the Greens) was able to gather 43,000 signatures to support the law.

The law was then sent to the Regional Council, awaiting for a discussion among its members and for a decision.

The Tuscan experience showed the possibility to build a consensus on this issue, and pushed social movements and associations to organize a similar initiative at the national level (document W1). The idea was to set a working committee to organize a National Social Forum on water and to set initiatives for the re-publicization of the water at the national level, by integrating but also multiplying the local conflicts.

In the following years, the committee enlarged to include all sort of groups and associations, and after the National Social Forum on Water was held (in Rome, 2006) a final declaration was elaborated:

“We consider a priority the necessity for radically changing the existing norms on water. We want to collectively propose a national framework LAW that includes the entire water cycle and that puts it in the horizon of a public and participative government of the water, free from the market logic...” (document W13).

The document also emphasized the need to continue the local actions against the privatization of the water but suggested to coordinate the local experiences at the national level.

At the same time, the link between local and global is mentioned:

“We will participate and bring our contribute of this experience in the next international meetings (the counter-summit of Messico-City in march 2006, the Athens ESF in May 2006, and the counter-summit of Vienna 2006).

We now go back in our territories with an increased trust and awareness. Other worlds are possible, a new public and participative government of the water is walking and is coming closer.” (ibid.).

After that, the national committee organized, with the help of regional and local committees, the gathering of the signatures. At the national level, the amount of signatures needed to present a law of popular initiative is 50,000; the network established that the political goal would be met if they were able to collect ten times that amount. At the end of the campaign about 450.000 signatures were collected and presented to the President of the Camera this year (2007).

The campaign is now moving toward the mobilization of the public opinion to support the law within the Parliament. In the meanwhile a first success has been registered: in the bill elaborated by

the centre-left government on the privatization policy, the water management was excluded with a moratoria, and it was decided to discuss the water issue separately.

On the whole, the network was able to maintain an high degree of mobilization, and with a precise schedule on mind, to reach its intermediary goals. The last public action the network organized is a national demonstration in Rome (1 December 2007) that gathered according to the organizers about 40.000 people. Interestingly enough, the slogan was “it is written water, but it means democracy!”.

### 2.3 *The antineoliberalism frame between local and global*

As elsewhere, also in Italy Attac refers explicitly to a “antineoliberal” frame (Andretta 2005, della Porta et al. 2006, Ch. 3), by listing the problems the world is facing nowadays, what Snow and Benford (1988) would call the diagnostic side of the frame:

“The world in which we live is more and more characterized by social inequality, environmental diseases, the negation of the peoples’ and the powerless’ rights. The gap between the reach and the poor increases, the work and the life conditions worsen, the social exclusion and the marginalization of whole parts of the world, which also causes wars and violence. It brings about increasing human, social and environmental sufferings” (document A2).

At the same time the attribution of responsibility is also evident: “the acceleration of those phenomena is the effect of a neo-liberal process of the globalization of the economy ... Competition and profit have become the founding values of society, at the expense of solidarity, equality, freedom, culture and democracy” (ibid.). Thus, Attac links its main issue, the financial aspect of the economic globalization, with this broader analysis:

“One of the founding aspects of the processes of globalization is the transformation of the international financial system. The development of the speculative businesses has increased as never before. The liberalization of the financial system is completely out of control. In this complex scenario, there are the interests of the corporations, of the big international finance that prevail on those of the democratic institutions, at the expense of the real economy and the social conquests of the workers...The absence of rules on the international movements of the capital has dramatic consequences” (ibid.).

Also the Water campaign is framed within the antineoliberal dimension. As the document which called for the first national social forum on water says, in fact:

“Water is the source of life. Without water there is no life. Water is then a common good of the humanity... which belongs to everybody. The right to water is an inalienable right: water then cannot be a private property, but must be equally shared by everyone. *The neoliberal model* has produced an enormous inequality in the access to water, also due to the policies of inefficient and corrupted governments, and has generated an increasing scarcity of water, caused by models of production which tend to destroy the ecosystem” (document W3).

In the document attached to the national law presented in the Italian parliament, the promoters specifically write that:

“The economic, financial and political institutions that for decades have created the decay of natural resources and the water impoverishment of thousands of human communities, today say that water is a special and rare good and that only the economic value can regulate and legitimate its distribution.

We know that is not the case. After decades of neoliberal intoxication, the effects of market of public services and of the water show that only the public property and a public and participative government of the local communities can guarantee the protection of this resource, the right to access the water for everybody and its conservation for the future generations”. (document W12).

Thus, although the campaign is issue-specific, the frame of reference is very broad. This point is made clear by one of the participants:

“You cannot influence a policy if you don’t frame the problem and if you don’t single the enemy out. In this phase we have many things, the social forums, the meetings, in which the problem of water is referred to, as paradigm and as specificity. As paradigm, because the privatization of water says a lot of the meaning of neoliberalism and of the possible consequences for the persons’ lives, and as specificity, because a common good like the water, which our 70% of our body is made of, is sold out” (Interview W2).

It is not surprising, then, that in the final declaration of the Italian forum on water there is an explicit mention of the GJM, which defines the broader identity of the campaign:

“We recognize ourselves in the values, the proposals and the practices of the movements against neoliberal globalization and for other possible worlds, that, through world and continental forums and social mobilizations, opposes the invasion of the global market, the financial powers, the multinational companies, and the governments that support them” (document W13).

If this is the scenario, those are the problems that those (macro)processes are responsible for, then what is the solution – what Snow and Benford (1988) would call the prognostic side of the frame. The Attac document explicitly refers to the movement of movements: “Against this scenario, the world civil society shows, since Seattle, evident signs of an increasing opposition to neoliberalism and of a research of alternative planning” (document A2).

Within this movement that calls for another world, Attac so defines its own mission:

“The necessity to impose a democratic control on the neoliberal logics, which today lead the world system, is at the origin of the foundation of the French Association ATTAC (Action pour une taxation des transactions financières pour l’aide aux citoyens), that gather individual citizens, territorial and national trade unions, voluntary associations, NGOs, newspapers, local communities” (ibid.)

Also a list of specific goals is presented that refers to ATTAC, among which are quoted: “The creation of a people’s self-education movement oriented toward actions against neoliberal policies promoted by international organizations as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization” and the Tobin Tax as a measure of taxation of financial transactions” (ibid.).

If the frame is clearly antineoliberal, this does not mean that the organization is a single issue group. To the contrary such a broad perspective allows to link different frames, such as social justice, environmental justice, international solidarity, peace, democracy and so on. In one of the founding documents of Attac Italy we read that:

“The founding values of Attac Italy Association are: peace, solidarity between peoples, anti-racism, anti-fascism, the promotion of the dignity of the person and the refusal of any form of war, terrorism, mafia, social, racial and women discrimination...”

The Association aims at ... fighting the increasing forms of social inequality, the environmental blight, the negation of the peoples’ rights, by promoting concrete alternatives that draw a model of sustainable society and by sensitising the citizens” (document A8).

If we look at the campaigns ATTAC has organized in Italy, and in Florence, we can assess the range of issues, located at the international, national and local levels, it deals with: from the Tobin tax to the war, from the Bolkestein directive to the common goods (especially water), from the Italian campaign on the extension workers rights, on pensions, etc., to precariousness, from the mobilization against the high speed trains system to the protest against incinerators, and the list could be longer.

On the other hand, if the water campaign is issue-specific, the framework within which the issue is located is very ample, and part of the prognosis is framed as such. The National Forum on Water, in fact, “has focused on the whole water question, from the global political aspects to the local ones, from the protection of the resource to its managements, from the critics of privatization to the search for new models of public (government) based on participative democracy” (document W13), and the “struggles for water tend to become instruments of peace against the global war, today the more and more caused by the competition for the control of strategic natural resources, among which the water is the most important” (document W12).

The campaign is however mainly directed to changing the national legislation on water policy, and the envisaged solution is to stop the wave of privatization that takes place especially at the local level, where these strategic decisions are taken by the executives (especially the mayors) in absence of an open public discussion, and without any connection with the elected councils (interview W1). In this scenario, only a national law can uniform the water policy and set the principles that must be followed.

The Italian social forum on water, then, claims the “necessity of the national norms, which signals a radical change in the policies... that have made water a type of commodity, and the market the mode of its management” (document W12).

For this reason a law was drafted which foresees the end of the privatization process and a redefinition of a public government of water (document W11). The law is very technical and specific; in general it insists on water as a common good, which cannot be treated as good to exchange in the market, but as a strategic resource to be governed by the institutions and the citizens through a participative model (see section 7).

### **3. The groups' structure**

#### *3.1 The Water Campaign*

The water campaign is structurally an informal network of associations and individuals. Organizations are formally promoters or supporters of the campaign, but their involvement largely depends on their members' willingness and availability to participate. As Tommaso Fattori, one of the coordinators, told me, the campaign is permanently open to everybody who wants to participate. The aim of the campaign is in fact to gather as many groups and individuals as possible to spread the awareness of the water problem, to enlarge the network and strengthen the mobilization (Interview W1).

There are three levels of coordination of the campaign: the national coordination, with meetings open to everybody, aiming at sharing information, setting the agenda of mobilization, discussing and deciding strategies and results of the mobilization. The regional level has a similar structure and is meant to coordinate the local activities. The lowest level of the campaign is the local committee, which is composed by all the organizations and individuals who address the question of water privatization at the city level. During the period of the signatures gathering for the national law of popular initiative (2007), all the local and the regional committees have been activated. A national committee of promoters was set up, always open to everybody, composed by the Abruzzo Social Forum, Acea Onlus, Arci, Attac Italia, the Italian Committee for the World Water Contract, the Roma coordination public water, the grassroots trade union Cobas, the Cgil Funzione Pubblica (Public Function), the Ong Geologia senza Frontiera (Geology without frontiers), the catholic inspired Ong Mani Tese, and the National Operative Secretariat of the Campaign (document W8). The operative secretariat was set up to deal with the formal procedures of the signatures gathering, to collect and centralize them and to monitor the work at local level.

### 3.2 Attac

During the observation period, Attac-Florence has only individual membership. This seems to reflect the decision of the organization at the national level to abandon the idea of an inter-group organization, based on collective membership.

Like the other Attac groups, in Italy membership is formalized through a membership card, but this is only an instrument to finance the group. Informally, people can be part of Attac without a membership card: “if somebody wants to participate in our activity she does not need to have a membership card, we never asked newcomers to formalize their membership, they often do it only when the national membership card campaign is launched” (interview A3). This is in fact in line with how Attac Italy considers membership cards. During the National Assembly of Local Committees held in Florence in 2006, this issue was discussed, within the agenda item on the organization. In the introduction to the national membership card campaign the president of the Association Marco Bersani urged to mobilize and to make as many membership cards as possible during the Libera Festa (Free party, the annual party of Communist Refoundation). A member of Attac Turin questioned whether Attac wanted to use the membership cards for financial support only, or rather, in order to strengthen the organization, it would not be better to use the cards only for the “real activists”. But the people who intervened afterward agreed that Attac was not a political party and that an old vision of activism should be avoided, since “activists are those who actually get involved in Attac” (one said), and “membership cards are needed also for financial support” (Marco Bersani added). The member of Attac Turin was clearly of a different opinion but understood that there was no room for a change of mind of many participants and did not insist (Notes on the observation: 1/2-07-2006).

Formally Attac Italy has 1,500 members, but real participants in whatever activity are probably less than 200 (Interview A2).

Attac-Italy structure includes three national bodies: the National Council, whose delegates are member of local committees, the Assembly of the members, and the Assembly of the local committees, and a certain number of local committees, which organize and mobilize autonomously (document A12).

In Florence, the number of membership cards sold varies according to the phases of mobilization, from more than 50 during the peak (2002) to less than 15 the last year. The participants in the meetings Attac Florence vary from the 10-15 of the foundation phase to the actual 5-6. As an old member, a woman, told me “initially Attac was an association in which women prevailed, and I liked this, a thing that was difficult to find elsewhere, with the exception of Gay and Lesbians, neither in Communist Refoundation nor in the social centres. There was a big lack of women, but not in Attac.” (Interview A1).

This changed overtime, especially in the declining phase of the group: “many women stopped participating, as it always happens,... they do so because actually politics is made not to fit them, because if there are children, you cannot leave them alone in the evening, when you have to participate in a meeting, thus we can say that politics has a macho structure... for this reason those who left first were women, I did not, simply because I don’t have children and I have passion for politics... I was very happy when Ilaria came here, though this meant the end of Attac-Siena, where she was once very involved” (ibid.).

Attac Florence has no formal coordinator, though de-facto coordinators changed overtime, on the basis of the contingent availability of the members. It has a delegate who participates in the meetings of National Council, but during my period of observation I met him only once.

#### 4. Action repertoire

The action repertoire of Attac Italy is very broad, and includes both conventional and non conventional forms of protests: from public letters, to petitions, from demonstrations to boycotts, from sit-in to laws drafting at regional and national institutional levels. After all, Attac was born to promote a law (the Tobin tax) which would impose taxes to financial transactions, by means of political mobilization and protests. The only limit of the association is that the action repertoire must be “pacific”. In the national statute it can be read that Attac wants to “contribute to the renewal of democratic political participations and to favour the development of new organizational forms of the civil society through the mobilization of political but *pacific* tools...” (Document A12, art. 2, emphasis added).

An important form of action is related to one of the functions Attac tries to perform: the citizens’ self education. This function is performed also through regular online publications such as the newsletter called “Granello di Sabbia”, which is published every 15 days:

“The Granello gathers and sends in the whole world the inputs and reflections for Attac internal debate. It is meant to know, inform, debate central themes of the associative life. Campaigns, actions, reflections on the liberal economy, on the impact of the pensions funds, on the connections between the banks system and the fiscal paradise are always present, together with many international and local issues of general interest” (document A13)

At the national level each year “the University of Attac,” is open to anyone wants to participate, is organized (see document A5). There, lectures on economics, common goods and globalization are given. Also in Florence some meetings are devoted to cultural activities, experts are invited to inform members on political issues upon which the group is called to decide if to participate:

“Especially at the beginning, each week we organized some educational initiatives: one of us would research an argument that was of interest to us, for instance on the labour market or on another ‘hot’ political argument. and then we invited somebody who had an expertise on the argument, somebody of the CGIL, for instance... a kind of open lecture. It would help us and anybody interested, to learn. This lasted for long, but this year we have not been able to do it, because we had many things to do, because we are only few... But this aspect of self-education is one reason which explains why Attac in Florence is still alive...” (Interview A1).

From the actual behaviour of the group in Italy and in Florence we can say that non violence has always been respected and never questioned. Cristian recently told me that:

“In general for the actions strategies we have no limits, or boundaries, in the sense that each historical moment has its needs and we wait to see in each moment what is needed. Surely, we are not a group that can even think about being an armed group; we have always supported peace, and we always make the marchers very happy with the help of musical bands... we are not violent, for sure..., we are not passive either. We want to make actions... surely we do not agree with groups that destroy, for instance by breaking windows or by burning garbage cans, things like that. This is the ruin of a lot of work made by many committees, not only of Attac, that spent a lot of energy to mobilize many people... We don’t agree with this. We are anyway persons accustomed to demonstrate in marches with those we collaborate with, we are a few, but we do what we can...” (Interview A4)

This is confirmed also by Caterina, who reported an experience during the local struggle against the high speed train system in the Mugello (della Porta and Andretta 2002). In that circumstance Attac collaborated with many groups, but one of them acted in a covert and non cooperative way:

“Some have done stupid things that brought about negative consequences. For instance we were mobilizing with the workers employed for building the High speed system, people from the south that due to the hard work conditions have been injured in accidents... since the employers did not give them enough time for going home and coming back to work. We created a link with them, we

made assemblies together, we even filmed a very interesting documentary... And once, some did stupid things, like cutting the wheels of the employers' cars, and they have also been recognized by the workers... This is really stupid, I mean when you are part of a larger group of persons... you must understand that you have responsibilities for what you do, and that the consequences of what you do are suffered by the workers, and you must be careful. You anyway pay for what you do, and those people have been isolated by the whole movement, not only by Attac" (Interview A1).

This shows that the group considers the strategies of action as a function of a cooperative work in joint campaigns. Strategies are decided together, and "whether violent or not, nobody can do something different from what has been decided together" (interview A2).

The water campaign repertoire is, instead, obviously linked to its goals: law drafting and signatures gatherings. But it also includes other tools of mobilization, as the organization of a Forum on water and participation in the Anti-Bolkestein march demonstrate. Moreover, at the local level, the repertoire is very diversified, depending on the configuration of actors involved and the local opportunities structure (see section 6). As reported by Renato: "strategies vary from context to context. For instance in Latina there is a movement that promotes a kind of civil disobedience, by asking citizens not to pay for the water bill, because the water management foresees a peculiar legal model, while in other contexts we find different strategies" (Interview W2). And Tommaso says that "obviously it is not only a matter of gathering signatures, because you stop people and talk with them, you invite them to participate, you organize assemblies in the districts, with leftist associations and with parishes, you promote public gatherings and moments of debate... and so on" (Interview W1). Contrary to what happens in Attac, the campaign does not have a "conception" of action repertoires which depends of the vision of the group. This is because there are groups with different conceptions and action repertoires, from the radical collectives of students of Rome, and the collectives of unemployed in Naples, to the non-violent Lilliput and Catholic organizations, from the established trade unions (Cgil) to the radical grassroots ones (Cobas), from Attac itself to the environmental organizations.

## **5. The groups' environment**

Social movements act in a complex multi organizational field (Klandermans 1992), which shapes their structure, behaviour and identity. Social movements scholars distinguish between the movements organizational environment and the political system environment, the latter referring to those political parties and institutions which have relationships of any sort with social movements, and which will be treated in a separate section (6).

The two selected groups have different ways to relate with their environment: in one case the environment is the place where the group is embedded and tries to implement its political strategy (Attac): in the other case the environment overlaps with the group itself, since many organizations are part of its network. In other words, in the latter case to talk about the environment is to talk about the group's structure itself.

The campaign is however very important for the GJM, at least in Italy, because it provides a space where the various movements, organizations and groups that mobilize within the GJM continue to interact during its perceived crisis, when other common mobilizations are increasingly declining. As Tommaso Fattori points out, "the campaign was also the way to make all those movements and associations that were at the ESF work on a specific issue: from trade unions to leftist associations like Arci and other, from local committees and environmental organizations to catholic groups, etc." (interview W1).

But the reflection on the organizational environment is much more pronounced in Attac, which wants to play a central role within it.

By referring to the movements that in Italy have started mobilizing on the global issues (against the war, against the WTO, against biotechnologies and GMOs, for the defence of biodiversity and of the local knowledge, the women's world march...etc.), Attac reports a -"proliferation of groups, forums, networks that are bearer of big potentialities, though still too much fragmented, hardly communicating with each other, with an insufficient ability to impact on the local and national policies" (document A1). Therefore the political role of an association like ATTAC:

"The foundation of Attac in Italy and its direct link with the other Attac associations in other countries guarantee the global understanding of the big contradictions and the possibility of a coordinated and effective action for their solution. At the same time, Attac-Italy is an opportunity to mobilize and to create relationships between variegated social groups, but equally able to contribute to social and cultural transformation: the workers' world, the youths and students' realities, the peasants movements, the radical environmentalism, the solidarity associations, the gender differences, the migrants' world and the indigenous movements, etc." (document A2).

At the very beginning Attac Italy, similarly to her "mother" Attac France, would like to perform a function of incorporation of different sectors and organizations (ibid.). But, between Genoa and Florence, the scenario changed and it became visible that the other sectors, and organizations would not be absorbed by the association. The 2003 political document of the assembly recognizes this point by prefiguring a different political role:

"On this [antineoliberal] project, which passes through the strengthening of the movement against the capitalist globalization, we will build alliances with those, be them movements, associative, unions or political organizations, want to implement with us the building of an ample, plural and participated path toward a radical change of reality" (document A3).

In fact, a year later, the political document refers to "a radical change of skin, a shift from a potential container of an emerging movement (the initial inter-groups) to an association among others of a more ample movement..." (document A4).

These statements testify for a change of perspective: the function is now that of a broker that creates relationships between different groups and sectors, *brokerage* being "the linking of two or more currently unconnected social sites" (Tarrow 2002).

It is interesting to notice that this function is explicitly recognized by other participants in networks and campaign. Within the water campaign, for instance, the role of Attac is considered important, because it brings its expertise on law drafting (Attac was born with the draft of the Tobin Tax law) and for its ability to work with the others (Interview W1 and W2).

From the very beginning, Attac-Florence moves from the same premises and tries to translate these statements in local practices. According to one of the member of the local committee (Interview 1), during the first local meeting shortly after the Genoa protest in 2001, "There were persons of different groups, from Zapatistas to social centres, from the Antagonist Tuscan Movement (MAT) to Lilliput etc. Because ATTAC was one of biggest organization in Genoa and remained at the hearth of the movement... At the beginning everybody was there" (Interview A1)

From my own experience as participant observer in the group, I could see that the function of brokerage of the organization is visible at both national and local level. International, national and local campaigns (the Stop the Bolkestein campaign, campaign on water and others) are always coordinated with other groups and organizations and Attac performs the tasks of coordinator by preparing the meetings, calling groups to participate, providing the motivations to mobilize together:

"We are considered too radical in the moderate sector of the movement, and too moderate in the radical sector. To me, we are not moderate, we are very radical, but this perception allows us to stay in the middle, to communicate and to create communication between different groups. This is ATTAC, not only in Florence" (Interview 2).

In this line the local group is involved in a multiorganizational field of cooperation for specific campaigns. Members of ATTAC Florence are contemporarily involved in external networks on issues such as precariousness, the one on a law for the water management and others.

If the political role of ATTAC in Italy and in Florence is to be the broker of broader coalitions, it is obvious that its success and failures, its very existence, largely depends on its environment. Attac is very active in different campaigns, and tries to put together organizations and sectors of the movement which otherwise would hardly be connected with each other. In the political document written and approved by the national assembly in 2005, for instance, it reads:

“There is no longer a unique place for the recomposition of the struggles, but a plurality of conflicts which are produced by different social subjects, each of which expresses forms of resistances to the new commodification and to the old and new dangers... It is in this scenario that Attac Italy wants and tries to give its contribution, by promoting not an abstract unity of movement’s forces, but a unity based on key themes, on open conflicts on which campaigns have to be built which are able to move forward the capabilities of mobilization and of raising consensus in the direction of a radical exit from the neoliberal and war’s policies. It is still open the search for places and occasions that need to be collectively built to get the different mobilizations into a common field of permanent dialogue and of synthesis of the different practices and proposals elaborated for the transformation of society” (document A5).

At the same time the networks that Attac builds are of vital importance for the internal organization. For instance the recruitment of new members and external material support passes through the group presence in broader campaigns: membership cards are “bought” by other organizations’ members who wish expressing their solidarity, and in broader campaigns activists who are not members of any organization come to know Attac and sometimes decide to participate in its activities. As already reported, this holds true for Attac Florence too: Andrea was recruited during the water campaign in Tuscany, and the newest comer has been recruited by Andrea, who met her during the campaign on precariousness.

Attac promotes an inter-groups communication which is similar to what it tries to use internally, and as mentioned, it thinks about its own failures and successes by referring to the failures and successes of the GJM as a whole. As quotes from several political documents in the previous sections show, Attac is very aware that its organizational growth or decline largely depend upon the movement environment in which it is embedded. In Florence, as reported by interviewed members, relationships and campaigns are carried out with many other organizations:

“there are for instance the precarious students, who are a big group, which however fluctuates, but they do a good job... There are also trade unions, but this depends on the situation... For instance there has been in Florence an hot period, with workers’ strikes, and we did everything, like meetings with the workers in the public transport sector, debates, demonstrations... In those cases the most important trade union for us has been the Cobas [grassroots organization, very critical of the large leftist trade union confederation-CGIL]... They are the ones who come to visit us and to ask if we want to participate in some initiatives. Yesterday for instance they paid for 20 membership cards” (Interview A1).

## **6. Perceived Political Opportunities**

In the documents elaborated by Attac there emerges the analysis of a complex political opportunity structure which combines the international, the macro-regional (Europe) and the national level. This complex and closed configuration of political opportunities is, according to Attac, “focused on movements of financial speculation [that] brings ‘necessarily’ about the constriction of workers rights, the nullification of trade unions, the nullification of the unions democracy and makes political democracy a fake concept” (document A3)

At the international level the world is perceived as dominated by neoliberal agents (WTO, WB, IFM, etc.), while the European Union is seen as a strategic political space to contrast neoliberalism. In the political document elaborated by ATTAC Italy in 2003, the EU is described as “the monetary and financial Europe, based on the militarization of both its relationships with the South of the World ... and its internal social relationships, the more and more oriented towards the constriction of free spaces and the emptying of any democratic meaning of the institutional representative tools whatsoever”. However, it is also true that, against a Europe “slave of USA imperialistic politics”, a Europe birthplace of the humanism can become the bulwark against USA power”. Moreover, Europe needs to be recognized firstly as “a fundamental political place and territory of struggles for the building of an antiliberalist horizon”. This European space is being filled by “a European movement [that] poured into the street of Florence” (all in document A3).

As far as the water campaign is concerned, there is not such a production of documents on political institutions and actors. At the global level the campaign generically criticizes those economic, political and financial institutions that support the neoliberal policies of privatization (document W12), but it hardly gets into more details. In the documents I have collected, the European Union is never mentioned, except, implicitly, when the campaign decides to participate in the anti-Bolkestein demonstration in Rome. There are however detailed documents on the EU and the UN in the web of the World Contract on Water, that is considered only one part of the campaign.

At the domestic level, the national campaign is carried out between the end of the centre-right government and the beginning of the new centre-left government. This shift is explicitly mentioned in the document attached to the national law where we can read that:

“in the meanwhile, the change produced with the political elections of April 2006 has brought into the government the coalition of the Union, which in its electoral program mentions the will to maintain the property and the management of the integrated water service in the public hands. This is an important shift, which was possible also thanks to the social mobilization that in these years has put the idea of the water as a not-for-sale common good in the mass culture” (document W12).

However, during the meetings that prepared the organization of the Italian Forum on water in 2006, a discussion emerged on the opportunity to invite politicians of the centre-left coalition (at that point still opposing the Berlusconi government) to discuss the law (see section 8). For instance, during the national meeting held in Pescara on January 14, 2006 (see section report 1103), different conceptions and opinions on how to deal with political institutions and actors emerged.

Actually, the fact that the document accompanying the law of popular initiative explicitly recognizes the new centre-left parties government coalition as an important political change, must be read as a device to press the new majority to discuss and approve the law. The document was in fact delivered in the hands of the president of the Camera, Fausto Bertinotti, recognized leader of Rifondazione Comunista, part of the centre-left coalition.

Finally, the many local conflicts on the water issue, integrated in the national campaign, draw a diversified map of relations with political parties and institutions. There are contexts in which the centre-left is in the opposition and support the local campaign on water, and places where the centre-left is in the government and decided to privatize the water management (like in Tuscany). According to Renato, a representative of the local committees in Abruzzo (located in the South Italy):

“consider that in Abruzzo the Forza Italia’s mayors are in the alliance for the water, sure they are not part of the movement, but adhere to the local platform against the privatization of the water. They express, say, an intelligent neoliberalism, they understand that the water is different from other commodities. This is why we won in L’Aquila (the Abruzzo capital), with the DS [centre-left democratic party] and the Margherita [a centre party usually allied with centre-left coalition, and now together with the former in the new Democratic Party] on the other side... That is why we

need answers and strategies that vary from context to context, because the configuration of the actors and of the problems is variegated” (Interview W2).

Despite the formally more open political opportunity structure in Tuscany, mostly governed by centre-left coalitions, with the participation, in some cases, of the Communist Refoundation Party and the Greens, Tommaso reports a strong tension with the local governments:

“we have been completely ignored by the newspapers, and boycotted by the world of the institutional politics... They started discussing our law but within closed councils, with the members of the local executives and the representatives of the ATO (Autorità Territoriali Competenti, territorial authorities responsible for, among other things, the water management), because they have to face with the protest of political minorities within the councils. Because in theory, the centre-left majorities of the local councils in Tuscany were in favour of the privatization, but many have started doubting after our law... Then, some councils started to discuss the question with the Region, which supports the privatization, and with us. This is done in a very difficult atmosphere. Also because beyond the water privatization there are very strong interests, millions and millions of Euros, positions for the political personnel, etc. Then you touches the crossroad between the political and the economic power... And in fact, Claudio Martini [the President of the regional executive] declared in television that the law proposed by social movements goes in the opposite direction of the law that the Region wants to approve, that is any kind of discussion is closed. And in fact, just after we presented our law, many majors of the Tuscan cities, decided to accelerate the entry of ACEA [a multinational company] within Publiacqua [the public-private agency responsible for the water management in Tuscany]. This represents a slap in the face of one of the most important participative phenomenon since ever... That is to mean that with 43.000 signatures that ask to open a public discussion on this problem, the answer is to bind the decision... But then they should stop talking about participation, about a councillorship on participation, about a law that promotes participation. This means that the tension with the politics of the ‘palazzo’ [the Palace] is very high, despite the fact the in the regional promoting committee there is all the Tuscan civil society. It is peculiar to see this clear gap between the administrators and the civil society” (Interview W1).

The broader time-frame of the Attac activities (from 2001 till today), and the nature of the political subject, with long-term and structured political goals, allow to better appreciate the perception of domestic political opportunities. Until 2005, also Attac sees a very closed political opportunity structure: “the Berlusconi government’s attack on the workers movement, oriented toward the precariousness of the work relationships ..., as well as the assault on the more general social and citizenships rights, is one of the plugs of the reconfiguration of the European continent role” (document A3)

In this domestic political scenario, the traditional allies of social movements, such as leftist political parties, are seen, in that moment, as characterized by contradictory instances. On the one hand, “the lack of a precise choice on the part of the moderate left and the attempt to stay in the framework of the compatibility with neoliberalism make those parties without political weight and weakened by a rived internal debate”. On the other hand, for this reason “a debate that aims at drawing a strategy that, sustained by mass mobilization, would overcome the dichotomy between social movement autonomy and the autonomy of the political, through a reformist institutional outcome” (ibid.).

But especially the perception of the domestic opportunity structure changes over time, with the evolution of political events. Already in 2004 (one year before the national elections that brought the centre-left into the government), the political document points to strengthen the autonomy of social movements also in the scenario of a possible change in the national government with a winning centre-left coalition: “there will never be ‘friendly’ governments” to whom delegating the accomplishment of political goals. We need, then, a movement that acts politically, defines its

autonomy... and according to the different scenarios, defines the tools of struggle, dialectic and negotiation” (document A4).

Shortly after the national elections (April 2006), a political document declared that “we need to extend the territorial conflicts... we need to build national disputes that are able to modify the institutional agenda and push forward the political goals” (document A5, see also document A6). In the last year (2007), Attac recognizes instead the weakness of the centre-left government led by Romano Prodi, by even suggesting that it can be considered as “in continuity with the neoliberal policies carried out by the previous centre-right government” (document A7). Also the radical left (the two communist parties and the Greens) is not able to change this picture. It follows that “all the puzzle of the relations between movements and institutional politics, removed for a long time, clearly emerges now”.

Attac Italy, and Attac Florence as well, express, then, a strong need for movement’s autonomy from institutional and party politics. This does not mean to leave the function of making political work to established actors.

In fact,

“Autonomy must be practiced: not as a separation of the social or a reproduction of the traditional roles (the movements that question by walking, waiting for the politics to answer); but as ability to build paths, to begin with social conflicts expressed by the territories, that are able to pass through the institutional politics and determining the agenda, by experimenting participative practices that overcome the politics of delegation as political representation” (document A5).

This basically means that also social movements have to “make politics”, by trying to influence political institutions, without relying on classical mechanisms of political representation. The critique of delegation points to overcoming the traditional scheme that sees movements articulating demands and allied political parties transforming them in policies.

Also the relationship with political parties is seen with caution. As it is well known in Italy, the Communist Refoundation Party (PRC), born after the split with the old Italian Communist Party which decided to transform itself in a social democratic party (the Leftist democratic party, PDS, then DS), has mobilized within the GJM since Genoa 2001, and has been considered as an important ally. In Florence, which is embedded in a traditional communist subculture, this relationship is even stronger, and therefore more problematic. When asked about who is considered the most important ally at the local level, our key informant expresses no doubts:

“The Prc, for sure. This cannot be generalized because the relationship with this party changes in every city. In other cities the PRC is very close to the DS [meaning far from social movements] here instead we have a very good relationship with them [PRC’s members]. The PRC has always been in the movement, this without trying to conquer the hegemony, as others try to do, but supporting the movement by bringing activists and by working with us. Often, politics is not about the party, but about the persons; and in Florence we found the right persons in this party” (Interview A1).

To her, this strong relationship does not mean to weaken the autonomy of the organization, since:

“I have to say that within Attac nobody has a membership card of political parties, and this is something that I like... Obviously there are members who vote for the PRC, we vote for the least worse, and the least worse is the PRC, this is why everyone who is in Attac votes for the PRC, but nobody is a member of the party... But with the PRC there has always been a good relationship with some members who always helped us, they came and inform us on many things...” (ibid.).

In one of the last meetings I have attended in Florence, however, worries were expressed about the new political situation in Italy. After the DS decided to join the centre party (la Margherita) to form the Democratic Party, the left of the DS decided to exit and many leftist party’s leaders are calling for building a new political subject (a federation) of the various small parties at the left of

the Democratic Party (PRC, another Communist Part, the Greens and those who left the DS). In some local initiatives the PRC called for the unity of the left and tried to involve many SMOs (see section 8, illustration AIII).

To conclude, the two types of group frame in a similar vein the national political opportunities, though the water campaign is less interested in providing a precise and formalized view of the political situation. After all, the campaign is a network of different subjects that would hardly agree on a common declaration on the centre-left government. Besides, the campaign's aim is to convince the majority of the Parliament to vote for the law. Moreover, national opportunities interact with local ones, and activists are very aware of this.

In both cases, finally, this analysis confirms that political opportunities not only influence social movements (Tarrow 1998, Della Porta and Diani 2006), but are clearly reflected upon, and filtered by the perceptions of, social movements activists (McAdam 1982).

## **7. Visions and practices of democracy**

### *7.1 Internal democracy*

Though the two groups are different in terms of formalization of decision-making procedures, they both end up to prefer consensual methods in practice.

The water campaign is an informal network which does not foresee formal procedures of decision making. Its heterogeneous composition makes consensus the only possible way out when divergences of opinions are to be dealt with. "Normally, Tommaso told us, we take decisions by consensus, but only in a few cases a real divergence of opinions emerged and in none we have been unable to find a solution which was agreed by everyone" (Interview W1). In some cases, "it is possible that somebody is not fully happy with the decision taken, says Renato, but there is a sense of responsibility. That is, we understand that we are many people who come from different experiences and that only if we avoid blocking the group on a single decision we can continue to work together. I mean, after all we talk about very small divergences, on this or that way to organize things, but in general we are all happy with the things decided" (Interview W2). As Tommaso points out: "It is true that we are different, different people, different organizations, but our strength is that everybody agree on a precise campaign that focus on the theme of the common good and conceive the question of participation as central, both in the way we write the law and in the way we want the water management to work" (Interview W1).

Attac is instead a formal organization with formal procedures to organize the internal decision making. As stated in its charter of intents, "Attac Italy wants to be a democratic and open, transversal and pluralist association, composed of diversified individuals and social groups: associations, NGOs, unions..." (document A2).

With the WP3 data, we classified Attac Italy as formally adopting a deliberative representative model of democracy. The method of consensus has been attributed to Attac because "the election of the National Council, the integration and/or the substitution of its members are done through the search of the unanimity of the consensus." (art. 23). Strictly speaking, however, Attac should be classified as having an associational model, since both the assembly and the national council take decisions by means of majority vote (art. 9 and art. 14).

This nonetheless, from the interview with a key representative of the national association (WP4) it seems that as far as practices are concerned, both the assembly, composed by whoever wants to participate and actually attended by a range of 100-300 persons, and the National Council, take decisions by consensus, rather than voting. This is confirmed by my personal observation in two national meetings of the local committees.

The statute formally foresees the existence of territorial committees –"which represent the territorial articulation of the Association" (art. 20)- with a great degree of autonomy: "The territorial

committees, within the limits and the respect of the goals, the principles and the values of the present statute, has full organizational autonomy, that can be formalized with its own statute” (art. 20).

Accordingly to the interviews I have carried out during my period of observation, Attac Florence members consider the consensual method as “obvious”, and it is never questioned:

“In Florence things are very relaxed, we don’t have “capetti” (little bosses), we don’t have complicated procedures; if one comes to the meeting and has something to say, this is put into the agenda and we discuss it... something very elastic and very simple, since in general we are often in three people... If somebody miss the meeting the others can take a decision, and then this decision is communicated to the mailing list by saying “we have taken this decision, what do you think?”. Obviously it must be something important otherwise we don’t need to do that” (Interview A2).

The group clearly aims at deliberation and participation, both at national and local level. But consensus is not conceived in ideological terms: “in principle we are very pragmatic, we aim at reaching a large consensus, but when a decision must be taken, we don’t stop at national level because a few do not agree. Obviously we discuss the questions, but when at the end there still remains some disagreement we go ahead, without tragedies...” (Interview A3). At the local level, I could observe no deviation from this standard (see section 8).

As we can see, then, in both cases consensus is considered a practical tool to manage divergences, more than an ideal model of internal democracy, otherwise this would be codified in the Statute of Attac. Moreover, consensus method seems to work, as we will see in a more detailed way in the next section (8).

## 7.2 *External democracy*

As far as external democracy is concerned, Attac Italy seems to have, similarly to what we see in the other national chapters of the organization, a conception of democracy which values citizens’ participation without denying the role of representative institutions. This is implicit in the first goal the French association was meant for: the introduction of the Tobin tax implies a level of government that imposes it, and the general antineoliberal discourse of Attac is based on the democratic control on the globalization process (della Porta et al. 2006, chapters 2 and 3). In the chart of intents written to found the association in Italy, we read that “the necessity to impose a democratic control on neoliberal logics, that today lead the world system, is at the origin of the French Association ATTAC...” and “the role of the democratic institutions themselves disappears and politics becomes more and more guided by the economy. The democratic participation is impeded” (document A2). That is why Attac aims at “favouring the return of the political control over the economy. In an age in which governments have decreased their function of control on their own national economies...” (ibid.).

Representative democracy is considered, however, insufficient. This is why the association aims at “experimenting participative practices that overcome the politics of delegation as political representation” (document A5). Electoral politics is, in Attac terms, to be avoided, by proposing “the strength of the concept of autonomy from party and electoral hypotheses”. However, as already mentioned, “autonomy does not mean indifference, but capacity to contaminate and to confront on our themes with political subjects that oppose neoliberalism” (document A3).

In the Attac’s conception, democracy is about citizens’ participation and influence on democratic institutions. The scheme that foresees political parties as mediators between civil society and institutions is criticized, and overcome by a view that see informed and self-organized citizens exercising their own influence on political parties and institutions. In this sense, Attac wants to “create a critical, pluralist and active movement of people’s self-education, which is action oriented, a richer and richer movement of culturally and politically alphabetized citizens for a universal and

articulated contention against neoliberal policies” (document A12). Attac wants to promote an intellectual work to spread counter-information, the goal is to make citizens more aware of the problems caused by neoliberalism, and to promote their political mobilization.

The concept of participation, evoked in many documents, is then linked to the idea of an “action oriented people’s self-education able to put together the need for awareness and critical self-formation of each activist with her own mobilization for the transformation of the existing”(document A3). Participation is first of all social conflict, since Attac calls for “the conquest of new spaces of democracy and social justice, by trying to conjugate conflict with the necessity to evoke another world” (ibid.).

Again, this does not mean to deny the role of political institutions in the “idea that it is possible the construction of a society as a collective political process, which aims at social equality and solidarity, including the centrality of the institutional (and state’s) dimension of positive right on the basis of which to organize the civil living and the conflict in a pacific way (document A14).

Conflict is then what makes (representative) democracy work. For instance by commenting the results of the local elections at the time in which Berlusconi was prime minister of a centre-right government, which included the racist League and the post-fascist National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale), Attac Italy stated that those elections represented the “success of those political forces that in a more explicit way opposed both war and the attack to the welfare state. It is particularly meaning the result of the local election, above all in those places where social and territorial conflicts have produced radical and participative experiences, contributing to qualify the vote as a real action for change” (document A4). The mobilization from below is, in this scheme, “useful to influence, control and assess ... the functioning of the institutions...” (document A12).

Especially at the local level, collaboration in innovative public decision making processes is considered important, though “only if they are real and not artificial” (Interview for the WP4).

In the complex international institutional system, Attac sees a crucial role of the European Union: “Within this scenario, the European continent is called to define its own path and its own political project” (document A5). The problem is, according to Attac, that “the signature of the Constitutional Treaty draws a monetary, market-oriented and a-democratic Europe. The constitutionalization of specific monetary policies, established by the Cardiff, Amsterdam and Maastricht treaties, defines a European project based on the principle of an ‘open economy of the market’, strategically oriented toward the hegemony of the North on the South of the world, the building of a strong European army, the precarization of work and rights... The Bolkestein directive, which the European Union is discussing, as much as the discussion on the work time, tell more than any other discourse how big is the attack on what has been till now called ‘the European social model’”. Moreover, this EU is the first that wants to liberalize and privatize services with the GATS’ negotiations within the World Trade Organization” (ibid.).

In a specific document on the Constitutional Treaty, Attac Italy criticizes it because, among many other things, “a constitution should be a document which defines how relations between institutions must be developed, but this treaty determines the very content of the policies”, which are guided by a neoliberal logic (document A14).

This would undermine the very logic of democracy that foresees that citizens choose policies by voting: “In a democracy a Constitution must allow for alternative choices, the European Constitution blocks any policy which is different, because it establishes (IV-443) that any amendment will not be accepted without the ratification of all member states...” (ibid.). In a special issue of the mentioned online newsletter “Granelli”, it can be read that “The European Union is actually very weak in terms of democracy, legitimacy and transparency” (document A16).

The EU related democratic deficit argument is mentioned and discussed in almost all the political documents approved by the national assemblies of the organization. If this is how it judges the EU, Attac proposes, together with the European GJM, “another Europe”: “we struggle for another

Europe, a feminist, ecologist, open Europe, a Europe of peace, social justice, of life sustainability, of the alimentary sovereignty and solidarity...” (document 17). If Attac is in favour of another Europe, this does not mean that it denies the need for European institutions, and a new European treaty is even called for. The treaty must be democratically written, promote democracy, and preserve the “European Social Model”.

For this purpose, Attac suggests 10 principles (elaborated by about 15 European national chapters) that should guide the elaboration of a new constitution. First, the treaty must be written following a truly democratic procedure; then, on the institutional content, the treaty should deepen and improve democracy, institutionalize transparency, and develop participative and direct democracy; with regard to European policies, the treaty should strengthen the fundamental rights, defend and improve the democratic conquests on social rights, prefigure an alternative kind of economy (which does not institutionalize and constitutionalize the idea of an open and concurrent market, but rather defines the limits within which the market should operate); the treaty should also define the goals and not the means (for instance the goals should be the “sustainable mobility” or “sustainable agriculture”, while the means to reach them should not be defined by the treaty, as the ECT actually does by foreseeing the high speed train system or the increase of the agriculture production or rationalization); the treaty should foresee the fiscal instruments to fight speculation and fiscal evasion; and, finally, it should promote peace and solidarity (Document A16).

As for the conception of external democracy, it is worth analyzing in details the principles which concern the democratic procedure for the elaboration of the new treaty and the ones which concern the EU institutions. For the former, Attac calls for:

“a new democratic Assembly, directly elected by the citizens of all member states, [that] will have the mandate to elaborate, with the effective participation of the national parliaments, the proposal of a new treaty.

The composition of the Assembly will have to respect the equality between men and women... and to be representative of all sectors of the society, and to be inter-generational. The treaty should be approved by a referendum in all the member states and the result of the vote will have to be assessed country by country. During the ratification campaign, the European institutions and the Member States should establish rules that assure a deep debate...” (document A16). From this suggested procedure it is evident how Attac sees the combination of deliberative, representative and participative democracy, at least when a fundamental law, such as a Constitution, must be written and adopted.

For what concerns, instead, the democratic institutions, the association affirms that:

“The new Treaty must be based on the best existing democratic principles... A clear separation of powers: executive, legislative, judiciary. We need to stop the monopoly of the Commission in the function of proposing laws. In this field all the institutions and the citizens of the Union must have the same rights.

The European Parliament must have the right to propose and to approve the European Union legislation, and even the exclusive right to nominate and revoke the Commission and its single members.

The national parliaments should be reinforced both at the national and at the European level...

The new treaty must define in a clear way both the European Union competences at the different levels, and their limits vis-à-vis the national States and the local authorities. The Court of European Justice must not act as a de facto legislator.

The European Central Bank... must be democratically controlled. Its monetary policy priorities must be economic justice, full employment and the social security of all European citizens. Moreover, the Eurogroup must assume its responsibilities as foreseen by the treaties in force on the definition of the monetary changes policy.” (ibid.).

This vision of how democratic institutions should work at the European level is clearly borrowed by representative democracy at national level. But it is complemented by principles of participative democracy:

“The new treaty should include the citizens’ fundamental right to directly participate in the Res Publica, by proposing ample forms of direct democracy... To name but a few, the following rights should be guaranteed:

- the possibility, for a certain number of citizens of a certain number of member States, to propose a law to be discussed and voted within the European Parliament
- the possibility for a certain number of citizens to ask to the European Parliament the organization of a referendum in all the member states...
- to establish the limits of the companies’ influence on the EU institutions and on their decisions, by forcing them to be transparent and by reducing their access privileges
- the institution of a consultation of social movements, NGOs on each new European legislative initiative, equal to the other interest groups...” (ibid.)

As for other dimensions, the Water campaign, not being a political subject but an ad hoc network, lacks of documents that are not directly related with the issue it deals with. However, the focus on a single issue reveals the functioning of the institutions of government within a specific policy sector. As we saw in the section on political opportunities, the question of (the lack of a) democracy is addressed in the analysis of how decisions are concretely taken when a problem of general interest is dealt with:

“we say that the commodification of the water besides killing the (idea of the) water as a common good itself, and excluding people from access to water, here as in the rest of the world where Acea and other multinational companies invest their capital, besides all this it also excludes any form of democracy in the water management, because the water government responds to the councils of administration (of the companies), to the logic of profit, to the stock exchange, because those companies quote themselves in the stock exchange of the multi-utilities, and then it responds to a logic that has nothing to do with democracy and the citizens choices.” (Interview W1).

The conception of external democracy also emerges from the laws the campaign have drafted. The Tuscan law for instance foresees specific participative institutions for the management of the water.

As Tommaso told me:

“the key point of the law is the dimension of the participation, maybe the most innovative part of this law, because we don’t say we want the old public management back in, we say that we want to profoundly renew the tradition of public government. That is, to start from the idea that the water is a common good and as such is a social ownership, which does not belong to the market, nor to the state, and then the participation of the citizens and the workers of the service is central to rethink the water government. That is why our law (the regional one), has an important part where we ask to institutionalize the water councils of citizens and workers of the sector, whose function is to decide on some substantial questions, such as the allocation of the resources, the plans of management, the industrial plans. Those are decisions that are now out of the prerogatives of the representative town councils. That is why we say that, on this issue, the majors must act under a blind mandate of the councils, the town councils must be reinvested of decisional powers on this, but this is not enough, because it is also necessary that the citizens themselves participate in such decisions through the citizens and workers councils” (Interview W1).

Logically, the law drafted for the national level is organized on the same criteria. The law, is a national framework law (a law that bind decisions taken at regional level), due to the fact that the

water management is a regional prerogative, and draws on a complex combination of national and local representative and participative democratic tools for the water management.

First the law foresees the local integration of the water services (art. 5), a period of stopgap to stop the concessions of the water services to private law's subjects and to bring them to public law's institutions (art. 6), and institutionalize a national fund for the public government of the water with the function of implementing the public water government (art. 7).

The functioning of such public water government is articulated in a separate article (10):

“To assure a democratic government of the integrated water services, the local institutions adopt forms of participative democracy that give tools of active participation in the decisions on the fundamental acts of planning, programming and management, to the workers of the integrated water service and to the inhabitants of the territory. Within six months of the date on which this law is in force, the regions define ... the most proper forms and the modalities to guarantee the exercise of this right” (document W11).

Although the empirical findings rely on different type of materials, in both groups, then, external conceptions of democracy seem to value complex mechanisms which integrate representative and participative models.

## **8. Talking, arguing, and deciding: Looking inside the groups dynamics**

Attac Florence, as every territorial committee, has a strong autonomy from the national organization, though most the campaigns in which the group is involved are decided at the national, or even international level. The local group is embedded in a system of environmental relations and participate in the conflicts which are considered important to its members. Many decisions, then, are regularly taken in the local meetings, though many times members meet just to talk about politics, without necessarily taking decisions. Those meetings have been, since the foundation, organized every week, but eventually the members decided to meet each 2 weeks, starting from January 2007, and as far as I know, since the last summer the group did not call for a meeting yet, though one of the member told me they intend to do so in the future. The period of observation of this group lasted from January 2006 to July 2007.

Attac- Florence's meetings are held in the building of an association that struggles for housing rights; two or three members have got the keys of this building, which is also used as logistic support for public action: telephone calls, storage of leaflets, books, cards, etc.

Especially during the last year, some meetings have been organized during joint actions. In a couple of times, discussions of the group occurred during the gathering of signatures in concerts or public assemblies.

The water campaign instead does not have regular meetings; which are strictly related to the organizational problems of the mobilization, and occur in different cities. Participants met in Cecina (Tuscany, 23 July 2005), in Florence (17 September 2005), in Rome (29 July 2005), in Naples (12 December 2005), in Pescara (15 January 2006), in Florence again (7 October 2006), in Rome again (10 June 2007), and in Milan (8 September 2007). I have observed three of such meetings between 29 July 2005 and 15 January 2006.

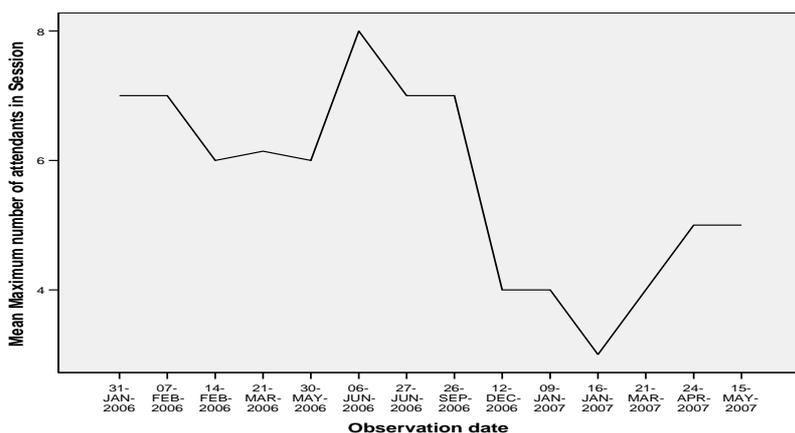
We can learn the time passed between one meeting and the next changes over time as a function of the organizational needs in the different phases of the campaign. The first two meetings have been aimed at building the network and checking the possibility to realize a campaign at the national level. Once this was achieved the next meetings aimed at the organization of a national forum on water, at the end of which it was decided to launch the campaign for a national law of popular initiative. After this was decided, the network met two times to discuss the results of the signatures gatherings, and to organize the meeting with the President of the Camera to present and illustrate the drafted law. The last meeting, in Milan, was meant to organize the mobilization

needed to support the discussion on the law in the Parliament, and set a national demonstration in Rome (1 December 2007).

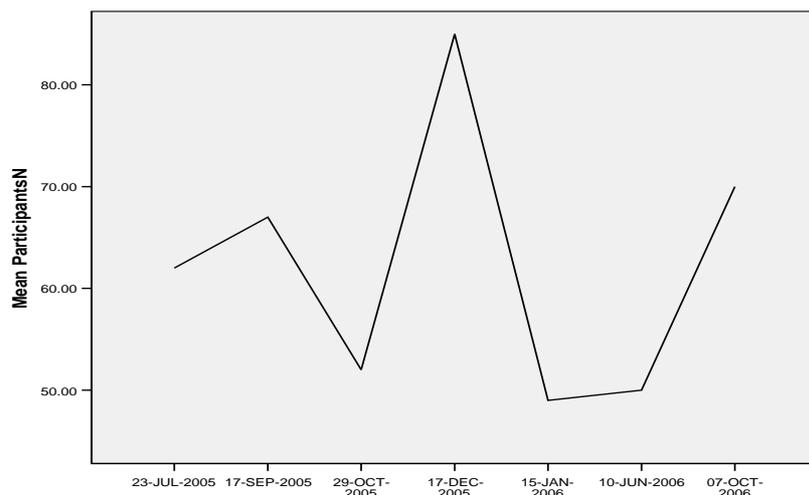
The number of participants in the two groups varies. For Attac-Florence, If we consider the period of observation from January 2006 to April 2007, the number of members attending the meetings of the group ranges 3 to 8, with a mean of 5.62. The number of women participating in the meetings varies from 0 to 2, with a mean of 1.39. The number of attendants decreased during the period, as figure 1 shows, eventually getting value 0 since the group did not meet in the last three months.

The water campaign has been observed at national level and includes a lot of groups, the participants' number is thus much higher ranging from about 50 to more than 80, according to the reports of such meetings (documents W2-W10, see fig. 2), and from 49 to 85 according to the three observations I made from October 2005 till January 2006. However, I also observed a local committee's meeting of the campaign (Florence, 17 December 2006), and the number of participants was 12, not much higher than the participants in Attac-Florence. The ratio of women participants varies from 29% to 42% (35% is the mean) at the national level, but it gets to less than 10% in the meeting I have observed at the town level (only one woman was present!). Contrary to Attac-Florence we do not observe a clear declining pattern in the number of attendants in meetings; we do observe however a cyclical pattern (figure 2) which needs to be interpreted. The three peaks in the number of attendants, actually, occurred each time the campaign started a new phase: the first one occurred when the organization of the national forum on water and the decision to participate in the anti-Bolkestein demonstration were on the agenda (document W3); the second peak when the program of the forum and the group that should write the national law was to be set (document W5); finally, the third peak is found when the organization of a national demonstration to support the law presented in the Parliament was at stake (document W10). In between those peaks, the lower number of attendants can be explained by the operative nature of those meetings: political decisions were already taken and the aim was especially to monitor and discuss their implementation or their results.

**Figure 1 - Number of attendants by observed meetings (Attac-Florence)**



**Figure 2 - Number of attendants in the national water campaign meetings**



Since the number of participants is very low in Attac-Florence, it is not difficult to organize the meetings in a round table, and this is what has always happened during my period of observation, but the same I observed in the national meetings of the water campaign, except in Rome (29 October 2005), because of the structure of the room: it was a traditional room of the University La Sapienza. At the beginning of these meetings the moderator/s explicitly asked to create a cycle with the seats, and also in Rome they apologized because this was not possible.

In both our groups, the sessions are prepared in an informal way. In Attac, at the beginning of my observation, the agenda was prepared and circulated in the mailing list, but after a while, the agenda has been elaborated during the meetings themselves. Everybody could suggest items and propose shifting the agenda items and I never heard of discussions or disagreement on the agenda building process. The sitting order is always circular, and no moderation has ever been used. Everybody takes notes of the discussion, and after the session somebody volunteers to circulate the minutes of the discussion, but only when this is considered important. Also for the water campaign, one of the core group member prepare the agenda on the basis of what was decided in the previous meeting, the agenda is then commented and amended in the mailing list, till it takes the final shape. However, at the beginning of each meeting the moderators ask if somebody wants to add a new point for the discussion.

At the moment of my observation, a central figure Attac-Florence was Andrea, actually a newcomer who entered the group because he was interested in the water campaign (interview A2). He spent a lot of energy in that campaign and at the same time he started mobilizing in another network on precariousness. When public actions are decided, Andrea is the one who contacts the other members and makes the list of those who can attend. Sometimes Ilaria or Sauro helps him, while Caterina is less and less involved. When possible, Caterina and Ilaria work together, especially when a leaf-let must be prepared, or when members are needed for the gathering of signatures, but in general it is Andrea who keeps the group visible in the broader social movement environment in Florence, though also Sauro sometimes reports on other social movements' activities.

As already mentioned there are no formal rules of discussion during the meetings, and the atmosphere is always relaxed, though a sense of frustration is sometimes felt. And though somebody has stopped to regularly attend the meetings never other members of the group tried to make them feel guilty.

In the water campaign, the core group is quite large: consider that the operative secretariat of the campaign is composed of about 50 persons (19 women) (<http://www.acquabenecomune.org/spip.php?article=217>), among which we find some central figures, about 5, with at least one woman.

It is difficult to find a visible group dynamic in such a large network, especially when division of labour is considered. However some evidence can be used to draw the map of the roles. The operative secretariat is composed by a national coordination (14 members and 1 woman), a voluntary operative secretariat (2 persons, 1 woman), a budget committee (10 persons, 4 women), a legal support group (5 persons, 3 women), a communication area (5 persons, 1 woman), a section devoted to the management for the distribution of tools to gather the signatures (2 persons), a section devoted to elaborate ideas on the creation of leaflets, manifestos or similar (2 persons, 1 woman), a group responsible for the scientific dissemination (7 persons, 1 woman), a computer service group (4 persons), and, finally, a group responsible for the organization of events (14 persons, 9 women). In the “political” section of the secretariat, basically the national coordination group, we find the president of Attac Marco Bersani, the president of the national chapter of the World Contract on Water, Emilio Molinari, our key informants Tommaso Fattori (Tuscan Social Movements) and Renato di Nicola (Abruzzo Social Forum), and the national responsible for territorial conflicts (vertenze territoriali) of the Communist Refoundation Party (PRC), Walter Mancini.

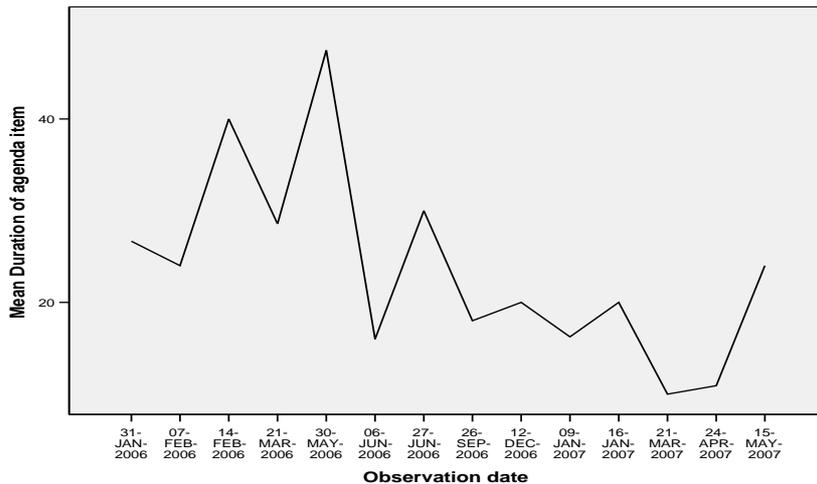
Those seem to be the ones at the centre of the core group since their names recur often when ad hoc groups are formed within the meetings (the working group on the draft of the national law, the one devoted to the drawing of the map of local conflicts on the water issue, and the one aimed at enlarging the network). As in the case of Attac, central figures are those whose willingness to be involved is higher and who declare their availability. The ad hoc groups are always open to anyone wants to participate in.

Obviously the two groups’ sessions are quite different, in terms of time length, due to two variables, the regular (Attac)/non regular (Water Campaign) nature of the meetings, and the number of attendants.

In Attac, the sessions lasted from a minimum of 60 minutes to a maximum of 130 minutes with a mean of 94.55, while the discussion on the agenda items lasted from 5 to 80 minutes with a mean of 20.59. Also in this case a decreasing trend can be observed, which suggests a decline in commitment in the Attac group (see Fig. 3).

In the water campaign, the observed sessions lasted from a minimum of 360 minutes to a maximum of 390 minutes, and the discussion on the agenda items lasted from 20 to 130 minutes (with a mean of 60 minutes). Normally, the meetings had only one break, during the lunch time, which lasted about 60 minutes. Contrary to what happens to Attac-Florence, the minutes spent to discuss about agenda items increased from the first to the third observed sessions: from an average of 50 to 65 minutes.

**Figure 3 - Minutes of discussion per item by period of observation**



What is interesting is that in the other dimensions of the session dynamics the two groups show similar patterns.

The observation data show that the most important forms of communication is by far the “input/proposal” type, which consists in reports of external activities, mostly joint campaigns with other groups (about 50% for Attac, and 32% from the Water campaign) and the discussion type (both more than 35%), followed by the brainstorming (7% Attac, and 13% Water Campaign)) and go-round (4% and 6%) (table 1).

In about 87% of the items for Attac and 83% for the campaign, where an input type of communication was present, this was followed by a discussion. and brainstorming and go-round followed when the item started with a discussion.

**Table 1 - Types of observed communication in the two groups**

Group	Type of communication (multiple response set)						Total
	Input/proposal	Separate Contribution	Discussion	Brainstorming	Go round	Others	
<b>Water Campaign</b>	32.3	6.5	38.7	12.9	6.5	3.2	<b>31</b>
<b>Attac-Florence</b>	51.2	0.0	36.5	6.7	3.8	2.0	<b>104</b>

Besides, when decisions are taken, none of the two groups during the observed sessions have recurred to majority vote, unanimity is largely prevalent, though in Attac-Florence, it often takes the form of “nodding, or tacit agreement”. Moreover, Attac-Florence seems to be much less decision-oriented than the water campaign (table 2). Those differences can be explained by the following: 1) The water campaign meetings are special occasions to make joint decisions, time is very important, and decisions urgent, while Attac-Florence meets (or used to meet) regularly, and the time can be spent just discussing issues: 2) Nodding or tacit agreement can be a legitimate tool only when the group is small and people know each other, as in the Attac case, while in the water campaign participants are too many and came from different places and organizations, thus, unanimity must be explicit to avoid conflict or misunderstandings. In the meetings I have observed, the moderators have always asked if there was somebody who did not agree on a decision.

**Table 2 - Modes of observed decisions in the two groups**

Group	Mode of decisions (multiple response set)			
	No decisions	Nodding, Tacit agreement	Unanimity	Total
Water Campaign	12.9	3.2	83.9	31
Attac-Florence	32.1	31.1	37.8	74

Finally, in both cases only a few controversies have been observed, and when they happened consensus was the way to close the discussion. I have observed 2 controversies in the Water Campaign meetings, and 7 controversies in the much longer period of observation of Attac-Florence. There are some differences in the controversies features that are related to the different nature of the groups. The subjects of the controversies vary (table 3): while in the case of the national campaign they were related only to “external group actions”; in Attac, they were related to internal organization or structure (4), external delegation (2), and principles/values (1), and in four cases such controversies implied a kind of metadiscourse.

**Table 3 - Subjects of the observed controversies**

Water Campaign	Attac-Florence
Whether and when to meet institutions	Crisis of participation in Attac
Location of the national forum	Was a spokesperson right to denigrate other moderate networks in the first public assembly of ATTAC in Florence?
	How to deal with the perceived “bad” behaviour of the local representative on the National Council
	Different understandings of the organization
	why Caterina does not want to be responsible for the card membership anymore
	Why Ilaria should take the function of Caterina?
	how to deal with the process of left parties aggregation after the birth of the Democratic Party

The water campaign is more instrumental in the sense that it aims at the mobilization on a specific issue. That is why controversies are only about how to implement actions. As reported in table 3, the controversies were in fact about the location of the national forum on water and whether, and in case when, to meet representatives of political institutions to discuss the national law on water before presenting it in the Parliament. Attac is instead a group with long terms goals and internal problems are then crucial. In some cases, those were little controversies lasting a few minutes on the division of labour (why Caterina does not want deal with this or why Ilaria should substitute Caterina), but in other cases they implied discussions and reflections on the situation of the organization, especially at the national level. For instance, once, a discussion raised on the organizational structure at the national level and somebody thought it would be better to have a scientific committee, instead of the National Council, but the others disagreed. References were

made to Attac-France, and at the end everybody was convinced that a scientific committee could be undemocratic. At the end, everybody agreed that, however, Attac-Italy should improve its relationship with intellectuals.

In only one case, the members of Attac-Florence disagreed (for a few minutes) on how the local group should act externally, when the problem of the autonomy from leftist parties was raised (see illustration AIII).

In a network campaign, the agreement between different organizations must be based on the strategic actions to pursue. There is no need for, and maybe it is even useful to avoid, discussions on principles and values - and metadiscourses always imply a discussion on the core values of a group. Within one single organization, instead, when a controversy raises it is much easier to re-elaborate the values participants share. In the first case, disagreements can only be resolved by arguments based on the best way to achieve the common good (the re-publicization of the water management), in the latter they can be resolved by arguments that show a congruence between common norms and values and actions.

Table 4 shows a number of observed features of the two groups' controversies. Controversies lasted not surprisingly longer in the Water campaign (with a mean of 40 minutes) than within Attac (8 minutes), involved a higher absolute number of participants, and women (about 33 people present and 15 active participants, among whom 6 women vs. 6 people present, about 4 actively involved, among whom 1 of 2 women), though not in relative terms (in the water campaign 53% of the present actively participated, and women were 40%, while in Attac 66% participated and women were 43%). Other differences have been found on the origin of the controversies, their focusedness and their decision-orientation.

In the Water campaign, the two controversies were preset on the agenda, since there was already a discussion on the mailing list before the meetings on the possible strategic options (locations and program of the forum), and this is probably the reason why the conflict situation was in both cases bipolar. In Attac-Florence instead controversies were much more likely to gradually evolve from a discussion, and in some cases unexpectedly, raising by the dissent of one or a few persons, probably because they were not necessarily tied to a decision to take. This explains also why the degree of focusedness of the discussion is lower.

**Table 4 - Controversies' observed features in the two groups.**

Controversies' features	Water Campaign	Attac Florence
Number of controversies	2	7
Subjects	External	Internal
Duration (mean)	40.0 minutes	7.86 minutes
Number of people present	32.5	6.0
Number of people involved	15.0 (ratio: 53%)	3.86 (ratio: 66%)
Number of women involved	6.0 (ratio: 40%)	1.57 (ratio: 43%)
Origin of the controversy	Preset on agenda (100%)	Gradually evolving or unexpected (76%)
Degree of reciprocity	High	High
Symmetry of relations	Very symmetric	Very symmetric
Type of power	Soft power	Soft power
Major source of soft power	Arguments	Arguments
Minor source of soft power	none	Agitation/empathy
Degree of cooperativeness	Very cooperative	Very cooperative
Type of controversy situation	Bipolar	Dissent by one or a few
Degree of uncivility	No	No
Focusedness	Focused	Both focused and unfocused
Atmosphere	Relaxed	Relaxed
Decision orientation	Definitely decision-oriented	Both no decision and decision oriented
Outcome	Rather consensus	Rather consensus or no decision
Mode of decision	Unanimity	Unanimity (1 case: nodding)

Despite those differences, however, there are remarkable similarities that are worth noticing. Controversies have always been characterized by a relaxed atmosphere; speakers expressed their opinions with a high degree of civility; relationships were very symmetric; and when a decision was made, consensus based on arguments (soft power) was always the outcome and unanimity the mode of decision. Only in Attac Florence during the controversy on the behaviour of the local representative in the National Council a bit of agitation (trying to radicalize the discourse) was observed.

In the following, I will present illustrations of three controversies emerged during two observed meetings in Attac-Florence, and of the two controversies observed within the water campaign.

In one of the Attac-Florence controversies the internal debate generated a metadiscourse that implied a kind of story telling :

**Illustration AI**

30 May 2006, Florence

The group started reflecting on the perceived crisis of the organization at national and local level. There is a perception of a lack of participation and commitment, difficulty to involve other people, etc. It was conceded that the situation is common to the other networks and organizations of the movement in Italy, but some problems of functioning of the organization were discussed. I could observe in the group a sense of frustration with the situation and a lack of optimism for the future. The discussion was however calm and relaxed and members respected each other opinion, even when divergent.

The controversy rose at the beginning. Ilaria interpreted the crisis of participation in ATTAC Italy as due to the top down decision making:

Ilaria: *“the initiatives are taken by the top, and the ordinary members have difficulties in elaborating autonomous initiatives”*

Cristian says that the problem was instead the lack of commitment from below: *“the national level provides opportunities for the local committees members to make their voice heard: two national initiatives (the National Assembly and the Assembly of the local committees) each year is not a small thing, but the problem is that the local committees lack the necessary commitment to intervene in the national process. They do not propose to much, many do not participate at all. For instance the assembly of the local committees was meant to be called for by the local committees themselves, but till now they never did it, it is the National Council that call for the assembly in absence of local initiative”*

Caterina said that the crisis does not concern only ATTAC, but the lack of commitment concerns the whole movement: *“maybe we are tired, maybe people are stressed by the lack of result, see the mobilization against the war for instance... so I think the lack of participation is due to a general phase in Italy”*

This discussion lead to a general reflection on the movement and on the organization, and a story telling process begun.

Spontaneously a member of the group started telling the story of the organization from its beginning, that is after the Genoa protest in 2001.

Caterina: *“formally, before there was not an ATTAC Italy yet, in Genoa the flags of ATTAC were those of ATTAC France but in Italy there was already an informal network which explicitly referred to ATTAC”*.

One of the member told that he was in France at that time, and he was a member of ATTAC France.

Ilaria remembers: *“during the first national assembly in 2002 in Bologna, there was a mass participation and many activists of the GJM were present, including some national spokespersons such as Agnoletto”*. She continues by reporting that the first statute of the association gave the founders members a control on the association, they basically had the last word, as in France, but then it changed. This was because at the beginning the Italian ATTAC was worrying about activities of hijacking by external groups that could enter the association with many members and decide everything.

In Florence, Caterina remembers, the first assembly was in 2002 in the Casa del Popolo Andrea del Sarto, and in practice it attracted most of the people that were active in the GJM in Genoa and after: *“Then, when it was decided to build the local social forum, our function was reduced and only 10-12 people remained in the association. Before that, there were people from social centers, leftist activists and catholic organizations such as Lilliput, but once the social forum was set up Attac became only one group of the network”*.

Caterina also remebers that the first campaign was the Tobin tax campaign in which all the network of the social forum actively participated. It was at that point that it was decided to organize a public assembly in Florence to discuss about ATTAC and the Tobin Tax, the huge participation in a big theatre of Florence (the Puccini) was reported. Here there was a problem: Caterina reports than one of the most visible member of ATTAC publicly accused and even offended some networks of the movement considered too moderate, he is reported to have said *“we are not Girotondini (a movement which emerged in Italy against Berlusconi government attack on the judiciary power and against his control of television), the Ethic Bank or Critic consumerist organizations, they are not useful at all!”*, many people complained in the assembly and 6 members of ATTAC left the organization.

It is at this point that the second controversy raised:

## Illustration AII

Cristian: *“you might substantially agree with him but it was not the right place”,*

Caterina: *“no I don’t agree, the movement is heterogeneous and its plurality is its richness, we should understand that the other views are legitimate as well”, and added “if you (impersonal- in English would be if one..) wanted to make a sect... go ahead but I don’t think we want to be a sect, rather we talk with everybody and accept the differences, after all this was the success of the movement.”*

A couple of other members stressed this point, and the first speaker conceded the point, but added

Cristian: *“yes that assembly represents a break, because before ATTAC was viewed as something new, and after it was considered something very close to the old leftist sector, in fact Fiorini (the one who accused the other networks to be moderate) is now in Rifondazione Comunista... this is quite funny, before Fiorini played the role of the revolutionary man and then becomes member of a political party.”*

Ilaria: *“this is probably the reason of the crisis of ATTAC.”*

Catterina says that other persons left because of personal problems: *“for instance Ilaria (another Ilaria) who was pregnant... it was a real loss for our group... Sometimes personal problems matter more than political ones, after the end of this process we were left alone”.*

Ilaria gets back to the responsibility of the national council: *“after the Tobin tax campaign there was not a good reflection on what was happening... only practical work on campaigns... there must be also a problem of tiredness”*

Caterina agrees on this point and continues: *“After this break there are 6 members of the National Council who left. When those 6 persons left they wrote a letter of complaints to the National Council...”*

Ilaria says: *“the National Council answered by e-mail and this polarized the situation...”*

Caterina: *“answering by e-mail was not the correct methodology, they should have met to discuss together, after this letter the local committees of Bologna and Naples disappeared it was an hard loss..”*

Ilaria: *“There was also a period in which we tried to coordinate at macroregion level North-South-Centre..but it did not work too much...”*

Cristian reports that after that many local committees were born on single issue, though Caterina adds that: *“once they were built they were ATTAC at local level... There was and there still is a problem of communication, the local committees do not know what the national level does and vice versa.”*

Andrea that at that time was a newcomer asked many questions to the group during the discussion, and everybody was ready to answer... Now he asks how the campaigns are decided?

Caterina and Ilaria answered that campaigns are decided by the top.

Cristian added that the last campaigns such as the campaigns against the privatization process are maybe too general: *“they do not characterize ATTAC, as for instance did the Tobin tax campaign; there is not a campaign which makes Attac attractive any longer. Yes, the water campaign is an exception because it is more specific...but..”*

Ilaria: *“The question is also the problem of communication between the national and the local..”*

Caterina: *“the solution of the National Council was to have one member for each local committees”*

Ilaria: *“yes but not anyone; it depends or should depend on the commitment and the skills”*

Caterina: *“besides some committees do not have a member in the National Council”*

Ilaria: *“before Bologna had 4 members in it”*

Cristian corrects: *“the fact is that such a rule that every committee must have a member in the NC never existed, the candidates were presented on the basis of their will to commit themselves, and the initial decision was to vote for (well not voting but by consensus) candidates and not for platforms, in order to avoid the constitution of fractions. What happened is that when they became too many from one single committee then it was decided that one committee must have no more than one member in the NC, but that did not mean that each committee must have one, they are not delegates or representatives they represent the national council that is all. But the problem of communication was not solved anyway.”*

Andrea asks again what are the committees which actually work in Italy.

Caterina: *“Roma, Napoli, Torino, Milano, Saronno, Foggia, Catania”*

Andrea: *“but then what is the problem of ATTAC?”*

Cristian: *“yes, actually the problem is of communication and of commitment, for instance each NC loses 2 or 3 members in the course of the year, the NC works on operative things they do not discuss about political problems.”*

Andrea: *“it seems that it is a problem of attractiveness and identity”*

Caterina: *“another problem is that the NC is dominated by 50 years old people only.”*

Ilaria: *“also we are perceived as too much close to Rifondazione Comunista, and those who do not identify with it see that there are many RC people in ATTAC ..., before instead we also had people from Lilliput and others...”*

Cristian: *“This is also the problem, Attac has many people that are not involved full time in it, I mean they also participate in other groups, before it was even more so, at least now who is here is full time ATTAC, the others are more sympathizers.”*

Caterina: *“Before there were also the Giovani Comunisti (the young section of RC) with us, but then they decided to join the disobedients, though it lasted only for a while.”*

Andrea: *“that is the problem, the crisis is general, everybody is affected. It is a phase, but I think that the prospective of ATTAC is to commit in a specific campaign and to try to get some results, but this is not sure either.”*

Ilaria: *“before it was different, the identity was much stronger, this is important.”*

Andrea: *“it is also true that if you do not succeed in including new people at local level, if you do not grow the people start to go away. The same happens to the network on precariousness, there is a lack of reflection on the macro-economic causes, but also people starts to fight against each other, because they have different views, and they split, but they lose attractiveness and the people leave.”*

Caterina: *“again the problem of communication; once I participated in an assembly in Naples and many people asked me to tell what we do in Florence, which means that this of having information on what people do at local level is considered important.”*

Ilaria: *“we also have the site and ATTAC info, but nobody uses it.”*

Cristian *“it is the crisis of activism that produces this lack of commitment, before people made any effort to present the committee”*

Ilaria: *“I should recall that I once proposed the AgoraATTAC. a kind of mailing list where all members of the local committees can interact with each other, but the National Council kind of censured this idea.”*

Cristian: *“the problem was that all were worrying to receive lots of e mails each day, which is the problem of the mailing list today”*

Ilaria: *“yes but at this moment even the local mailing list are mediated by one responsible, this creates problem of delay in the communication. We can propose to set this mailing list without mediation, and the list should be used for a political discussion on the organization, a participated discussion.”*

Cristian: *“it can be a good idea because now we are only few people and the problem of tons of e-mails is somehow resolved.”*

Caterina: *“yes we can propose it again”*

The group agrees!

There are several things we can get from these pieces of discussion. First, there are different ways to frame the perceived crisis of the organization: one points to the question of internal democracy and communication, another to the lack of commitment at local level and the last one to the declining phase of GJM as a whole in Italy. These three arguments are presented by the different members of the group, but at the end of the discussion, they become complementary rather than alternative visions.

The discussion on the crisis of the organization turned out in a process of collective memory building by integrating different stories told by different members. Again, the result is a collective effort to construct a plausible story of the group. The presence of a new comer (Andrea) forced older members to re-tell the story of the organization, and the new comer was able to get the information he needed to understand the situation of the organization. Besides, a process of progressive inclusion can be seen at work: at the beginning Andrea just asks, at the end he is integrally part of the discussion. Finally, the whole Attac story telling by no means resulted in nothing, on the contrary it produced a collective and operative decision. This decision takes into account those arguments on the crisis that can lead to a solution: there is nothing the Florentine group, or Attac as a whole, can do on the declining phase of the movement, but they can propose solutions to solve the internal problems of the organization and they can also show that more commitment on the local side can overcome some internal problems.

In the water campaign, instead, discussions were more about how to get things done and organized, since the focus on a single issue allowed participants to draw the boundaries of the discussion and to concentrate on what is the purpose of the campaign. Although a discussion on the values of the groups did not make sense, this did not exclude a kind of story telling. In each session I have observed, the first item of the agenda was always devoted to the representatives of the local committees who were asked to tell the local situation of the water campaign. Despite that, controversies were implicitly allowed only when they had to do with strategic questions, as the following illustration reports.

### **Illustration W1**

Rome, 29 October 2005

Marco Bersani (45 years old, President of Attac-Italy): *“I think we shall discuss and decide what we want to do with the national forum, now, right? The questions are when and where. From what it has been said it seems there is a consensus on March 2006, an important date because we enter the period of the electoral campaign, and on Puglia, to value the experience of Vendola and Petrella...”*

Young man: “ yes, *this is important, but I think we should focus on the meaning of the forum...According to me the forum is the expression of the autonomy of social movements, this is why we should value a social movement experience ... We all know what has been done in Tuscany with the regional law... I think that a forum there would mean something, and would assure a high participation, since the public opinion has been already mobilized... ”*

Renato (50 years old, Abruzzo Social Forum): “*This is true, but I think that the forum is also about integrating the territorial conflicts and proposing a national law, right? We should build a national vision, which is difficult, because local conflicts are sometime very different...; however in the local there is the global, and we have to single this global out and put it at the centre of our vision.. This is what we want to do with national law, right?, but it is a law and we want it to have an impact, right? If we choose March because of the national election, then we should go to Rome, because Rome is the centre, is where the national electoral campaign is fought... At the same time we can go to Florence for another thing, we can mobilize to support the regional law, we can go there for a national meeting... ”*

Emilio Molinari (50 years old, president of the national chapter of the World Contract on Water): “*I think that the real options are between Rome and Puglia, cause in Tuscany we did already many things, we use the forum also to create something new in the territory in terms of social movement experiences.. Well, in this sense I would be in favour of Puglia, for many reasons, but this experience is about how social movements interact with institutions and promote changes ... then we should value what happened in Puglia where social movements made the election of Vendola possible and he appointed one of us for the water affairs... this is a real change.. I think... ”*

Marco Bersani: “*yes, really I don't see any counter-indication for Puglia... ”*

Paolo Rizzi (50 years old, man): “*There is a problem in Puglia that we should be aware of... There are not local committees struggling for the water problems.. al.though Vendola appointed Petrella, this is not done by the pressure of social movements, which are basically absent on this issue... it is more an institutional logic... Ok, a good one, but the problem is that if we want the forum to be there we should mobilize people, otherwise we risk that nobody, except us, will participate... So if we want to do it, we should start from now to work on the territory and to create the basis of participation...; we should set a local committee, we should start organizing meetings, and so on... At the same time this is more difficult to do, because there is no conflict with the institutions on that...While in Rome we have a combination of local and national conflicts, the participation will be higher and also the impact on the national debate more visible.. ”*

Nicola (40 years old, local committee of Abruzzo): “*I agree with Paolo, I think that Puglia is not the best option, because there are nt contrast, the civil society is not mobilized... and after all we want a high participation and we want to influence the national election debate... and Rome is the best place to achieve both... ”*

Renato: “ *I agree with Nicola... ”*

Marco: “*yes this is true, Rome is the centre of politics, and in March will be more so... maybe it is better to organize the forum there... ”*

Saverio (young man, from Rome): “*I agree, but we should be aware that here we wont ask funds from the local institutions, we are conducting a struggle against them... Yet, we can ask other local institutions, like in Puglia... and Rome is really the place where such a forum can be successful... ”*

Emilio: “*ok, after all... Puglia is a good experience, but maybe for our purpose Rome is better... ”*

Marco: “*I guess we agree... then... Any objection? Do we all agree that the Forum will be held in Rome on March?... Ok then!”*

As we can noticed, the question of the location of the national forum, was solved by rational arguments based on the common good (what is better for the campaign). The controversy situation was quite bipolar: one part wanted to organize the forum in Rome where the impact on the next (April) national elections might be maximized, the other one wanted to organize it in Bari, Puglia, because at the last regional election a person (Niki Vendola) close to social movements and member of Rifondazione Comunista was elected as President of the region. Moreover, after his election, Vendola appointed the former president of the World water contract (the Italian Riccardo Petrella) for the regional water affairs. There was also a third position at the beginning in favour of Tuscany, because there social movements first drafted a law, but this option disappeared in the course of the discussion. Clearly the two positions implied a different vision on what the forum should be about, a phase of the mobilization strategically oriented to achieve political results, or normatively and expressively oriented to value one of the most important experience of movement-party-institution relationships. Also the third position was expressively oriented to value social movements experiences. When the frame of the problem as a problem of best strategy prevailed, the best solution was already there: “go to Rome!” It is also interesting to see that people changed their mind in the course of the discussion, and this was not only implicit –after all nobody objected the decision any longer- but explicitly declared (see Marco and Emilio for instance).

The next illustrations show instead how difficult it is to manage and practice autonomy from political parties, but at the same time that the position of the groups in the political contingencies is not prejudicial or ideological, but rather justified by political arguments.

### **Illustration AIII**

Florence, 15 June 2006

As a consequence of the discussion on the invitation by the PRC to participate in a public assembly in solidarity with a squatted public building (Luzzi) in Vaglia, a small town close to Florence, Roberto raises some worries about the multiplication of the initiatives supported by PRC. Caterina and Andrea asked him to present his worries. Roberto said that he was wondering if this multiplication of initiatives was due to the process of constitution of a new left party-or federation of party (which would include PRC, the Greens, the PCDI and the left wing of the Left democrats, which quitted the party after its decision to merge with La Margherita- a rather centrist party- to form the new Democratic Party). He considered this process of constitution as a top-down process- “more image than substance”- which would undermine social movements’ autonomy. He expressed his worries in a cautionary way, and anticipated that he was expressing only an opinion to open the discussion.

He said: *“well, I just express an opinion that maybe we want to discuss, but in a mere zapatist spirit, which means that we reflect on this issue and we take a common and shared position, by consensus”* (important direct reference to consensus which is often taken for granted in the group).

He continued: *“obviously this refers to the position of the group as whole, while as always within our group, individuals can decide whatever they want- that is obvious.”*

The other members said that a discussion on this was worth doing, and in general agreed with the expressed worries.

Andrea said that, however, *“ if we prejudicially avoid those kinds of meetings we risk to isolate ourselves from the rest of the movements in Florence...I participated in the first meeting for the association of the left in Florence, on behalf of myself only, and I found that almost everybody (meaning social movements activists) was there, but I think, not because everybody is ready to participate in the process of constitution, but because they want to understand what happens.”*

Caterina said that: *“participating in the events like this (the latter) can be done individually, but in other situations like the public assembly for the Luzzi, we should go, if we agree, as group, since*

*we should express our solidarity, and because, even though parties are involved, the process is a social movement one... shall we not give our solidarity to the poor people who are squatting the Luzzi only because some parties are there?"*

Sauro agrees on that point, and I too tried to distinguish between the two process: social movements initiative where parties are involved, and parties initiative for party politics. On the basis of this distinction a consensus was found and Roberto declared his availability to go as representative if Attac to the Luzzi initiative.

This decision was reported, later on, to the representative of the PRC who came to officially invite Attac, by introducing the squatting situation and problems and the type of the initiative (Section Report 1214-15 June 2007).

## Illustration WII

Pescara, 14 January 2006

The controversy was started by a young women (Sara), who raised the question of the autonomy of the movement, and of the forum. The people who disagreed with her, did it kindly by always referring to her statement:

Sara (young member of a students organization): *"...I'm against the meeting with politicians in the forum, the forum is the autonomy of the movement which should be protected. We should confront the authorities with a platform, which is the law that should emerge from the forum, I would close the forum with a movement action, something not very big, but an action.."*

Walter (Young member of Communist Refoundation): *"...I see what Sara means, but I think that there is nothing bad in a final meeting with institutions. We should work on the format of the "vertenza", a conflictual position and action and then a negotiation with institutions... We should avoid the idea of the "autonomy of the social", which actually re-proposes the idea of the autonomy of the political; this is dangerous, we should link the social and the political, otherwise no change will occur... Consider that we are not going well because the electoral program of the Union (the coalition of centre-left) is very far from us..."*

Marco Bersani (45 years old, President of Attac-Italy): *"... I understand Sara position but also Walter is right, I doubt that we can have a meeting with politicians within the forum, but at the same time what Sara proposes is not sufficient-just preparing the law. What I would propose is that while preparing the forum, we also see when after it we can meet with the institutions, but it is important to do it before the national elections, and then we should prepare the meeting before the forum..."*

Severio (55 years old): *I think Marco's proposal is a good one*

Francesco (young, Attac-Italy): *"...the law is the instrument of the political autonomy of the movement which we use to influence the electoral campaign – but we should be able to impose it in the agenda, and I think Marco proposal goes in this direction"*.

Young woman: *"I think that this solution goes also in Sara's direction"* (Sara approves with gesture)

Adult man: *I agree with Sara and I think we should find a solution to increase the mobilization around the law first, than we can meet the politicians"*

Renato (50 years old, Abruzzo Social Forum): *"I agree, but for the meetings we should not invite the leaders of parties, but rather their members responsible for the water sector, and we should say 'dear politicians, the water must not have owners'"*.

Marco then asks if everyone is happy with this solution: first the forum-mobilization and then the meeting with institutions, parties and unions, where we will ask a clear position, before the elections.

Everybody agrees!

As we can read in those two illustrations, both groups share the same worries about the autonomy from political parties and institutions, and in both cases the outcome was consensus based on arguments. Interestingly enough the arguments are justified in different ways, however.

In Attac, the discussion implied a re-discussion and re-definition of the group's values and principles. If autonomy from political party politics is taken for granted, this value is however always challenged in practice. As already reported in a previous section, many members of Attac are sympathizers of the Communist Refoundation Party, and many members of that party continue to buy the Attac membership cards to financially support the organization. What is more, the PRC

has been very involved in the GJM in Italy, and in many cases it acted as a movement organization rather than simply a political ally. At the moment of the discussion, however, the national political opportunities structure had changed. As already reported, the PRC is now part of the centre-left coalition that supports the Prodi's government, though it continues to oppose a similar centre-left coalition that leads the Florentine executive. But the discussion reported shows that a practical solution can always be found if the group is able to discuss on how autonomy must be translated in practice. If one member of the group started the discussion, by being very critical toward the situation, at the end of the process a new boundary between social movements and party politics was established. This new distinction was able to redefine the situation, and the members preferences adjusted accordingly.

On the contrary, in the water campaign, the discussion did not rely upon shared principles. True, autonomy from institutions has been referred to by Sara, but Walter, as member of a political party, cannot share the same vision and overtly criticizes the "autonomy of the social", which in his view reproduces the "autonomy of the political", meaning the growing separation between institutions and civil society. Had the discussion been based on this "conflict" of values, the outcome would not be a consensus, probably. Only by bringing the discussion back on the terrain of the strategic options (incoming national elections, necessity to negotiate with institutions, etc.), and by separating the two phases of the movement constitution (national forum) and (later) the relationship with institutions, this was possible.

## **9. Democracy at work: Partial conclusions**

What can we conclude with these empirical findings? In the course of this chapter I have underlined many differences between the two groups: size, structure, level of organization, heterogeneity, etc. Despite that, my hypothesis was that similar conceptions and practices of democracy should be found as a function of their common belonging to the GJM. Indeed, both groups share similarities in both the framing of their collective action (antineoliberal globalization) and conceptions of democracy. The latter emerged as a complex combination of representative and participative tools. Although the critic of the actual representative democracy is quite evident (and political opportunities are perceived as less and less available), none of the two groups seem to want representative democracy to be substituted by a generic direct democracy. On the contrary, participative democracy is seen as a complement that can strengthen, or repair, the representation of democratic institutions. Besides, even though the two groups differ in terms of formalization of the internal decision-making, both making decisions through consensus.

In general my participant observation confirms what my key informants told me in the interviews: though no formal rules are established (or despite the formal rules), unanimity and consensus (if a disagreement raises) clearly prevail. Discussions and decisions are always based on arguments justified by the common good of the groups (their goals or their values), and the tolerance of different opinions allowed to often find what was perceived as the best option, or the best argument. As the theorists of deliberative democracy claim, then, the results show that when decisions must be taken, preferences may not only be aggregated, they can also be transformed through a dialogue that is based on common good (Elster 1986). However, it should be noticed that in most of the observed cases preferences are neither aggregated, nor transformed: they are juxtaposed since they were homogenous from the beginning of the discussion: in this case unanimity was the natural outcome. The two groups, however, juxtaposed preferences in different ways: in Attac-Florence this happened mostly implicitly by nodding or tacit agreements, while in the water campaign unanimity was anyway explicit. Tacit agreements are possible only if participants know very well each other, while in a context, like the water campaign, where participants come from different organizational settings it is key to avoid any kind of misunderstanding that in the middle term could disrupt the trust among participants.

Finally, also when preferences were not homogenous and controversies,, the two groups utilised two different devices to reduce the uncertainty. In the Attac-Florence case opinions were justified by referring to common values, and the (re)interpretation of those values brought about a shared definition of the situation and a consequent line of action. In the water campaign, participants do share some principles but do not have a common organizational identity and a correlated action frame, which is to say that they have different way to interpret values and translate them in practices. , In this case, then, the discussion on values might probably have led to a non manageable conflicts. This does not mean that they did not refer to some values from time to time, but consensus was found on a different basis, that is the best “strategy” to use to meet the common good: the success of the campaign. In the former case, then, uncertainty is reduced by common values, while in the former by drawing a boundary on what is to be discussed: “our strength is that everybody agree on a specific campaign that focus on the theme of the common good and conceive the question of participation as central”! (Interview W1).

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**Attac- Florence interviews**

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Interview A2: Andrea, member of Attac Florence (informal interview), May 2006.

Interview A3: Roberto of Attac Florence (informal interview), February 2006.

Interview A4: Ilaria of Attac Florence (informal interview), June 2007.

**National Water Campaign interviews**

Interview W1: Tommaso, coordinator of the campaign (Taped interview), September 2005.

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# **Participant Observation of Democratic Practices in the Spanish GJM**

**By Ángel Calle and José Manuel Robles**

*(IESA-CSIC)*

## **1. Introduction**

The main goal of this report is to analyse the democratic practices inside GJMs in Spain. We have selected two organizations active in Córdoba: *Ecologistas en Acción-Córdoba* (Córdoba branch of Ecologists in Action) and *Córdoba Solidaria* (Local solidarity platform of NGOs involved in development, education, environmental and global issues). In our participant observation, we have attended assemblies and seminars arranged by these two organizations in order to identify their key attitudes and strategies concerning deliberation, democracy and decision-making views and practices.

These two groups originated from a very different background. *Ecologistas en Acción* is part of the political ecologist movement that, from the 1980s onwards in Spain, has promoted the emergence of a new culture of mobilization, i.e., the new global movements. It is a key actor in the promotion and experimentation with greater horizontality. As in the other cases, we find good standards of communication and a strong support for consensual decision making. If heterogeneity is there, differences are expressed in a dialogue through the development of new or specific arenas that are set up in order to tackle them, as special workshops or summer schools in the case of *Ecologistas en Acción*.

*Córdoba Solidaria*, on the other hand, is both an engine for and an outcome of social education and mobilization inside the world of critical networks in the city. It came into existence in 1994, after an agreement among some local NGOs, wishing to achieve better levels of communication and coordination, both inside the associational networks and between these and the citizens at large. It is an expression of the culture of the new global movements in line with the international and local social fora. And, although heterogeneity is there, conflictual interactions are scarcely present, as the purpose of this organization was kept deliberately “low”, in comparison to those social fora that attempted to build new political subjects able to coordinate social struggles: *Córdoba Solidaria* acts as a connector rather than a co-director. In this sense, *Ecologistas en Acción* is a structure more prone to promote deliberation and inclusiveness towards new participants than *Córdoba Solidaria*. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, we should take into account that *Córdoba Solidaria* acts in a relatively small city, endowed with a rich social activity that allows for multiple interlinks among organizations.

## **2. Ecologistas en Acción (EeA, Ecologists in Action)**

During 11 sessions of the monthly assembly we have built up our session reports and introducing ourselves in the internal relationships that shape democracy practices of *Ecologistas en Acción* (EeA). Apart from this material, we count on two interviews to the general coordinator of this local group and the responsible for the area of technique and nature. Furthermore, we have attended the internal seminar arranged by the coordination at national level in order to reflect about strategies concerning participation and proposals of EeA (*Ecologistas en Acción* 2007a). This material is quite valuable as the outputs are decided by consensus and involve a variety of local groups of EeA. The participant observation at national level so helped us understanding the political culture inside this organization. At the same time, observing EeA has provided us with internal collective reflections concerning organizational, participation and decision making processes (*Ecologistas en Acción* 2003, *Ecologistas en Acción* 2005). Furthermore, we count with some texts produced by quite active participants of EeA, some of them well known inside GJMs in Spain (Fernández Durán 1996 y 2003, Cembranos y Medina 2004, Tello 2007).

## 2.1 Group history

Ecologistas en Acción (Ecologist in Action) is a network created in 1998 when 300 hundred local groups, around the Spanish State, got together after previous coordination experiences. The main networks that supported this unification were AEDENAT and CEPA. Most of these organizations had already been coordinating their action under the umbrella of CODA (Coordination of Environmental Support Organization). They belonged to the political branch of contemporary ecologists. In the organizational principles of Ecologistas en Acción of Andalusia (EeA-Andalusia 1998) a self-portray as a participatory movement, and a reluctance to get involved in a political party appears. EeA can be considered one of the pillars of the anti-globalization movement in Spain as they were key promoters of protests and meetings around global issues, such as AEDENAT during 90s (they organized the campaign 50 years is enough! and the parallel summit against World Bank meeting in 1994) and Ecologistas en Acción (supporting protests and meetings of social networks from different trends from 1999 onwards).

In Córdoba, the environmental groups mobilized during the protests against the nuclear waste deposit of Cabril, near by Cordoba. AEDENAT developed, in 1976/77, after these protests. In general, most of new social movements had to wait until the death of Franco dictatorship in order to break both political censorship and the paramount position of the pro-democracy struggles inside social movements. In Córdoba, Ecologistas en Acción was joined two organizations: AEDENAT (radical ecologism) and GODESA (save and defense of birds' group, belonging to the faculty of Biology). The process of unification in Córdoba was marked by a decrease in the number of participants. An activist stressed in an informal conversation after an assembly, this situation was explained by the fact that many people considered that the new organization was born upon the resources of two previous collectives, and that a "new ecologism" did not need the presence of "older" militants.. Currently, 160 people pay fees on a regular basis to the Cordoba section of Ecologistas en Acción. Around 30 are actively involved in one of the four organizational "areas" (or sections) in which the group is organized: Nature, City and Energy, Globalization and Education. These areas operate inside the group, but enjoying large autonomy. They hold a general assembly every month; this has been the focus of our participant observation. There is a coordinator elected at the annual assembly, which has kept its position for years, mainly due to the difficulties of finding experienced people with capacity to manage daily affairs. He told us, during formal and informal interviews, that the key problem of the organization is the excessive autonomy of the areas and the fluctuation of activists that affect the function and stability of the organization.

## 2.2 Explicit role of deliberation and participation as a collective aim

Deliberation and participation are both pillars and goals of the organizational ideology of EeA. In the words of one of the interviewees: "everybody has something to say in our internal deliberations" (E1). In fact, when a general issue concerning strategical positions of the group becomes controversial (critic of urban planning, relationships with political parties), the monthly assembly prefers to put it aside and to ask for a special assembly in order to deliberate with more information and time. Debates in small groups, participatory workshops, visual and painting methodologies to build up ideas were part of the participatory tools used at as in the Summer School of 2007<sup>51</sup>. There is a significant bibliography published by activists of EeA involved in education that address methodological issues in order to build up a "collective intelligence"<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> 40 people of local groups of EeA gathered during a week to think about strategies for social change. One member of EeA-Córdoba attended the meeting, a person with good relationship with the group but who usually does not attend the assemblies. However, because of fluid communication among local nodes of EeA and the fact that the school is a state-wide even, we consider the material obtained (EeA 2007a) quite useful and representative for our work.

<sup>52</sup> See Cembranos y Medina (2004) and the website [www.ecologistasenaccion.org](http://www.ecologistasenaccion.org).

Concerning participation, the interviewees define it as essential for the group: “more important than developing ideas is to strength participation [...] as we need creativity” (E2), “[participation through] the assembly generates (at least for me) identification and adherence to the organization, and I think is a way to make our way of taking decisions visible, something that has to be part of the identity of a ecologist movement” (E1). The general document on organizational ideology of the network states that the functioning of EeA must be based on “simple rules” and able to promote “collective participation” (Ecologistas en Acción 2007b). At the national coordination on the area of Consumption<sup>53</sup> and at the conclusions of the Summer School of 2007, activists of EeA remarked that participation is a basic and universal need, along with other needs concerning subsistence, expression and creativity, present in all human cultures as the specialist in human development Max-Neef (1991), pointed out.

Specific and regular seminars are held at a national level in order to tackle the question of how to involve more people in local groups. EeA is perceived by its members as an organization with a participatory potential as: “participation is central”, “we are closed to local problems”, “multidisciplinarity” increases the number of issues to be addressed (EeA 2005). Nevertheless, EeA stresses the importance of adopting some “boosting” attitudes and measures in order to enhance a real participation: “ask to newcomers what do they look for”, “make meetings more attractive”, “develop concrete activities”, “rethink the organizational model periodically”, “go beyond management and urgent issues”, “assume internal diversity”, etc. (EeA 2003).

In the Cordoba group, the debate about internal participation is becoming an issue that, activists recognized, needs to be tackled more seriously. The question has been raised in the open assembly, in personal conversations and during the interviews we carried out. The activists feel that the ongoing agenda concerning local problems (urban design of the city, the threat of significant environmental areas, climate change involvement) pushes EeA-Cordoba to give less attention to how coordination, arrival of new people and integration of the different thematic areas is taking place. In fact, the DEMOS research encouraged them to develop a special commission that would evaluate problems concerning participation throughout the coming year. Among the key questions activists mentioned (during the open assemblies, at informal talks or in formal interviews) in order to address this issue we find: how to balance such an open structure (irregular implication, autonomous thematic areas) with stable organization demands (administration, regular contact with supporters, distribution of the monthly journal edited at a State level) and with a long-term work in environmental issues at Cordoba?; which are the “minimums” that, respecting diversity of interests and capabilities, we should demand to the activists that form this local network (both activists and thematic areas) in order to develop and share some general objectives, an organizational umbrella, stable relationships with other groups and thematic areas of Ecologistas en Acción?; how much do we care about participation without constraining creativity and self-development of internal coordination?

So far, no explicit answer has been articulated in the local group. T In practice, the monthly assembly has worked as a space for the internal interchange of information among thematic areas rather than a decisional assembly on both tactic and strategic issues of the group. At the same time, some commissions like education has a special dynamic in which they count with their own “youth group” which attends meetings of the area but their degree of autonomy is almost full. The speaker-person of the area is present from time to time at the monthly assembly. This inherent and not previously reflected dynamic seems to work pretty well on promoting a vast number of actions under the umbrella of EeA concerning local environmental issues. But it seems to be a non-sustainable dynamic, from the organizational point of view of EeA-Cordoba, if some key volunteers in charge of administrative and external relationships would decide not to fulfil their tasks? .

Concerning attitudes, the “need of more compromise with collective decisions and assumed work” would summarize the suggestions made by the two people interviewed. As possible

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<sup>53</sup> See [http://www.ecologistasenaccion.org/article.php3?id\\_article=6825&artsuite=4](http://www.ecologistasenaccion.org/article.php3?id_article=6825&artsuite=4)

structural solutions, there have been proposals in different assemblies of engaging a person responsible for administrative tasks, developing a specific commission on participation as other local groups of EeA have and rethinking the dynamics of coordination, and re-enforcing personal ties by means of shared activities, between the different thematic areas, among others.

### 2.3 *Visions of democracy*

As we will justify more in depth in part 5, the horizontality we observe in the organizational forms of the Cordoba group (coordinator has no executive function, very high autonomy of thematic areas in terms of organization and agenda) has to be regarded as an attempt to build up political forms inspired by radical democracy. This attempt would go in the opposite direction than most of current institutional practices. Political parties or big trade unions, according to one interviewee (E2), “manage your vote with absolute independence and turning their back to those who voted for them” (E2). In order to build up a new society, participants stated in the conclusions of the Summer School of 2007 that “we should get rid of [current] barriers that keep people from equally participate: information, time and schedules, gender relationships, the representative system...”. And, what about new institutional mechanisms as the participatory budget, so popular in Cordoba? An interviewee (E1) states: “I am sceptical about participatory budgets [...] as they do not address the problems of the city from a global perspective, and the proposals about how to manage public funding beyond your square or your street have been boosted by organized groups, not from the neighbours [...] in the end, if a more global and public vision is not supported, participatory budgets help in satisfying needs of individuals, some times in a selfish manner when the kernel of the process should be a collective vision”.

What then? How to build up processes inspired by this radical democracy perspective present in the new global movements<sup>54</sup>? There is a general “from below” approach ecologist thoughts have been nurtured from. Think for instance in the classical work written by Schumpeter in 1911, *Theory of Economic Development*, whose thesis (“small is beautiful”) resonates in ecological approaches. Nowadays, some academic thinkers argue that capitalist globalization will not be sustainable in the next decades in their ecological, economic and social dimensions<sup>55</sup>. The systemic and economic dependence on non renewable energies like oil, the increase of inequalities and the fact we are arriving the limits of charge of the nature (pollution, ozone layer, etc.) make these authors propose a “de-globalization” not as an ideological perspective but as an unavoidable future. For them, a “from below” approach is justified from economic and social reasons, even beyond ecological arguments.

Not surprisingly, these arguments are present in the vision of democracy inside EeA. Conclusions concerning strategies for a radical change at the Summer School of 2007 envisaged certain measures and dimensions as central in order to propose a “sustainable democracy”. They could be summarized as the task of making economic, political and energy circles (commerce and finance; institutions and decision-making; and energy production respectively) as close as possible to a local context: autonomous institutions, food and energy sovereignty, local economies, do not externalize pollution but internalize environmental impacts (EeA 2007a).

As we perceive in these approaches, methodological issues (who, how and when to decide) are mixed up with the need of equality and access to basic needs, when we talk about democracy “in the future”. As an interviewee (E2) stated, “we can not talk of democracy without talking about principles”. That is, the concept of democracy is tied to the distribution of power. It is a substantial approach, that finds the liberal methodologists perspectives biased or insufficient. Power is perceived in this case, in its negative form (the other would be emancipation, potentia). The local emphasis of EeA resonates with the idea, on the one hand, that the “mechanisms for a participatory democracy must come out from a need expressed by the people” in order to satisfy their needs (E1).

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<sup>54</sup> See Calle (2005, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, Heinberg (2003) and Broswimmer (2002)

And, on the other hand, a real participation would demand a minimum an equalitarian access to information, expression and material needs. We can read at the material produced by one of the State-wide thematic areas of EeA that “we are poor in liberties as consequence of the market freedom, that is, the economic liberalism that, carrying out their absolute freedom, puts market tyranny of the benefit above any other needs of human being”<sup>56</sup>.

Very often during the discussions held about alternatives to urban planning in Cordoba, participants of EeA-Cordoba states to be fiercely opposed this development of the city that has a speculative character (big infrastructures oriented to global commerce, non environmental-sustainable business, political influence of business on urbanization plans). Development should instead be balanced and take into account housing as a basic right. That is, democracy encompasses the satisfaction of some basic needs in order to ensure real participation and a modicum of “dignity” for all.

#### *2.4 Institutionalized meta-talk*

During informal conversations with regular attendants to the assembly, a concern emerged that the autonomy of participants and thematic groups can result in a lack of good intra-communication inside EeA-Córdoba. Twenty years ago, the existing ecologist groups based their communicative fluidity and cohesion on personal ties, that could make political debates turn into personal conflicts. Nowadays, this situation is not present at the level it was, as a consequence of both the constitution of EeA-Córdoba as an umbrella of two different organizations and the arrival of newcomers. The lack of regular and personal channels to evaluate internal communication and trust in EeA as a project is considered however as an element of the negative impact of the “full autonomy” as it was stated by some participants. The annual assembly does not seem to sufficiently cope with this situation. And as we stated before, the problematization of the participation issue (internally and for newcomers) through our work has spurred the will for developing more spaces that directly help to evaluate the situation, that is also pointing out to the need of keeping regular internal meta-talks.

Nevertheless, these meta-talks occurred now and then as consequence of the particular social dynamism of Cordoba and the sensibilization events organized by EeA-Cordoba. A small city full of social life (cultural, political, leisure) generally develops informal spaces to tackle problems concerning personal or organizational talk. Apart from that, the group is quite active in introducing in this social agenda events such as debates, cinema festivals or visits to environmental damaged zones that are enjoyable forms of protests, that act also as spaces for informal gatherings of EeA activists.

#### *2.5 Relation of intra- and inter-group communication*

There is a self-definition of *Ecologistas en Acción*, and social movements in general, as laboratories of democracy and spaces for the satisfaction of human basic needs (material, expressive, affective and of relationships with nature). “Social movements by the mere fact of their existence are, to some extent, conveyors of other forms of democracy of a higher quality in terms of participation and deliberation [...] a radical democracy” (our italics). This sentence, retrieved from the website of the group, is part of an article submitted by an activist of EeA and usual collaborator of left-wing journals about the role of social movements in social transformations (Tello 2007).

The Summer School of EeA 2007 mainly focused on the topic of how to start building up ecotopian societies from social movements. This general issue was addressed from the theoretical perspectives of human development (basic needs’ approach of Max-Neef 1991) and systemic

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<sup>56</sup> See previous note.

theories (relational, opposed to mechanistic perspectives). One of the conclusions stressed the need of developing social movements that could already become experiences of a “new world” to come.

Therefore, activists do not differ much in terms of social order, or more concretely the question of democracy, between the outside and the inside world. Social movements should democratise their way of functioning, not only in terms of efficiency, legitimation or creativity as interviewees expressed, but also as a way to experience alternative social relationships.

## *2.6 Ideology/frame/identity/goals/conflicts*

Political ecologism perceives ecological and social problems as linked. A sustainable and de-globalized world can be only accomplished through a radical democratisation in which most of the citizens develop equitable relationship among them and with nature. This statement summarizes and permeates, to various extents, thoughts and practices present in assemblies, encounters and even books concerning radical ecologism that we have come across during our field research.

To build this eco-democratic society, the tasks of sensibilization and the development of new spheres for satisfying our basic needs were considered to be crucial at the Summer School of 2007. From this perspective, EeA-Córdoba would be just an illustration of the radical ecologism in Spain that coordinate efforts to promote a participatory organization that keeps a radical critique concerning environmental issues, starting from local problems but embedding them in a global scale and in multiple dimensions. Therefore, consumption, globalization or peace are areas in which EeA-Córdoba works regularly. These interests pushed the activists to get involved in daily dynamics of alternative consumption or leisure, being this the support for the relationship with other agro-ecological groups.

There is a search for “other relationships”, both globally and locally. Consequently the meta-communication is so important for this group. EeA-Córdoba is a node of confluence of multiple identities all of them having in common a need and a demand for radical changes in the relationship with nature. As the coordinator expressed, people do not get into our group because they are “convinced”, but because the “ecologist” one is part of multiple references concerning identities or attitudes which are quite critical of the current capitalist globalization or local environmental problems that directly emerge in everyday lives. The group is not only a mean, but also an end in itself, as no programmatic or organizational “solution” open to all cultures and all citizens can be offered without a radical democratic perspective. As it was discussed during the Summer School of 2007, extreme-right forces can exploit the environmental, economic and social crisis tied to the capitalist globalization in order to justify “green social fascisms” that delegitimimize current public institutions and propose new social orders suitable for minorities in the North and based upon authoritarian and excluding principles.

Participants of EeA consider that the organization is another node of a global network of networks where a sensibility against this social implosion is being nurtured. Mobilization would be, therefore, more than a possible repertoire. EeA-Córdoba has a permanent presence in the streets of the cities and in the media, with almost an important event every single month. Lobbying is also compulsory taking into account that, for instance, the criticism of urban planning almost forces the group to specialize in judiciary battles. But, as mentioned in several assemblies, lobbying has two main drawbacks. First, lobbying works well only if there is protest mobilization before. EeA-Córdoba managed to put into the electoral agenda and to change council plans about the permission granted to build up some hundred houses in the mountains near to Cordoba, affecting the tide of a small river and the surrounding forest, after promoting an intensive citizen campaign with demonstrations, organization of visits to the area by students, signatures and other forms of protest. Second, the activists see the risk of transforming ecologist struggles in a specialized matter for a minority with a high experience in building up political and media alliances, good knowledge of the corridors of the council and some expertise in judiciary processes. This situation would make the

group appear distant from the citizens and would restrict participation to some elite with good political links and a university background in social or environmental issues.

Being EeA-Córdoba at the crossroad of activists with different concerns with environmental issues, these activists do perceive the group as heterogeneous: “Ecologists in Action is a plural organization where different ways to feel the ecologism are present” (EeA 1999); “Our movement gets expressed through multiple forms, ranging from the ideologically well defined to those that focus on very concrete problems” (EeA 1998). In the meetings we identify those people more interested in a conservationist approach, generally concerned with concrete problems; those more interested in changing the institutional agenda; and those more interested in building up a participatory network able to develop more alternatives and to put more pressure. The latter usually are newcomers, more involved also in “new” ecological issues like consumption or anti-globalization. We have the perception that each participant feels the “other” group as complementary and necessary for their own work. For instance, the commission in charge of energy matters leads a global climate change that attempts to build up an alliance with significant local political actors (trade unions, big NGOs), questioning local electric expenditures during festivals or for Christmas, and promoting street events oriented to the participation of people that approach these issues for the first time. As interviewees recall, autonomy and heterogeneity are a source of creativity if unstable situations for the organization can be avoided.

Finally, the attempts at developing (both internally and externally) such a diverse set of societies always lead to two questions:

is there a need of stable references (norms, attitudes, spaces for expression or interaction)? If so, how to keep them “alive” (to constitute, keep into motion, transform)?

What about dissent? Where is the frontier between agonistic and antagonistic proposals and practices? How to manage them? What if the conflict challenges “basic principles”?

These questions were introduced into the debate by different participants at the Summer School of 2007. They are part of the organizational problems of EeA-Córdoba: “The fact that people participates in everything and that any single issue is subject of debates and discussions generates, also, the impossibility to trace some organizational criteria, ready to follow and to implement [...] We should generate participatory mechanisms, but once a general will has been generated, the individuals that participate in their generation should feel the need to obey them” (E1: 2, 4). And they are classical topics in political debates around democracy, specially from participatory ones.<sup>57</sup> The group in Cordoba counts with two basic references for their organization: the state-level umbrella organization of EeA and the special debates held about particular criteria concerning to strategies of the network. Nevertheless, the openness (in a participatory, ideological and affective sense) of the assembly and the acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of the organization facilitate the emergence from time to time of recurrent debates: shall we go for a radical challenge of current speculative urban planning? Which and how to build political alliances? What about the maintenance of some administrative work (journal, telephone, web page, press) which is the key for interaction with citizens and even members? Desirable radicalism and possible lobbying, autonomy and the need to accept some minimal criteria in terms of organizational structure or political positions are not regarded as fix positions but as dialectic in which a “proper” balance, according to the participants wishes and stability of the group, must be reached and constantly examined. When some issue blocks either the debate or the organizational motion an special call is made to work out the problem. Some times a special assembly is held in order to argue about a strategy. Some times a desperate appeal is made to help in distributing (posting) the journal of the organization or to deal with some public relationships considered interesting for the group (event, press conference, etc.). In general, as information coming from the observation process will show, a collective effort is made among more committed activists, some times counting on the implication of a whole thematic

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<sup>57</sup> See works by Castoriadis or Chantal Mouffe.

area, in order to figure out a solution. For most of the time, good atmosphere prevails. “Human” fluidity is considered to be even more important than ideologies to build up a radical democracy, as an interviewee stated (E2: 4).

However, when thinking about (new) eco-topian world, in which some human conditions of EeA-Córdoba could be absent (confidence, shared goals, closed identities), the question of how to manage conflicts seems to be addressed in a bi-dimensional process dimensions that feedback on itself. At least, participants of the Summer School of 2007 put it in that way, connecting to contemporary critical approaches to democracy. First, conditions to achieve a “human scale” should be achieved, according to the wording of Max-Neef. Both a local scale (or a proximity or from below approach) has to be pursued whenever possible; de-globalization is a pre-requisite for building up a society characterized by a sustainability and “demodiversity”. Proximity opens the door to a more participatory, stable, affective and bearable relationships; deliberation asks for it. “Equity” is considered as necessary since dynamics of power take places in unbalanced situations in terms of access to economic resources (class differences), educational and symbolic tokens (discrimination due to gender; educational differences), information or expressive mechanisms (demands for self-institutionalisation and participatory mechanisms)<sup>58</sup>. An active politics for preserving common goods (resources, spaces for socialization) is demanded.

The search for these conditions should develop in parallel to alternatives to tackle conflicts and dissenters. Conflict is also an opportunity to explore new patterns, attitudes, relationships. It can be positive. Education is the key to visualize the conflict as source of creativity and an unavoidable situation in social issues, declared the group in charge of summarizing conclusions of the Summer School of 2007. Also, when some principles are elaborated in a “from below” manner, dissent has to be coped with affective, artistic, community repairs and educational process for which material isolation is not a solution but a new burden for the society as a whole. The question of what to do when the dimension of the conflict can not be managed in this way remained however unanswered. A non-violent perspective was the general framework to be respected by any possible solution.

## *2.7 Group structures*

EeA-Córdoba has 160 formal members that pay a regular fee to the organization. They receive general information about actions of the group via e-mail. They are also subscribers of *El Ecologista* (The Ecologist), a monthly journal about environment and social movements. Between 20 and 30 people are involved in developing actions through the different thematic areas. Between 10 and 20 attend the monthly assembly. There is no need to pay the regular fee to EeA-Córdoba, although most are formal members of the group. In the province of Córdoba there are other local groups. In total, they amount to 800 formal members, one of the highest ratio of supporters per habitant around the Spanish State.

As it is stated at EeA (2005), this political ecologism is attractive for those who look for another way of living, away from consumerism, authoritarian values, etc. Particularly between the long-time activists, EeA tends to be regarded as the “main” participant structure in which they are involved.

The activities of the group include a high variety of actions, from sporadic appeals to non-violent civil disobedient campaigns about transgenic or military expenditures. As it was expressed, the assumption of diversity (multiples identities, repertoires of actions, relationships with institutions) is part of the project of EeA from the very beginning. Being environmental issues the focus of the

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<sup>58</sup> Some traditions behind these analysis of power are Foucault (the construction of practices imagineries according to a imposed moral-economic order), feminist studies (cultural inequalities as a substrate for other dominations) and contemporary studies of neo-marxian thinkers in terms of substantializing the debates of democracy (from Sousa Santos to Negri, Virno), along with other traditions in rejecting the “new enclosures” of knowledge as a way to maintain privileged positions of some class/social actores (Vandana Shiva, even Paulo Freire). See Calle (2007)

group, both their appeal for a political ecologism and the anti-globalization protests have pushed the role of the organization at the state level towards the development and articulation of global campaigns like those against EU Constitutional Treaty, the support of anti-WTO and anti-World Bank protest events, the diffusion of international calls for action against war, etc. Nevertheless, the local group of Córdoba seems to be more engaged in conservationist and urban planning affairs. They count with a globalization area but it has not been operating in a regular basis, being the organizational over-loading and the lack of people the argument made by some participants to explain this fact.

Nobody has any executive mandates, not even the general coordinator. Administrative tasks are carried out by a special group of two volunteers. In an assembly, due to the overloading, it was proposed of re-taking the regular engagement of somebody by using funding coming out of institutional projects.

They meet in their own local, both thematic groups and the monthly general assembly. This room is placed in the Citizen House, in which other social organizations (educations, neighbourhood) also have their particular room, along with common spaces for meetings or presentations. The council owns and facilitates the management of the Citizen House. The room is four by five meters square. It has a little library, a panel with news concerning activities in Cordoba, a big table in the centre that serves as the meeting point for the assembly, administrative works, etc. There are two computers. The organization sells at its office the Diagonal, alternative two-weeks newspaper for social movements.

Sessions always have a basic structure: the iterative expositions of the work by different groups. Apart from this information, and depending on the political and social agenda, there are other issues, generally concerning with common problematics: management of the organization, relationship with local institutions, etc. The mailing list serves as a way to exchange ideas or to state the convenience of introducing new issues in the agenda. There is always the possibility of introducing a point in the same assembly. A person, that varies in time, is responsible for animating the group and taking notes of the meeting. No defined seating order exist, although the coordinator and those responsible for management tasks of the organization usually arrives earlier and sit down on one side of the table. When the table is crowded a second rank of seats is made available by taking seats from other organization spaces.

Consensus is always the rule, both in working groups and in the general assembly for coordination. We have not been informed of any session in which voting was used as a methodology for taking a decision. There are not many controversial issues, as sensibilization and identification of environmental local problems are the main tasks in which thematic groups are involved. But if controversies arise, then a special session is programmed in order to properly address and discuss with equal information the specified issue. It has been done for establishing the position of the group concerning urbanization by small proprietors of protected or rural areas surrounding Cordoba.

The relation between new activists and oldtimers is balanced (about 50% each). Among new activists, we have a balance of women and men in terms of assistance in meetings, internal coordination and taking public responsibilities. Among the new recruits, we came across two or three people in their forties who have approached the group because of a particular concern on environmental issues during recent years. In the group of oldtimers, men predominate in number and in assuming internal and external responsibilities.

Friendship does not seem to play a particular role in supporting the cohesion of Ecologistas en Acción nowadays, as it was for previous organization (at least according to the two interviewed activists, that had participated in the process of unification). This situation is perceived as good (less personal quarrels), but it is not quite helpful in promoting a more fluid emotional communication or a greater adherence towards the local group. In part, because most of newcomers are members of other social networks that are also part of their identity as “activists”. The main socio-economic

categories present at the general assembly are people working for administration in the areas of education, participation, and environmental. Most of the new recruits are students of the university or recent graduates in areas like biology, education and environment.

The older people are usually concerned with the more classical ecologists problems: energy, pollution, urbanism, conservation; anti-globalization issues, including consumption and participation, seem more attractive for young people, as also observable at the state level according to some participant of the Summer School of 2007. This fact implies not “more power” for the “older” activists, but a certain specialization. Logically, political contacts and political debates about relationships with parties (Izquierda Unida y Los Verdes, United Left and The Green, the last one without local representation) are part of the interests of older people, with more ties to EeA or that have this organization as their main space for participation. Gender differences do not seem to play a role. The person that coordinates the section of Nature in *Ecologistas en Acción* at a state level is a member of the local group of Córdoba.

We were not able to identify any neat “coalition” inside the whole group, except in particular situations the new activists “versus” oldtimers. This has to do, in our opinion, with several factors. First, ecologism has a remarkable attraction nowadays among critical citizens, especially among young people, in a city permeated by its countryside as it is Córdoba. As a consequence, from the process of unification onwards, and taking into account that some “oldtimers” did not enter into the new organization, the arrival of young people has always acted as a counter-balance to the stabilization of “experience” as a permanent source of “legitimation”. Second, being “friendship” or the belonging to political groups outside of *Ecologistas* of little importance for the development of internal solidarity there is more room for the “heterogeneity effect”: that is, as stated in the introductory chapter, the dissent is expressed more regularly,. And third, the autonomy of small thematic groups facilitates a consensus that is oriented to concrete actions.

There are some significant differences, however, observed in the debates about issues related to alliances or local policies, between those involved or closed to some political party (Izquierda Unida y Los Verdes) and those who are not (being sometimes pretty much diffuse the frontiers or giving way to more blocks). But it was not identified as a frontier, rather as two perspectives that usually arise. Partially, this absence of “coalitions” or marked dissents is due to the good atmosphere and the respect that participants recreate in their meetings. In fact, and comparing with our experience in observing and participating in other social movements, we were impressed by how easily relaxed moments, with humour in debates or jokes getting involved in conversations, developed between different people.

## *2.8 Environment of the group*

At local level, *Ecologistas en Acción* has regular ties with other organizations. Apart from the critical relationship with the council and the party in power (Izquierda Unida), the local ties range from getting symbolic support, arranging particular social events or establishing formal coalitions. Symbolic support has been pursued in the large trade unions at state level (UGT and CC.OO.) on issues like the elaboration of a public statement and a local campaign on climate change. Demonstrations and visits to environmental damaged areas have been articulated with other environmental local groups (A Desalambrar) and with educational NGOs active universities and schools in promoting solidarity, peaceful and environmental values (Barbiana). Around global issues (foreign and ecological debt, transnationals), the group started to approach to the platform Who owes to whom? (*¿Quién debe a quién?*). They are an active part of Córdoba Solidaria, the local platform of networks and NGOs, also studied in our research.

Asked about their critical position with respect to the left-wing party in power at the city of Córdoba, an interviewee replied us that: “It is a complicated relationship [...as] they govern and they do not follow a very left-wing perspective [...] and we do not have a link with any leftist

opposition. But if compared with other cities, the political situation of Córdoba is better [...So] it does not make too much sense that 80% of our efforts were critically oriented towards (and against) Izquierda Unida.”

In the wake of the last council elections, an oldtimer who used to attend the monthly assembly and to work regularly for EeA entered the local government as head of the environmental department. As in the case of the head coordinator of Los Verdes, also for an activist of EeA, this situation in itself did not pose a problem for the group. Nevertheless, a more critical evaluation was made about the little space in the local distribution of power left for the environmental department and the first statements made by the elected person as were interpreted as too much “pragmatic”.

### **3. Córdoba solidaria (C.S.)**

In 2006/2007 we monitored an association located in Cordoba, Spain, Córdoba Solidaria [Cordoba in Solidarity] (C.S.). We attended a total of 10 general assemblies of the organization, which were scheduled to take place about once a month.

Córdoba Solidaria is an organization of organizations. In technical terms, these types of organizations are referred to as umbrella organizations, as they promote, represent, train and provide information to a collection of organizations grouped under their influence. Given its nature, the principle activity of Córdoba Solidaria is to keep all the citizen’s associations located in Cordoba informed about all the different types of events, activities and mobilizations on the local, national or international level that are related to issues of interest to the represented groups. In addition, Córdoba Solidaria coordinates all types of activities that imply the participation of more than one of the organizations in Cordoba. In this spirit, Córdoba Solidaria advises and provides information to more than 50 associations in Cordoba whose work covers diverse activities that can range from international solidarity to dealing with issues of concern to residents in marginal neighborhoods in Cordoba. Cordoba Solidaria has been doing this work since 1994.

C.S. is an organization whose principle end is helping the coordination of the work of its member organizations and providing information to organizations located in Cordoba along the entire participative spectrum. As a result, the organization is involved in projects which seeks to involve social organizations in Cordoba in the activities that are taking place in the city, while also seeking to strengthen the work of said organizations through its coordinating efforts. C.S. is organized into issue-based committees, such as Education and Raising Awareness, and Communication and Participation. These committees are in turn directed by an assembly which is formed by representatives of the committees as well as by a group of representatives of the organizations affiliated with C.S. It is a hierarchical organization headed by a president and four board members, all of them members of C.S. In addition, C.S. has two staff members who, at are in charge of all the work that the organization does. Their role is very important as they are the persons that report on and organize all the activities of C.S.

The issues dealt with in the assemblies are generally of an informative character. This information is basically of three types. Firstly, it is information and follow-up on activities organized by C.S in which the affiliated organizations may or may not be involved. Secondly, the organizations which are a part of C.S. give an accounting of their activities or of their responsibilities in activities organized by C.S. Finally, information is provided on issues, activities and mobilizations that will be taking place in Cordoba. This last activity is also done through the use of telecommunications media such as email.

#### *3.1 The role of deliberation and participation among the organizational aims*

Deliberation is neither a key objective of the activities and, in particular, of the general assemblies of C.S., nor a recurring pattern of the meetings of the organization. In other words,

meetings are based on the exchange of information rather than deliberative processes. Given the nature of these activities, the general assemblies are organized around the figure or figures of the staff of C.S. These persons report on the activities done or on the activities that are to be carried out; and they present projects and proposals on initiatives to be taken. In the majority of the assemblies that we have attended this information mode predominated. In this atmosphere, the members of the assembly, mainly the representatives of other organizations, didn't, in general, take the ideas and suggestions made by the staff of C.S. as issues to debate; but rather as issues that they should transmit to their organizations or as information through which they can organize their own activities.

On the few occasions in which deliberative debates were generated, this was motivated by the organization of group mobilizations, or the "gestation" phase of a project in which various of the organizations within C.S. were going to collaborate. It must be said that such occasions were rare, and that in general, deliberation did not form a principle part of the meetings of the organization.

Regarding the participation of the members of the assembly in the process of discussion, it is important to point out that this was also limited. Generally, a very low percentage of members in the assemblies participated in an active form in the meetings. Overall, the voice heard was that of the staff members of C.S., who brought the information, and most importantly, their opinions on the issues to be dealt with in the assembly to its members.

### *3.2 Perspectives on democracy*

C.S. is an organization with a strong hierarchy. It is not a hierarchy that is expressed exclusively in formal terms. In other words, we did not note in the assemblies of C.S. that any of the participants, based on their positions, imposed their opinion. However, a set of circumstances which are related to the activities of the organization itself determine that fundamental issues for radical democracy, such as horizontality, the distribution of responsibilities, consensual decision-making or deliberation itself were not consistently present in the observed meetings. As a result of these circumstances, we believe that C.S. does not have an innovative democratic character. We cannot say however that they reproduce in the heart of the organization, patterns or democratic strategies of formal organizations such as political parties. We will briefly explain these circumstances below.

One of the principle democratic limitations of this organization is the low level of participation. This low level of participation refers to both the number of persons that intervene in an active form in the meetings and, more importantly, the infrequently controversial and reflexive character of the contributions of the people who do offer their opinions. In the majority of the sessions, the recurring dynamic of interaction was, first, the presentation by the C.S. staff of the activities that had taken place during the last month, second, the report of the activities of each committee made by their representatives, and finally, a proposal for actions to be taken for the coming weeks. This dynamic meant that, in the majority of cases, those present were passive witnesses to a round of information offered by their colleagues. In rare exceptions, some of the participants participated by introducing a comment or suggestion related to the information that had been presented. However, as a general rule, these interventions did not generate debate or discussion. By prioritizing the informative character over the deliberative, we didn't, in general, have the opportunity to see an interchange of opinions that ended in a collective decision.

Another of the elements that has an influence on the limited innovative democratic character in C.S. is the lack of common concrete objectives. That is to say, in contrast to, for example, organizations such as those that deal with ecological issues, C.S. does not have a concrete object of activity that connects the interests of all the members of the assembly, and that, at the same time, can generate contrasting visions over how to solve the problems the group confronts. The lack of expression of a broad range of opinions determines the inconsequential deliberative character and, in a certain sense, the lack of implication of the participants.

However, we can appreciate an important strengthening of the dynamics that make transparency possible in the communication of information. This important issue is dealt with in C.S. by an efficient and regular computerized system of distribution of information through mail and during the assemblies themselves. This transparency also affects both issues of internal order (expenses, etc.) and issues of an external character.

To sum up, we think that the lack of an innovative democratic dynamic results more from limitations that are implicit in the activities of the organization itself (coordination and management) than from the intention of the members of C.S., or as a result of a perception of advantages to this type of democratic position. When there are ways towards democratic innovations, C.S. introduces them. Nevertheless, the very character of the activities of the organization makes innovative practices such as deliberation more difficult, if not impossible,.

### *3.3 Meta-discourse*

Among the regular participants in the C.S. assemblies we could observe a set of opinions from which they construct their vision of the organization. C.S. is perceived by its members, in general terms, as an organization with an important presence in the city of Cordoba. This presence is considered as very positive in two ways. In the first place, an important number of C.S. members are assiduous participants in all types of cultural and political activities that take place in Cordoba. This allows them to be well-informed and up to date on issues of interest in the city, and also opens doors for active participation around those issues. Secondly, they consider C.S. to be a point of reference in the city; principally thanks to the help its activities provide to the participatory fabric in Cordoba. In the view of some of the members of the organization, coordination and management that C.S. undertakes is one of the pillars on which the important and rich participatory fabric of Cordoba is built. The extremely positive value given to the work of C.S. leads its participants to judge their participation in the organization very positively.

### *3.4 Inter and Intra group relations*

One of the main values that C.S. promote is related to generating and strengthening inter-group relations. As was pointed out earlier, the C.S. assembly is constituted by representatives of different organizations and collectives located in the city of Cordoba. The work of C.S. is oriented toward the coordination of the activities that this group of organizations and collectives embraces. In this way, C.S. facilitates and promotes the network of citizens' organizations in Cordoba and reinforces their connections. This reinforcement has various dimensions. Firstly, the citizens' organizations of Cordoba are kept informed about the activities and objectives of other organizations. In this way, these organizations are exposed to information and varied and novel points of view which lead to a stronger citizen culture. Secondly, informal relations between members and leaders of distinct organizations are generated which permits a greater reciprocity between organizations. Finally, C.S. generates an important flow of information that keeps the affiliated organizations up to date on the activities and actions that are taking place in the city. In this sense, C.S. is of great value for the relationships between organizations in Cordoba.

Given its character as a managing and coordinating organization, C.S. must maintain close contacts with public groups and institutions. This is the case, for example, with the municipal government of Cordoba and with other platforms with a similar structure to C.S. In this sense and based on the information we have (internal documents of C.S. and information collected in the general assemblies), C.S. has shown itself to be an organization with an important capacity for relationships with other organizations and collectives.

### *3.5 Ideology/Framework/Identity/Objectives*

Struggling in favour of global justice, the group perceives the existing disequilibrium between rich countries and poor countries, between areas of greater or lesser political, social or economic development, and inequalities for reasons of race, gender or religion, as a collective responsibility. In other words, inequalities, and concretely their eradication, are considered as a responsibility and the work of everyone. This responsibility is greater, if anything, for western governments, as they are the ones with the resources and possibilities which favor equality and development. In addition, they are recognized, together with multinational corporations, as the ones ultimately responsible for global inequalities and injustices. In this sense, their responsibility in this struggle is double. However, this work is also the responsibility of the citizens that make up the developed states, because it is through their awareness, their actions, and their pressure that in large measure the reactions of their governments will depend.

C.S. constitutes an organization that corresponds to this ideological focus. In this sense and in general, it raises as objectives, the defense of peace, support for equality and development for the most disfavored, and defense of human rights. In both its statutes and its website, C.S. is defined as an organization which defends equality and social justice. Certainly some of its activities, principally those related to raising awareness and social consciousness, such as the “Solidarity Fair”, aim at develop citizen consciousness about the urgency and necessity to collaborate in the defense of a more just distribution of resources, as well as raising awareness about the existence of political and social inequalities. C.S. also participates in national and international forums (the World Social Forum) that defend the necessity and the viability of creating alternative forms of global management.

However, C.S. is defined more concretely as a coordination made up of collectives and organizations that work to promote peace, cooperation, solidarity and human rights. In this sense, the concrete objective of C.S. is not exactly or directly the struggle for or action in favor of the general objectives previously mentioned; rather it is the support and coordination of other organizations that directly work toward those ends. Thus, the organization’s true labor is primarily related to raising awareness, training, management and coordination more than to taking action for equality and global justice. In fact, so much is this the general priority of the organization that the organizations which are part of C.S. do not only focus on these so-called “global justice” objectives. C.S. is also made up of ecological and women’s organizations, whose objectives do not, at least in a direct sense, coincide with those set out by C.S.. So, the principle activities of C.S. are those of coordination and not direct action, and that the spectrum of groups that make up C.S. reach beyond the concrete framework of global justice, The principle consequence of these two circumstances is that the general framework of the organization is, to say the least, diffuse. In other words, given that the activities of C.S. are, principally, the coordination of existing social movement organizations and the diffusion of information, its general objectives such as the struggle in favor of global justice are relegated to a secondary place.

### *3.6 Structure of the group*

Córdoba Solidaria is an organization formed of some forty organizations of varied profile among which stand out, for their numbers, the so-called solidarity associations. Together with organizations such as Ayuda en Acción, Cordoba acoge or Paz y desarrollo (Aid in Action, Cordoba welcomes, Peace and Development), we find youth groups such as el Consejo Local de la Juventud, ecologists such as Ecologistas en Acción or Veterinarios Sin Fronteras (Local Youth Council, Ecologists in Action, Veterinarians Without Borders), and women’s organizations such as Barbiana. In this sense, we can say that the field of concerns of C.S. goes beyond, in a certain sense, that of strictly solidarity. As has been mentioned previously, C.S. sets out as its objectives the coordination and management of activities related to the objectives of its member organizations. To complete these stated objectives, C.S. is organized into distinct committees (Education, Raising Awareness,

Communication and Participation) which work concretely on issues related to the objectives of the organization. These committees report to a basically monthly general assembly (July and August are virtually months of inactivity). Representatives of the organizations affiliated with C.S. come to the assemblies and they have a voice and vote in the decisions adopted by the organization.

The management of the activities of C.S. is the responsibility of the board of directors headed by a president and changes biannually. In addition, there are two committee members and a treasurer. This team is in charge of the management of the organization. It is a team of volunteers and no one receives economic compensation for their participation. The management team has the support of two staff persons, who do receive a salary from the organization. These are the persons that are in charge of the day to day work of the organization as well as for the communication and sending of information.

C.S. has an office in the “citizen’s house” of Cordoba. In this location, managed by the city government, all the meetings of the various committees as well as the general assemblies take place. This center is outfitted with a technological and material infrastructure which includes an auditorium, workshop spaces and other facilities.

### *3.7 Group environment*

On the local level, C.S. maintains a close relationship with both public institutions of the municipal administration and civil society organizations. The relationship of C.S. with both the municipal and county governments is, up to a certain point, a relationship of dependency, as the organization’s relationship with them is primarily an economic one. In addition, C.S. often demands from the local government public space for implementing some of its activities, such as the “Solidarity Fair.” In this sense, C.S. maintains a stable and constant relationship with the public institutions of Cordoba, but one which rarely goes beyond a instrumental relationship of getting organizational and financial support.

Cordoba is a city with an important associative fabric and numerous social and political activities. In this sense, it is a city with quite a receptive environment for participatory and associative activities. In this environment, as has been mentioned earlier, C.S. is one of the leading associations as much for its work as an umbrella organization and for the political and social significance of its components.

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# Practices of Deliberative Democracy in Switzerland

Marko Bandler, Marco Giugni, and Alessandro Nai

*(University of Geneva)*

## 1. Introduction to our participant observation

Attac-Geneva (AG) and the Lemanic Social Forum (FSL), albeit being very different groups, are two of the more emblematic organizations of the Swiss GJM sector. As we will see below, both represent radically different functioning models. While AG is a relatively young organization whose birth and growth is the result of the spread of the French counterpart, the FSL results from a transformation of old groups that aimed to unite in a common platform the wide range of social forces fighting neoliberal globalization. Thus AG has recruited activists from different horizons in a new organization, while the FSL rested on a pre-existing network of people / groups that were used to work together. As a result, one can see several differences in the ways these two groups vision democracy, their working principles and their internal practices.

We took part in three meetings of each organization, held between February and July 2007. Although this number may seem small, we claim that the saturation point was reached: in other words, no significant difference in the main topics of observation can, in our opinion, be expected from participant observation in further meetings, given that the structure, progress, topics, discussions and controversies we witnessed very similar from one meeting to another. This was also confirmed informally by a regular participant in AG meetings.

However, we found big variations between the two groups. Indeed, AG put a total of 76 items in their agenda, while the FSL only put 16, though the overall duration of each session was quite similar for both organizations. As a result, we found that the average duration of an agenda item was about 7 minutes for AG but more than 25 minutes for the FSL. And the same kind of results obviously concerns the number of controversies we identified: 26 for Attac (about 9 per meeting) and only 5 for the FSL (about 1.5 per meeting). That explains why most of the analysis on the latter group (see below) will remain essentially descriptive.

## 2. Attac-Geneva

The first group in which our participant observation was conducted is Attac-Geneva (AG), a regional spin-off (or cantonal section) of the ATTAC Swiss organization, itself a spin-off (or national section) of the overall and well-known ATTAC movement.

The following parts will, first, present some major insights related to AG's history, identity and structure; secondly, a short part will sketch the main characteristics of AG meetings; the last two parts which form the core of our report on this group will present the specific content of the discussions taking place in AG meetings, first by analyzing their topics, communication types and decisions modes, and finally by focusing on the handling of the controversies that rose during AG discussions.

### 2.1 Group history and identity

ATTAC is probably one of the major examples, in the GJM, of a structured and highly "contagious" organisational network.

The creation of ATTAC (Association pour une taxation des transactions financières pour l'aide aux citoyen-ne-s, literally "association for the taxation of financial transactions and the help for

citizens") was proposed in 1997 by the French monthly *Le Monde diplomatique*<sup>59</sup> in order to organize popular and democratic resistance against the growing power held by financial and economic institutions at every level. Traditionally known for its leftist positions and actions, and occupying a central space in the public space since its foundation, *Le Monde diplomatique* reached very rapidly the critical mass of adherents in order to launch a proper movement. The news of the foundation of the first nucleus of ATTAC activists in the late Nineties spread quickly in West European countries. Soon almost every country saw the birth of a national section of a movement that became more and more international (if not transnational).

Switzerland is not an exception in this sense. In 1999, a previously existing movement against financial powers (*Mouvement citoyen pour le désarmement des pouvoirs financiers*) proposed a call for the constitution of ATTAC Switzerland; a pre-constituency assembly took place in Lausanne on February 12, 1999, with more than 400 individual participants (which is quite huge according to Swiss standards). One of the major results of this first assembly was the "official" creation of a Swiss ATTAC movement at the national level as well as a series of ATTAC groups at the cantonal level; this evidently mirrors the federal structure of the Swiss state, and has the aim to better root the sub-sections in their wider context. The Geneva section of ATTAC that we shall portray closely in the following pages was born on this occasion, as well as other cantonal sections in Bern, Zurich, Lausanne, and so on. Today, 11 local sections of ATTAC exist in Switzerland, distributed more or less equally across the various regions of the country.

Moreover, the fact that ATTAC in Switzerland has developed following a top-down structure (from the national constituent assembly to cantonal sections) implies that the focus of each sub-national section varies strongly. In fact, while ATTAC is clearly oriented toward supranational concerns (e.g. international financial powers), the root of the sub-national sections in their local reality gives them a local focus. Therefore, the issues addressed in AG meetings only rarely have a geographical scope beyond local issues.

One of the first and main goals of ATTAC was to lobby in favor of the well-known "Tobin tax"<sup>60</sup>. Named after US economist and Nobel Prize James Tobin, the tax proposes to impose a duty (about 0.1%) on financial transactions at the international level. According to some estimates, such a tax could easily collect between 50 and 100 billions USD every year, which could be used in a wide range of actions against social and economic inequalities. As ATTAC Switzerland points out, a PNUD estimate shows that 40 billions USD every year could be enough to eradicate some of the major inequalities.

Although at the beginning ATTAC was basically focused on supporting the Tobin Tax, it has then transformed quickly from a "single-issue" to a "multiple-issues" group, both at the world and national level. According to the first constituent assembly of 1999 (as presented in the movement's platform), ATTAC aims to:

- fight against international speculation;
- develop a tax on capital's benefits;
- plan a redistribution of the benefits emerging from such taxation, whereby the first beneficiary would be the people;
- abolish "fiscal paradises", internally and externally;
- fight against the tradition of secrecy typical of the Swiss bank system (*secret bancaire*);

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<sup>59</sup> In the December 1997 edition of the newspaper, Ignacio Ramonet (editor in chief of *Le Monde Diplomatique*) pointed out that "*Le désarmement du pouvoir financier doit devenir un chantier civique majeur si l'on veut éviter que le monde du siècle à venir ne se transforme en une jungle où les prédateurs feront la loi.*"

<sup>60</sup> In fact, ATTAC was sometimes called (in his early stages) *Association pour une Taxe Tobin et l'aide aux citoyen-ne-s* (literally, "Association for a Tobin Tax and the help for citizens").

- fight against privatizations (in general) and especially against the dismantling of public services;
- stress a general and unconditional abolition of the Third World debt;
- increase the global awareness that the WTO is mainly a political rather than an economic power;
- create a new political and democratic space at the international level.

The document adopted by the first constituent assembly of ATTAC-Switzerland in 1999 concludes that, generally, the ultimate goal is simply to bring the power back and to fight for the determination of the future of the world. Clearly, the "single-issue" approach is no longer a priority for the organization.

## *2.2 Session organization and group structure*

Meetings of the AG take place once a month, every second Tuesday's evening of the month, usually between 20h00 and 23h00. They are held in the AG headquarters located in the well-know *Maison des associations*<sup>61</sup>, a center that gathers the main organizations of the Global Justice Movement's local scene.

The AG headquarters are a roughly 40 m<sup>2</sup> large room located on the ground floor of the maze-shaped center, and its only window opens directly on a small backyard full of leftovers and that does not provide a lot of natural light. However, this unfavorable situation does not deteriorate the overall atmosphere of seriousness, friendship and resistance. The important amount of all kind of propaganda materials literally dispersed in the headquarters (e.g. posters of former meetings, demonstrations or alternative events, flyers, anti-global books, CDs and videos, AG leaflets, official bulletins for popular initiatives or referenda supported by AG) contributes to this particular and certainly not unpleasant atmosphere.

Participants sit around a big table in the middle of the headquarters. Although the table is not round, the implicit message is cried loud and clear: there is no hierarchy in AG meetings, no specific discussion rules (except the ones implicitly accepted in each civil discussion) and no seat order.

The presidency of each meeting is established on a rotating basis. Usually the person who writes the meeting proceedings becomes the president of the next meeting. The functions of the president are almost exclusively formal (which reinforces our impression about this particular group). Firstly, in theory, the president changes discussion topic following the semi-structured "ordre du jour"; in reality, the various topics are addressed in a sequential way that does not always reflect the agenda. Moreover, a lot of "additional items" come out in each meeting. Secondly, the president acts as moderator in the discussions and gives every participant a chance to intervene in the discussion. Again, this function is often only formal, since discussions in AG meetings take place usually in a very clever and structured way, almost without any form of incivility or prevarication.

Another peculiarity of AG is that, in each meeting, a person (usually different from the president or the one who writes the meeting proceedings) presents a "political point". Determined in advance, this presentation aims to literally instruct the group on specific topics, from the political situation in a Latin-American country to the Swiss tax system, and has an approximate duration of 20-25 minutes. AG members are very proud of the existence of this presentation and always participate with great enthusiasm. Following a remark by an AG regular participant, "such auto-formation of the group is very important, because it gives the group the possibility to increase awareness on the

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<sup>61</sup> <http://www.lafea.org/>

problems that surround us; this is why, the planning of the future actions will be more clever and informed". Similarly, another member stated that "the political point presented in every meeting is like a formation in and on the action".

AG meetings usually gather 5-10 participants on a voluntary basis, including a core of customary participants and some more occasional activists (who are often members of many other social movement organizations, which is the reason why they cannot be fully engaged in AG). Participants varies in age and origins (from the young Swiss university student to the 40 years old housewife from Peru or the 60 years old nostalgic activist), but there is no apparent gender gap as meetings always included at least some women activists. In general, no hidden discrimination related to age, sex, origin or education/social level was present. The group displayed quite a strong cohesion (both in the single meetings and across all the meetings we attended).

Perhaps because of the relatively small attendance of the meetings, the atmosphere is warm and friendly, and no particular tensions within the group seem to exist. Participants apparently spend some time together outside the organization, which increases the friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Every session is preceded by about 10-15 minutes of informal chat among participants ("hey, how are you doin'?", "mmmm... a lot to do for my exams..."; "yeah, well, we all passed through this!"; "By the way, yesterday I went to a movie theatre and I saw the movie you recommended... you know, the one who won last years' Berlin Festival..."). Usually one or two of the participants bring something to eat during the meeting (e.g. chocolate, chips) and a final beer is always shared among the participants after the meeting, in the center's bar or in a nearby one.

The meetings have quite a long duration (on average, about 2h20) and the number of issues addressed in each meeting is quite high (on average, more than 23 issues per meeting), The sessions were characterized by the absence of breaks and by no significant fluctuation in the number of participants.

The group accepted and welcomed the observer very kindly, almost without "fuss". On the first meeting, we briefly exposed the main goals of the DEMOS project, described the information we were looking for and showed the participant observation grids (session report and discourse protocol). We clearly explained that the researcher's role in the meetings was not to participate in a traditional way, but rather to gather elements that could allow us to analyze the logics of decision-making and controversies behind their discussions.

The only aspect that was not really gathered with enthusiasm by the participants in the first meeting was related to the financial aspects of the DEMOS project. When we presented the main financing aspects, answering an explicit question, we had to face some seconds of silence and then a participant said: "Well, I guess that the European Union is now interested in the ATTAC activities...". The origin of the financial support was however never mentioned afterwards, nor has this been in my opinion of any limitation or bias on the material he could put together in the same and following meetings.

In general, our presence in the meetings was very well received and everyone acted as naturally as he/she could. This was confirmed informally by a regular participant.

### *2.3 Topics, communication and decisions*

Sometimes following a pre-conceived agenda, the discussions held by AG members in their monthly meetings are extremely heterogeneous as to meaning, focus, duration, participation, emotional engagement and importance. However, they all share a common anti-global orientation, in line with the core beliefs of the group.

In order to expose such richness and diversity, Table 1 presents some random examples of topics discussed during AG meetings.

**Table 1 - Discussion topics (selected examples)**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Duration (in minutes)</b>
What is liberalism? Who are the neo-cons? Political vs. economical liberalism	5
Popular initiative "for a unique health insurance" (Caisse Unique): seeking for volunteers! How to organize the campaign?	8
Does a march have a real impact on public opinion? If yes, which one?	2
Rethink the budget? Shall we increase the contributions for individual members?	15
Terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001: what do we do about it? Should we take position? Should we write something about it? Should we enter the debate about the conspiracy theory behind the attacks?	5
ATTAC and its position towards violence in demonstrations. Are ATTAC the good militants? Has ATTAC now a negative reputation?	3
Coordination with national ATTAC: situation in German-speaking CH, ATTAC journal, creation of a "scientific council", summer school	7
Update the website; everyone has to take its responsibilities	3
Hugo Chavez's (possible) visit in Switzerland; what are the events? Does ATTAC have to do something active?	10
A documentary on Attac-Geneva is being made: what to do for its release, soon?	5
Autonomous = black blocks?	3
"Café ATTAC": organization	20
Urging problem with e-mail organization: the responsible does not make his job!	10

During the meetings, the separation of topics was never really explicit or formalized and often discussions went "back and forth" from one topic to another. As an example, the group could easily speak several minutes on an ideological topic, then switch to an organizational one, and then come back to the ideological one just because one of the participants had something new to add. However, the confusion in the end is only apparent; most of the time, in our view, the distinct discussions not harmed by such overlapping.

As it also emerge in part from Table 1, the topics discussed in AG meetings do not only vary in their content and duration (on average, the duration of a topic is 6.4 minutes, ranging from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 25 minutes); they also vary greatly in the specific type of communication. As shown in Table 2, three main types of discussion could be identified in the meetings: input/proposals (accordingly to our codebook<sup>62</sup>, when the speaker informs others on a specific issue or provides a concrete plan on how to proceed with regard to a certain issue), discussions (when participants debate on a specific issue) and reports. This third form of communication, which represents alone more than a quarter of all communications, is not included in the codebook and was first coded as "other". In the specific case of AG meetings, we define a "report" as the voluntary and planned presentation of substantial information related to a specific topic on which the speaker has a privileged position (e.g. because of the fact that he/she participated in some activity, while the others had not) and a strong desire to instruct the other participants about it. It differs from "for your information" input in the importance given to it. The strong presence of reports in AG meetings points to the same direction of the group's strong desire to be better informed about external events (auto-formation). Brainstorming represents about 1/10 of the overall contributions, which is a considerably low score. In our view, a high presence of brainstorming indicates the presence of some serious queries about the ideological direction of the group and the need to plan jointly future actions without starting from the existing basis. Conversely, a low score of brainstorming indicates that the group has a clearly defined ideological guideline and/or that, for

<sup>62</sup> WP6 participant observation codebook, version January 2007.

the moment, no need for a redefinition of such guideline has emerged. In other words, here we have a first indication that the redefinition of the core values of the organization is not a point in the AG agenda. This is also confirmed by the quite small amount of ideologically oriented controversies.

**Table 2 - Types of communication**

Type of communication	Absolute frequency	Valid percent
<b>Input or proposal</b>	28	27.7
<b>Separate contributions</b>	4	4.0
<b>Discussion</b>	21	20.8
<b>Brainstorming</b>	10	9.9
<b>Other form of communication: FYI</b>	12	11.9
<b>Other form of communication: Report</b>	26	25.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Note: topics concerned by two different types of communications are presented in the table as two separate entries.		

We found very few separate contributions (only 4) and no go-round (in which every participant gives his opinion on a specific issue). In our view, this indicates a lack of inclusiveness, which translate into the absence of explicit decision-making procedures.

As reported in Table 3, about a half of the decision-oriented discussions conclude with a nodding or a tacit agreement and the great majority of the remaining discussions finish with some sort of unanimity (together, these two types of decisions represent 92% of all decision-making procedures). Even in the case of unanimity, however, there was never an explicit procedure verifying that everyone is really in favor of such a decision. Moreover, not once in the meeting was the observer able to participate in a formal decision-making procedure proposed by anyone. Decisions are taken in a very relaxed way, which is typical of AG meetings in general; since the meetings have a small attendance and participants are all friends, no structured decision mode seems necessary. This is effective when concerning minor points, but creates a high amount of misinterpretations and incomprehension, and paves the way to quite a complicated attribution of each one's responsibilities. Discussions and controversies about "who does what" (or, more generally, about internal organization) were frequent in the meetings. More than once, a discussion rose simply from the fact that there was no longer an agreement about an organizational point discussed and decided in the previous meetings. Although we attended only three meetings, we were able to uncover some of them. As an example, a recurring controversy was related to the responsibilities of the person charged to control and update the AG homepage. Although some sort of minimal decision was taken in the first meeting we attended (i.e. that the person in charge should do his/her duties) after a discussion that lasted 11 minutes, the same discussion came up in the next meeting, in which a totally different decision was taken (another person in charge, sharing of responsibilities). No new elements were introduced in the discussion between the two meetings (e.g. such as an external criticism or another mistake of the person in charge), but the decision taken in the first meeting was apparently not satisfying and the same discussion came up again (twice, in the same meeting). A formal decision-making procedure would probably have solved such contentions, which took about 10% of the meeting time (56 minutes out of 415).

**Table 3 - Types of decision-making**

Type of decision taking	Absolute frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Straw poll	3	3.9	7.9
Veto, no decision taken	0	0.0	0.0
Nodding, tacit agreement	19	25.0	50.0
Majority vote	0	0.0	0.0
Unanimity	16	21.1	42.1
Not applicable	38	50.0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Note: valid percent is calculated without the "not applicable" category.			

About 50% of the discussion did not have any decisional orientation. This shows once again that AG meetings are not only the place in which to discuss and decide about events or strategies, but also the place in which to increase awareness as a group by obtaining news and information (which are by definition voided of decisional orientation).

In general, we did not feel the presence of strong hidden conflicts when observing the discussions during the meetings. To be sure, some topics were more sensible than others with regard to possible veiled divergences, but the fact that the number of issues addressed in every session was quite high (and that no strict plan was present) probably contributed to avoid such contention, creating a basis for an open discussion instead of a hidden conflict. Again, this is helped by participants in such meetings sharing a common history.

Although no particularly strong hidden conflict could be observed, quite a high number of controversies emerged during the meetings (especially when confronted with the other Swiss organization). The next section presents the main elements of such controversies.

#### *2.4 Handling of controversies*

The more heterogeneous is a group, the higher the probability that numerous and/or severe controversies will rise among its members. Conversely, the more the group will share a common history and strong friendship bonds, the less we can expect conflicts to emerge. Similarly, the higher the decisional orientation of the meetings, the higher the likelihood that conflicts will be present. This is especially true for ideologically driven groups such as the ones studied here. Given the elements we provided earlier about AG (e.g. friendship among participants, ideologically homogeneous group, quite low orientation through decisions to be made) one could expect that this group does not provide a lot of contentious material. Although this is the case for the FSL, the other Swiss group studied in our research, it does not apply to AG. In fact, quite a high number of controversies emerged during the three meetings we attended. As reported in Table 4, most of these controversies (which had an average running time of 3.5 minutes) gradually evolved from issues discussed earlier or formally set on the agenda.

**Table 4 - Origin of the controversy**

Origin of the controversy	Absolute frequency	Valid percent
Continuation of an earlier discussion	5	19.2
Pre-structuration	1	3.8
Preset on agenda	5	19.2
Gradually evolving	10	38.5
Unexpected	5	19.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Only about 20% of the controversies were totally unexpected, which indicates once again that hidden conflicts are integrated into the evolving of the session and explicitly translated into evolving discussions. In our view, the higher the number of unexpected controversies, the higher the likelihood that preset agendas hide strong conflicts. Apparently, this is not the case for AG.

The discrimination of controversies by their subject is also of great interest. As shown in Table 5, controversies that emerged in AG meetings only refer to internal organization (30%), strategic decisions (42%) and core values (27%).

No controversy emerged about external delegation or group action during the overall 415 minutes of the meetings. Apparently, there is some sort of structural unanimity about the actions carried by the group. This is also shown by the fact that decisional discussions do not concentrate all the efforts of the group, as we said earlier.

The fact that about one third of the controversies are related to the internal organization of the group is significant. As we mentioned earlier, the lack of clear-cut decision procedures often creates misunderstandings, and the latter concern especially decisions about internal organization. Logically, such misunderstandings lead directly to conflicts about "who does what", which often result in controversies.

**Table 5 - Subject of controversy**

Subject of controversy	Absolute frequency	Valid percent
Internal organisation	8	30.8
Internal structure	0	0.0
External delegation	0	0.0
External group action	0	0.0
Strategic decision	11	42.3
Metadiscourse	0	0.0
Core values	7	26.9
Other	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Among the controversies related to core values, the following subjects were discussed:

- Does a march (e.g. the "white march" against pedophiles) really have an impact on public opinion? If yes, what is the importance of such an impact?

- Do we, as a group, really have to deal with a discussion about the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001? Is this related to our action as a activist group?
- Do we have to take position upon and discuss the role of the black block (casseurs) in the demonstrations? Do we have to discuss with the press our position towards this sub-group of activists? Do we have to explicitly dissociate ourselves from them?
- Is the movement of autonomous and anarchists related to black blocks? If yes, to what extent?
- What is the real role of the "scientific committee" who helps the decisions to be made in the national section of the group? Is there a risk of manipulation by intellectuals?
- Does the academic world represent a side of the economic power who presently rules the world?
- Is direct democracy (as presently existing in the Swiss political system) positive or negative? What is the price for the freedom of expression and freedom of propositions offered by the system?

**Table 6 - Degree of reciprocity**

Degree of reciprocity	Absolute frequency	Valid percent
Low	4	15.4
Medium	11	42.3
High	11	42.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In general, as reported in Table 6, controversies that emerged in AG meetings were quite reciprocal. First of all, 22 controversies out of 26 were classified as fairly or highly reciprocal, reciprocity being defined as the degree to which other positions are referred to during the controversy<sup>63</sup>. In other words, AG activists showed quite a high degree of rhetorical inclusion of the opposite arguments, which can be explained by the shared history and the friendship bonds of the group.

**Table 7 - Symmetry of relations between speakers**

Symmetry of relations between speakers	Absolute frequency	Valid percent
Very asymmetric	3	11.5
Asymmetric	8	30.8
Symmetric	7	26.9
Very symmetric	8	30.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.0</b>

However, the level of symmetry in AG controversies is only averagely high (Table 7), which indicates that sometimes speakers did not really treat each other as equal discussant. In three cases, the controversy reached even a high level of asymmetry. The most extreme of such conflicts was

<sup>63</sup> WP6 participant observation codebook, version January 2007.

related to a misunderstanding about the responsibilities in handling the website; the fact that this question was not discussed for the first time is probably a convincing explanation of the unusual level of asymmetry. However, we can consider that the average controversy emerging in AG discussions is quite reciprocal and symmetric.

**Table 8 - Degree of competitiveness**

Degree of competitiveness	Absolute frequency	Valid percent
Cooperative	6	23.1
Rather cooperative	5	19.2
Rather competitive	9	34.6
Competitive	6	23.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The degree of competitiveness varies strongly from one controversy to another (Table 8). As it is logical to expect in controversies, each participant has the desire to overcome the adversaries with a more powerful argument or position. Understandably, this leads to competitive discussions. However, about a half of the conflicts were resolved without entering any competitive confrontation.

**Table 9 - Degree of incivility**

Degree of incivility	Absolute frequency	Valid percent
None	18	69.2
Rare	8	30.8
Some	0	0.0
Frequent	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Although competitiveness is sometimes high, the handling of conflicts is always respectful among ATTAC militants. In fact, in every controversy that emerged during the observation period, the degree of incivility was always very low (Table 9), with only some occasional "hit and run", and the atmosphere during conflicts was most of the time quite relaxed (Table 10), surely due to the fact that the overall atmosphere of the meeting was seriously engaged, but also always friendly (and sometimes even quite amusing).

**Table 10 - Atmosphere, degree of negative emotional tension**

Atmosphere	Absolute frequency	Valid percent
Relaxed	9	34.6
Mixed	12	46.2
Tense	5	19.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In the meetings we attended, there was never a situation charged with negative emotional tension, and the occasional tense situations emerged from previous misunderstandings or unfinished discussions (here again, the discussion related to the managing of the website was the most extreme in this regard).

Finally, conflicts in the AG meetings were resolved almost always without any source, voluntary or not, of hard power (results not shown). Although sometimes the age of the speaker or the leadership skills<sup>64</sup> acted as some sort of empowerment, the controversies were almost always resolved through the power of the better argument and sometimes by a shared feeling of empathy. Again, the fact that participants seemed to share a common history and friendship bonds surely helps in this regard.

### 3. The Lemanic Social Forum<sup>65</sup>

The second group targeted by our participant observation is the Lemanic Social Forum (FSL), a regional spin-off of the overall platform gathering the social movement organizations opposed to neoliberal globalization.

Firstly, we will present some major insights related to FSL history, identity and culture: Secondly, a brief section will outline the main peculiarities of the organization of FSL sessions. Finally, the last two sections will present the specific content of the discussions that took place in FSL meetings, by analyzing their visions of democracy and handling of controversies.

#### 3.1 *Group history, identity and culture*

##### 3.1.1 History of the FSL: from coordination to autonomy

The FSL is neither a movement nor a structured organization, but always aimed to work as a platform gathering the social movement sector opposed to neoliberal globalization. It was founded in 2001 in order to set up demonstrations and protest events against the WTO ministerial conference that took place in November<sup>66</sup>. It emerges from the need to ensure a strong coordination within the galaxy of various networks that joined at the local level the protest against neoliberalism not only after the worldwide Seattle effect, but also the important protests and confrontations that took place in May 1998 in Geneva. At that time, most of the social forces opposed to globalization acted rather alone and, in spite of some coordination efforts led by the more radical groups (Coordination against the WTO), there was a lack of harmonization and synchronization of the broader activist spectrum (Duteil, forthcoming). The problem of speaking as one voice was raised by several activists whose aim was to offer both to public opinion and the authorities a united front built on a minimal shared program. Although the question of violence during mass demonstration continuously divided – and still does divide – radical movements (squatters, anarchists, extreme-leftists) and more reformist ones (Socialists, Greens, Christian groups), most of the organizations that were active against the globalization since mass protests of May 1998 joined the FSL agenda, as far as Geneva had to become at that time one of the core sites of the protest that would take place during the 2003 G8 summit in Evian. As this small town is located in France, on the Geneva lakeside few kilometers away from Geneva, which is the largest city in this area, it looked obvious that the main (but not only) coordination of social movements fighting the summit had to be created there. Thus, the FSL had as its first goal the mission to speak as the GJM voice during the

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<sup>64</sup> One activist, in particular, was able to present his argument and defend his position even without presenting substantially better arguments. It is clear that leadership ability helps in controversies.

<sup>65</sup> "Lemanic" translates the French word, *Lémanic*, which designates something referring to the proximity of the Geneva Lake (known in French as *Lac Léman*, i.e. "Lemantic Lake").

<sup>66</sup> Most of the information of this section comes from the official website of the FSL ([www.forumsociallemanique.org](http://www.forumsociallemanique.org)) and from discussions with some of its activists.

preparation of most of the protest events addressed to the neighboring G8 summit (Duteil, forthcoming).

The FSL mentions in its statutes that it “(...) gathers organizations and social movements of the whole crossing border lemanic region that, faced with capitalist globalization, are fighting for a social alternative to the neoliberal and patriarchal model.” It was created before the national social forum (the Swiss Social Forum) and rests on “(...) the call elaborated and adopted by social movements in Porto Alegre (January 2002) (...) It considers as its own the three fundamental axis of the next European Social Forum (Novembre 8-10 2002 in Florence): against the war, neoliberal globalization and the extreme-right”. The founding groups reflected the heterogeneity of the local GJM (Voiron 2003; Fillieule et al. 2004; Bandler and Nai, forthcoming; Bandler and Giugni, forthcoming) as they included the whole left (from socio-democrats to Leninists), most of the major trade unions, several solidarity and charity movements, students and youth organizations and specific antiglobalist groups (such as Attac).

The FSL has five main goals:

- to create a debate on a social alternative to the capitalist and patriarchal dominant model;
- to get involved at the local level in national and international protest campaigns;
- to join its action with national, European and world social forums;
- to develop local mobilization on global issues and more specifically to selected social movements.

After the G8 summit, the FSL has continued its activities against neoliberal globalization, especially by joining broader protest coalitions such as European or World social forums. As the Swiss GJM did not face mass demonstrations similar in size to that against the G8, the platform role first held by the FSL gradually turned into a specific GJM group devoted to fight neoliberal globalization. It thus became an autonomous organization setting its own agenda, organizing specific actions and reacting both to local politics and to international issues.

### 3.1.2 Functioning and main features of the group

The FSL has progressively changed since the beginning. In a first stage it acted like a platform intended to gather groups willing to set up protest events. During the anti-G8, in 2003, the forum mastered the broad spectrum of social forces involved against globalization. Dozens of activists and group officials were at that time part of the FSL decisional core. It worked actively by helping to set up various mass demonstrations in Switzerland, but lost progressively its role while GJM mobilization slowed down after the huge anti-G8 summit in 2003. Now it gathers only few historical activists that joined the adventure in the beginning. The FSL works on a voluntary basis and there is no hierarchy or membership rule. The internet website – regularly updated – provides the next meeting schedules and also minutes of previous meetings. The group was granted an important amount of money by the Geneva authorities in 2002<sup>67</sup> in order to manage the influx of activists that attended the anti-G8 summit. It used part of this money to hire a coordinator during the preparation of protest events.

Although we attended only three meetings<sup>68</sup>, our participant observation allowed us to explore the main activities carried by the FSL. The group is quite small (as attendance varied from 4 to 7 persons, mainly the same from a meeting to another) and participants have a very long activist experience. The attendance was almost always made of the same activists and it seems that the main core of the group did not gather new members for a while as their harmony is obvious and the group looks very united. Most of them are well-known in the local political scene. The core of the group

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<sup>67</sup> 50,000 CHF.

<sup>68</sup> On April 17, May 3 and May 8.

stems mainly from both the radical left and the first movements opposed to the World Economic Forum since 1992. There is thus a real political complicity shared by all of the activists and no factions or cleavages are visible. The group is mainly set up by middle-class intellectual activists with a well-established public recognition. There is a central actor in the group who is one of the most influent activists in the Swiss GJM. He is the organization leader and runs most of the discussions, although he tries to limit at best his predominance over the discussions. Indeed, his leadership is strictly formal and most of the debates are held in mutual reciprocity among all the activists involved.

As they all share many years of common activism, FSL activists also have a routine repertoire that makes their meetings more discursive than confrontative. It seems that the harmony and closeness act upon democratic practices among FSL activists, as controversies are rare, while animated discussion sometimes last about one hour in order to deal with a single point or issue. This means that FSL activists involved in the FSL do it very seriously and this organization is very important to them in order to discuss deeply some political issues. Although they all are also active in several political parties or other organizations, they seem to value the discussion space offered by the FSL.

As a result, the atmosphere is always very friendly and meetings are held in informal places such as a self-managed bar or an activist's apartment. At the time we attended the meetings, notwithstanding the proximity with the G8 summit protest that was to take place in Germany, most of the work and debates of the FSL tended to focus on the creation of a "Committee Against Precariousness" that aimed to become a platform devoted to fight pauperization and to sensitize the public opinion to the social fracture. The action repertoire of the group is thus oriented toward educational purposes. In order to reach this goal, the FSL shot a movie on that topic intended to be widely screened<sup>69</sup>. Indeed, 10 out of 16 agenda items discussed during one of the three meetings we attended were directly linked to the movie, while only one was about the G8. This seems to indicate that, because of the loss of its coordination role of mass protest events, the FSL has gained an autonomous form of activism and has set up its own agenda. However, most of the discussions held during the meetings we attended suggest that the group still considers itself as a core platform of the GJM, in spite of the paradoxical distance it shows with GJM typical issues.

### *3.2 Session organization*

The meetings are quite well structured. Everybody arrives on time and there is an agenda, although it remains open for last minute proposals. Everyone is courteous and takes care not to cut somebody else short. Debates are also willingly put forward by activists, as they often recall the importance of alternating speech among men and women<sup>70</sup>. As we said, the number of items discussed is quite small (on average, 5), while the duration of the whole session (which is never self-limited in time by activists) varied from 85 to 125 minutes. The average duration of an item is about 25 minutes. The type of communication is mainly oriented toward inputs or proposals by activists (50% of the items discussed).

### *3.3 Visions of democracy and decision taking*

As most of the activists of the FSL are used to work together and in many points also share a solid friendship, the structure of debates is very homogenous. 13 out of 16 decisions (i.e. 81%) taken by the group stem from nodding / tacit agreement. The routine established by habits makes the functioning of the group very informal. This can be felt particularly in the way decision are taken as there is never a formal agreement but the meeting goes forward from a point to the next

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<sup>69</sup> As far as we know, the movie is a documentary based on interviews of precarious people.

<sup>70</sup> Women attendance is significant. It varied between 1 out of 5 and 3 out of 7.

with a general acceptance of a consensual solution / decision. It is thus fundamental to underline the commitment of the members to mutual respect dialogue and discussion in order to reach a consensual decision mode. Discussed points are never limited nor in time nor in extension and everybody are invited to give their opinions about the issue raised.

### *3.4 Controversies*

As mentioned earlier, controversial discussions are rare, although we observed 5 controversies out of 16 items discussed during the three meetings (1.7 controversies per meeting). Four out of the 5 controversies dealt with external group actions, mainly with the movie about precariousness and the way to spread it at best in order to prepare the founding of the “Committee Against Precariousness”. The 5 controversies were equally split between continuing an earlier discussion (2) and presetting the agenda (3). Their duration was quite short (between 5 and 10 minutes). Most of the time, people taking part in a controversy were as numerous as people present during the meeting, and women also took an active part in it. The degree of reciprocity was mainly medium (3 out of 5), but the pitch could easily grow though remaining very respectful. However, most of the statements were asymmetric (4 out of 5) as some speakers used authority arguments in order to convince the audience. The experience, competences or expertise were often put forward to try to force an argument. However, structures of power were divided in two (2 hard power and 3 soft power sources): the 2 major sources of hard power referred to the other people they represented; the 2 sources of soft power were related to arguments. The structure of competition among actors is also divided between the two poles (competitive/cooperative) and it is not possible to ascertain a special trend in controversial discussions. There is no trend either if we look at the conflict situation, as 2 cases are related to a dissent by one or few, 1 is a bipolar confrontation and the 2 remaining ones do not allow us to identify clear factions. We only faced two small incivilities during the debates (clumsy speech cuts), which reflects once more the complicity and courtesy of FSL activists with each other.

As most controversies were related to the issue of the use and spread of the movie, the discourses were oriented toward one specific topic. Indeed, all the statements made during controversies were more or less focused on a specific question (the movie). The atmosphere has always been friendly and relaxed, although one intervention caused some tense debates (about the way to increase the visibility of the FSL by using or not the movie). The aim of all the controversies was never to exchange opinions and ideas on a specific issue, but always to reach a decision engaging the FSL. Two out of 5 controversies ended with no decision, while 2 other reached a compromise and 1 ended up with a delegation of decision. The decision mode was twice a tacit agreement and once a straw poll. Finally, only in 1 out of 5 controversies did activists stress the problem of time pressure.

All these elements about the structure of discussions and the decision mode stress once more the lack of frontal confrontation among FSL activists. The common experience they share since the beginning of the GJM, in which they always took an active part in Switzerland, has created a very strong team spirit that is reflected in their common vision of democracy and debate among their own group.

## **4. Conclusion**

The present report is based on a series of participant observations on two GJM organizations active in the Geneva region. Our observations took place between February and July 2007. Briefly put, the aim of our investigations was to look for group patterns of decision-making and the handling of controversies.

As we have seen, the two groups share a common position in the local scene concerning antiglobal activism, even if they follow radically different functioning models. While AG, founded

in 1999, is a relatively young organization whose evolution and consolidation in the local area is the result of the spread of its international (mainly French) counterpart, the FSL, though created two years later than the AG, results from a transformation of old groups that aimed to gather in a common platform the wide range of social forces opposed to neoliberal changes in the society. Thus, AG has gathered activists from different horizons in a new organization that had to be created, while the development of the FSL rested on a previous network of people and groups that were used to work together. However, the resulting discursive structures follows quite a similar logics: both AG and the FSL are composed by activists who share a common history, and the friendship bonds shared by participants in the two group explain, at least in part, why both AG and FSL meetings are in general more discursive than confrontational. Again, the fact that participants share a common history and some friendship bonds helps in this regard.

However, some important differences, mainly quantitative, need to be stressed. In the nearly overall duration of meetings, 76 items were addressed by AG and only 16 by the FSL. As a result, the average duration of an agenda item was about 7 minutes for AG and more than 25 minutes for the FSL. The faster issues in AG meetings produced many more controversies than the issues addressed in FSL meetings: 26 for AG (about 9 per meeting) and only 5 for the FSL (about 1.5 per meeting). However, even given the strong quantitative difference, controversies in AG and FSL were handled in quite a similar way, globally. As our analysis has shown, in both groups the discussions remained serene and respectful, with only occasionally direct hard power interferences. We observed, however, that AG meetings produced a higher amount of controversies than FSL meetings. Furthermore, AG controversies were almost always symmetric, highly reciprocal and with no incivility. As we argued, the fact that sometimes the character of the discussion was more competitive than cooperative in AG meetings did not imply that the atmosphere shifted toward an excessive tension between participants. FSL meetings had less controversies, but which developed in a slightly more competitive way: even if always respectful, FSL controversies were generally only fairly reciprocal and quite asymmetric, with a consistent use of authority arguments in order to convince the audience (which was almost never the case in AG meetings). Although the amount of controversies in FSL meetings is probably too small to draw unequivocal conclusions, the difference with the way controversies were handled in AG meetings is in our view likely to be effective.

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# **The Politics of Transnational Campaigning: The Mobilization for the UN Reform and Global Democracy\***

**By Raffaele Marchetti**

*(University of Urbino)*

## **1. The politics of global democracy**

While diminishing the exclusivity of states as international actors, the process of globalization has opened up spaces for new social actors (Keohane & Nye, 1972; Higgott et al., 2000; Haufler, 2001; Price, 2003). A new international political opportunity structure has allowed for the flourishing of thousands of local, national, and transnational new political actors that are increasingly asking for a voice in global affairs (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005; della Porta, 2007b). Nowadays, these non-state actors play a significant part in international affairs, for they provide expertise and information, but also by dint of the fact that they influence political discourse, agenda setting, law-making and implementation of international decisions (Arts et al., 2001). And yet non-state actors are for the most part still formally excluded from institutional power.

One of the most heated debates on the political agenda, both national and international, concerns the social consequences and the political control of what is usually referred to as 'globalization'. The focus of this debate is the inadequacy of the current institutional framework and its normative bases for a full development of the political sphere at the global level. Traditional political canons anchored to the nation-state and its domestic jurisdiction are increasingly perceived as insufficient, or indeed self-defeating in a world in which socio-economical interaction is, to a significant degree, interdependent. Unstable financial markets, environmental crises, and unregulated migratory flows offer just few examples of phenomena that simultaneously and all too clearly remind us of the heavy interdependence of contemporary international system and of its political-democratic deprivation. These intense processes of global transformation functionally require increased transnational co-operation, and yet pose a continuous challenge to the effectiveness and legitimacy of 'traditional' political life.

A typical phenomenon of any democratisation process, such as that occurring at the international level, is precisely the sense of instability that the emergence of new actors and new legitimacy claims (previously unheard) generate in the public domain. Within the context of the debate on globalization, an unprecedented global public domain emerges in which old, state-centred visions of international affairs mix with new non-state-centred visions of global politics, producing a complex map of ideological positions (Ruggie, 2004). The global public domain remains a central place where new dimensions and new applications of global legitimacy are developed in contrast to current interpretations. This does not necessarily entail that such reformative or indeed revolutionary reading of legitimate global politics do indeed influence concrete political action. However, the mere chance of starting a dynamic of norms change in international politics makes this global public arena and its ideal content extremely important for current global politics (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

This paper examines the politics of transnational campaigning within the Global Justice Movements (GJMs). In particular, a focus on the transnational campaign Reclaim our UN provides the case study on which considerations on the different dimensions of transnational mobilization (political development, internal dynamic and discursive practices, and impact) are developed in relation to the broader framework of global politics and democracy. Three layers are particularly

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\* I wish to thank Mario Pianta and Donatella della Porta for useful suggestions on the paper. Work for this paper was partly funded by the project *DEMOS. Democracy in Europe and the Mobilization of Society* (EC Strep contract no. CIT2-CT2004-506026, <http://demos.iue.it/>).

important in the analysis of the this transnational campaign: a) the internal discursive practices of the organizations involved in the campaign; b) the debate and deliberative processes that have given prominence to the campaign within GJMs; and c) the external discussion with international political actors raising the issue of democratic deliberation in transnational politics. Analyzing these complex and multiple layers of deliberative practices in themselves and in their reciprocal relations, this paper aims to formulate a number of observations on the discursive component of the decision-making (both internal and external) involving transnational social movements organizations. Hence, this study intends to contribute both to the general debate on global democracy, and to the more specialized discussion on global civil society and transnational social movements, especially on transnational networks and campaign.

## **2. Theoretical framework and research methodology**

The theoretical framework of this paper is mainly constructivist (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Wendt, 1999). Challenging the realist account of international politics, as based on “mere” power facts, the perspective here adopted focus as well on the discursive component of global politics (Ruggie, 1998). Deploying such framework allows to capture the relevance of new transnational actors that do not fall in the traditional categorization of governmental bodies. This also connects with the broad debate on the raise of the deliberative paradigm in political science (Dryzek, 2000; Polletta, 2002). Accordingly, the paper focuses on the discursive and deliberative practices characterizing the internal dynamics of social movements organizations (see the DEMOS project on this), as well as the different political opportunity structures that allowed for the development of the campaign under study. The fact that the issue of the Reclaim our UN campaign is democratization itself puts a special interest on the discourse and practices of deliberative democracy within GJMs. In this paper, I study a specific aspects of the (mainly internal) dynamics of social movement organizations (SMOs), the transnational case. This constitutes a distinct and utterly interesting case within the broader scenario of the SMOs engaged within the Global Justice Movements.

From the beginning, it must be cleared that the study of the transnational level has to face challenges that are different from the national ones (Pianta & Marchetti, 2007; Marchetti & Pianta, 2008). Firstly, contrary to the national cases, the study examines campaigns (rather than single organizations) since these are considered to be the most significant and innovative organizational forms at the transnational level (Pianta et al., 2007). Second, participation observation, as explained below, needs to be conducted in a different due to a number of factors, including practical difficulties of attending the campaigns meetings; minor frequency of these meetings; higher use of e-mail private and public communication; higher heterogeneity of the observed groups; presence of different levels/dimensions of deliberation etc.

The research method adopted consists mainly in participant observation (Jorgensen, 1989; Lichterman, 2002; M. West & Gastil, 2004; Andretta, 2005). The case study of the transnational campaign Reclaim our UN was examined in two steps. First, participant observation was conducted during a number of selected meetings (see list in appendix). The Reclaim our UN campaign developed many local and global initiatives. For the matter of participant observation of the campaign, I exclusively took into consideration its major and most interesting events for the analysis the deliberative practices. In addition, informed reports were used when relevant meetings could not be attended. For the analysis of these meetings, I adopted and adapted the research protocol designed by Rucht for the DEMOS WP6 (Rucht, 2006).

Beyond the participant observation, a number of in-depth interviews were also conducted in order to integrate the data collected so far by gathering further information, and to triangulate the results of the observation (see list of interviews in the appendix). Interviews were kept as informal as possible. The aim of the interview included explaining why a group acted as it did, learning more about the background of a unique or recurrent conflict in the group (e.g., hidden agendas),

clarifying situations that were not clear during the observation, and learning whether an individual who has not clearly expressed him/herself is satisfied with the handling and outcome of a conflict.

### 3. The emergence and political development of the Reclaim our UN campaign

The paper concentrates on the results of a participant observation carried out on the activity of the international campaign Reclaim our UN<sup>71</sup>. This transnational campaign is of particular interest as its focus is the strengthening of global democracy and a democratic reform of the United Nations system<sup>72</sup>. The campaign promoted democratic practices in international institutions, specifically within the United Nations (UN), demanding an opening up of political processes for greater participation of global justice movement (GJM) organizations. Its key result consists in the inclusion in the agenda of transnational social movements of the issue of global democracy to be pursued through the reform and democratization of UN institutions. The campaign contributed to change the attitude of GJMs from a straightforward rejection of international institutions, expressed by slogans such as “against the UN and all International Organizations” or “abolishing rather than polishing international institutions”, to a more moderate attitude entailing the possibility of legitimate and gradual reform of the existing institutions. This paper investigates the emergence and development of the campaign over two years (2004-2005), up to the 60<sup>th</sup> meeting of the UN General Assembly, with the addition of a later significant meeting. The UN meeting was expected to propose a vast array of reforms for the institution, but it only succeeded in suggesting and implementing a limited number of them (for a review see Archibugi & Marchetti, 2008). While the campaign was unable to modify the specific agenda of the UN reform, its relevance rests on its impact on the internal dynamics of GJMs, on the overall global public opinion, and on selected national governments and offices within the UN.

The campaign did not emerge in a vacuum. Its origins have to be traced back to a complex background that is formed by three main dimensions: the internal experience of the Peace Roundtable (an Italian coalition for peace), the national peace mobilization at the Italian level, and the international discussion on global democracy (Lotti et al., 1999; Papisca, 2006). For what concerns the local side, it is key to trace the slow emergence within the organizations that promoted the campaign of the issue of global democracy as derived from the broader interest in peace and development characterizing the activities of the Peace Roundtable (Interview 1). In addition to this, it is also important to understand the national political opportunity structure that gave the coalition a chance to consolidate. For what concerns, instead, the global side, attention has to be devoted to a number of like-minded organizations that began in 1970s to create the socio-political scenario in which the campaign could emerge and develop (Interview 4)<sup>73</sup>. These include the World Federalist Movement, the Institute for Policy Studies of Washington, the South Centre, a number of other transnational campaigns and networks<sup>74</sup>, and a few intellectual leaders—such as Richard Falk and George Monbiot—who had an impact on the GJMs for what concerns the issue of global democracy and UN reform (Falk, 1966; Barnaby, 1991; South Centre, 1997; Falk, 1998; NGO Millennium Forum, 2000; Falk & Strauss, 2001; Foster & Anand, 2002; Monbiot, 2003; Baratta,

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<sup>71</sup> See <http://www.reclaimourun.org/reclaimourun.html>

<sup>72</sup> For the discussion on global democracy and the UN reform see (Steele, 1987; Kim *et al.*, 1991; Müller, 1992; Boutros-Ghali, 1996; Marchetti, 2005, 2008).

<sup>73</sup> For a reference to the debate see (Donini, 1995; Gaer, 1995; Spiro, 1995; Uvin, 1995; Otto, 1996; Weiss & Gordenker, 1996; Charnovitz, 1997; Krut, 1997; Raustiala, 1997; Van Rooy, 1997; Clark *et al.*, 1998; Fox & Brown, 1998; Smith *et al.*, 1998; Paul, 1999; Martens, 2000; Bruhl, 2001; Hudson, 2001; Pianta, 2001, 2005).

<sup>74</sup> Among campaigns on the reform of the UN, it is here worth mentioning the following, which, differently from the campaign here examined, lack a genuine social movement component: a) Ubuntu, a mainly academic and institutional mobilization with a technical objective. b) The Millennium campaign (and the related Millennium+5 NGO Network), a mobilization very much entrenched within the UN itself. It has a more technical and institutional (rather than political) profile, with a long term objective (in 2015). c) The Campaign for a United Nations Democracy Caucus is another quasi-institutional mobilization promoted by NGOs such as the Democracy Coalition Project, Freedom House and Transnational Radical Party.

2004; Falk, 2005; Socialist International, 2005). Moreover, it is important to reckon from the beginning that vast part of the campaign developed within the context of the World Social Forum (WSF) process, with a particular role played by the WSF International Council (IC) (de Sousa Santos, 2006; Teivainen, 2006). Finally, few considerations have also to be devoted to the UN institutional response to the pressure for reform (United Nations, 2001, 2004; Pianta, 2005; United Nations, 2005; Willets, 2006).

The Reclaim our UN campaign officially started in 2004, but its deeper roots date back to the 1990s. During this decade, the Italian Coalition Peace Roundtable organized at the local level the first activities on the democratic reform of the UN. While the Italian political turbulence (so called *Mani pulite*, “clean hands” investigations in political corruption) created opportunities for mobilization and moved the focus of a portion of local activists on international affairs, two global events opened up the political space at the international level: the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the election of Boutros Boutros-Ghali as Secretary General of the UN (Boutros-Ghali, 1999). The intense (mainly neo-liberal) global transformations of that period provide the broader framework in which this more specific event took place. These elements changed the international scenario, putting the UN at the center of international affairs again. It is within this context that the (mainly) pacifist and environmentalist movements of the 1970s and 1980s “discovered” the issue of global democracy in the 1990s (Interview 1). Differently from other movements (e.g. the English movements that got localized in the 1990s), the Italian peace movement was, according to its activists, “genetically” internationalist and Europeanist (Interview 3). And yet before the 1990s, the issue of global democracy and of the reform of international institutions as such was scantily present in the mobilizations of social movements—with notable exceptions in the decolonization movements and the campaign for a New International Economic Order of the 1970s. The continuing atomic pressure and the numerous local armed conflicts all around the world, however, positioned the UN as the obvious place for peace after cold war. The link between peace, UN and global democracy came as a immediate result in the political framework of the activists. Not that such step was unanimous.

In the 1990s within social movements and civil society organizations there was (and still is today) a considerable portion that refuse to acknowledge the relevance of political institutions for peace or human rights. Some even held the positions according to which institutions are considered negative in terms of stability and order (Gold, 2004). This has to be interpreted within an overall global trend, whereby states play a diminishing role as service providers both domestically and internationally, leading to the privatisation of world politics. Within this trend, civil society actors have flourished both locally and transnationally (Chandler, 2001). The diffusion of new information technology coupled with political changes (e.g., the end of Cold War, the subsequent end of subsidies to Allied states, the consolidation of the ‘Washington consensus’, and UN world summits) created opportunities for the emergence of ‘global civil society’ (H. Anheier et al., 2001; H. Anheier et al., 2003; Pianta, 2003; Helmut Anheier et al., 2004; H. Anheier et al., 2005; Albrow & Anheier, 2006). This has meant that many of the functions previously performed by governmental actors have been reallocated to civil society. Since the 1980s, development assistance has been increasingly channelled through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Sogge, 1996). Developed states and international organisations have outsourced the implementation of aid programmes, while intermediating and retaining political discretion as to its overall direction. The changing international security agenda also shaped the nature and role of civil society. Up until 1980s, NGOs played a secondary role in security affairs. Although civil society played a key role in providing peaceful ways out from key incidents such as the euromissiles/SS20 crisis in the 1980s, its role was essentially subordinate to and in a lobbying mode of interaction with state-level actors. Since the 1990s, in view of the wave of humanitarian interventions, the field of peace-building has been instead partly transferred to the private sector, with states and multilateral organisations having lost their unique role in this domain (Richmond & Carey, 2005). NGOs began acquiring a more explicit security mandate in war-torn contexts, increasing in number and diversifying in

function (K. West, 2000; Terry, 2003; Goodhand, 2006). Hence, while at times representing a counter-hegemonic force of resistance (Marchetti, 2006), civil society organizations have also acted as a dependent functional substitute within the neo-liberal and neo-conservative paradigm for the diminishing as well as more assertive role played by states in international politics. It is within such trend that international organizations have been criticised for being unable to deliver on democracy and human rights.

Fostering a democratic and institutional way to peace, this critical attitude was disputed by the peace activists grouped around the Peace Roundtable who argued that this depiction of international institutions is historically false (Interview 1). The UN themselves, despite their limits, problems, and responsibility, should be considered, according to their argument, as key actors in positive interventions: there are currently hundreds of thousands of people that survive only thanks to the UN. Institutions are thus key in peace-making. According to this “institutionalist” position, it is impossible to defend human rights without institutions able to protect and promote them. Institutions are crucial, so much so that there is no democracy without institutions. If this argument is accepted at the domestic level, it has then also to be applied at the global level. The result of this political reasoning is that for human rights and peace, we need global democracy, and for global democracy we need global institutions. The Peace Roundtable formulated its position, as his coordinator Flavio Lotti is keen to stress, in the 1990s along this pacifist lines: it supported the UN not because of an institutional choice but because of a peace choice on the account that it is impossible to construct a solid peace without appropriate institutions (Interview 1).

Until 1995, the mobilization of the Peace Roundtable had been national in character. In 1995, the call for the first Assembly of the Peoples’ UN marked a scale shift in the mobilization towards its internationalization (Lotti & Giandomenico, 1996; Tavola della Pace, 2000). This occurred on a symbolic date: the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the UN. That was the deadline set by the Secretary General for the reform of the UN (Boutros-Ghali, 1995, 1996). In Ghali’s opinion, the UN had to adapt to the new scenario by enjoying all the political opportunities opened up by the crisis of the cold war stalemate. With the Assembly of the Peoples’ UN, the Peace Roundtable managed to gather in Perugia, its headquarter, several key peace activists from all around the world, who were beginning to engage with the issue of global democracy and the reform of the UN. This was a crucial moment in that organizations from different countries had the opportunity to meet and discuss their opinions on the current state of international institutional arrangements. Sometimes opening up and disseminating the ideas of global democracy among groups that did not necessarily have such objective as a key political target. The reform of the UN was in fact at that time part of the political vision of only a minority within social movements and civil society organizations. Along with few other events, such as the UN world thematic conferences, the Assembly of the Peoples’ UN constituted a unique place for the development of the ideas that in the 2000s from Seattle onwards underpinned the global mobilizations. In such a way, from 1995, the mobilization gets transnational, though still locally centered in Perugia, Italy.

In 2003, after several Assemblies of the Peoples’ UN, the need for a more permanent and global mobilization was increasingly felt by the activists. The Seattle demonstrations took place in 1999. In 2001, the World Social Forum first gathered in Porto Alegre. The global scenario of transnational social movements and global civil society was changed. Under those circumstances the political aim of a global initiative that was still locally based as the Assembly was to create the conditions for the encounter between the new social subjects acting on global issues such as the “peoples” of Seattle and Porto Alegre, and all those organizations that had been traditionally engaged with the project of the democratic reform of the international organizations but from a local position. Linking the previous locally rooted mobilizations with the new global networks part of the Global Justice Movements was a political need for any organization aspiring to have an impact on global public opinion and on global politics at large. And such impact was desperately felt within the unipolar trend in world affairs that followed the 9/11 event and the two subsequent wars in

Afghanistan and Iraq. In such context the role played by the UN was considered increasingly critical.

More specifically on the “internal” issue of the UN reform, towards the end of the 2003, the raising awareness of the year 2005 as a key year for the UN provided another incentives for the further global scale shift. In 2005, in fact, both the first deadline for the test of the improvements towards matching the Millennium goals—as set by the UN Millennium Assembly in 2000 (UNDP, 2003)—and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN organizations with its correlate of alleged reforms offered an unique opportunity for envisaging a truly global mobilization on the issue of global democracy. Despite the call for reform of the UN had already been announced several times, this 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary seemed a more viable moment for pushing for change since traditional democratic claims were in that time mixed with geopolitical interests in the form of an enlargement of the permanent seats at the Security Council. This weird combination created an environment in which the discussion on reform was (at least apparently) open on the agenda. The political moment seemed appropriate for the action of social movements from below. The need for “speeding up” the mobilization became urgently clear at that time (Interview 1).

In 2004, such acceleration brought to the launch of the transnational campaign Reclaim our UN. The space that was identified as the most promising avenue for the global scale shift of the mobilization was the World Social Forum. The Peace Roundtable, member of the International Council of the WSF since 2002, acted within it for proposing the inclusion of the democratic reform of the international institutions in the agenda of the WSF, and consequently for gathering different strands of social actors for a shared target. In the Spring 2004, the International Council had a meeting in Umbria, hosted by the Peace Roundtable. In that occasion the campaign was proposed to the world social movements audience, together with the suggestion for the organization of a thematic seminar to be held in Italy on the issue of global democratic reforms, a seminar to be organized in collaboration with the International Council of the WSF but open to all those social actors active or interested in the issue.

The thematic seminar was held in Padua in November 2004. Among the organizations that participated in the seminar, some were already members of the Assembly of the Peoples’ UN and of the Italian coalition Peace Roundtable, but also many “new” organizations were invited in order to broaden the social platform<sup>75</sup>. During the seminar, a substantial document was produced which

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<sup>75</sup> At the Padua seminar were present over 600 people representing 25 International networks, 50 national organisations and 284 Italian associations, including the following: Assembly of the Peoples’ UN; Peace Roundtable (Italy); Ibase (Brasil); InterPress Service; Ubuntu; Euralat; Cives (Brasil); Attac (Brasil); Conseu/CIEMEN -Centre Internacional Escarrè per a Minories ètniques i les Nacions; CADTM -Comité pour l'annulation de la Dette du Tiers Monde; IDEAS; the Interdepartmental Centre for Research and Services on Peoples’ and Human rights; the UNESCO University Chair on “Human Rights, Democracy and Peace” in Padua; Campaign for the Reform of the World Bank; ACLI (Italy); Action for Economic Reforms (Philippines); Africa Peace Point (Kenya); Africa Trade Network; Agesci (Italy); AIC - Alternative Information Center (Israel/Palestine); Alianza por un Mundo Responsable y Solidario (Peru); Alliance pour un monde responsable, pluriel et solidaire / Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le Progrès de l’Homme (Brasil); ANND - Arab NGO Network for Development; ANONG - Cotidiano Mujer (Uruguay); ARCI (Italy); Articulacion Feminista MARCOSUR; Attac France; Bahrain Association for Human Rights (Bahrain); Beati i costruttori di pace (Italy); Bridge Initiative (France); BGRF - Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation (Bulgaria); CAFOR (Cameroon); CCFD - Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement (France); Center Aziz Belal (Morocco); Centre Ubuntu (Burundi); Centro de Investigacion para la Paz (Spain); CGIL (Italy); Cipsi (Italy); CIDSE; CISL (Italy); Cities for Peace (United States); CNCA (Italy); Comunidad de autodeterminacion «Vida y Dignidad» of Cacarica-Chocò (Colombia); Comunidad de Paz San Jose de Apartadó (Colombia); CND – Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (GB); CONGO - Conference of NGOs in consultative relationship with the United Nations; CUT (Brasil); Dawn - Dev. Alternatives for Women; DION - Development Indian Ocean Network; Disabled Peoples’ International – Europe; Djazairouna - des familles victims du terrorisme (Algeria); Emmaus (Italy); FAL - Foro de Autoridades Locales de Porto Alegre; Fastenopfer (Switzerland); Focsiv (Italy); Focus on the Global South; Forum Mulher (Monzambique); Fride; General Board of Global Ministries - United Methodist Church (United States); Groupe Medialternatif (Haiti); Helsinki Process on Globalisation and Democracy; Instituto de Estudios de CTA - Central de Trabajadores Argentinos (Argentina); Instituto Ethos (Brasil); IPB – International Peace Bureau; Le Mouvement de la Paix/French Peace Movement (France); Legambiente (Italy); Libera (Italy); Mani Tese (Italy); National Bureau of the Moroccan

outlined the key points for the reform of the international organizations, especially for the UN reform. The document also provided the ground for the subsequent seminar that was held during the 2005 World Social Forum (January, Porto Alegre) in which the previous political reflections and conclusions were presented to a wider public. In the meantime, a web-site was launched with the intention of facilitating the agreement upon a common platform and synergies that could strengthen our political objective. The WSF seminar was mainly intended as the forum for the preparation of the global day of action for the democratic reform of the UN. Such day of mobilization was later enacted during the following UN General Assembly and 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Organization, with more than 300 organizations (many of which networks and campaigns) officially joining the campaign. On September 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> 2005 different demonstrations took the streets in several continents. The key demonstration took place in Perugia with 250.000 people marching for the democratic reform of the UN. Almost two years after, a follow up took place again in the WSF in Nairobi with the intention of resuming the work done during the campaign for testing new avenues for future mobilizations.

The key events of the campaign can thus be summarized with the following list:

**PERUGIA1.** The Assemblies of the UN of the Peoples were held in Perugia five times before the campaign took off (1<sup>st</sup>-1995, 2<sup>nd</sup>-1997, 3<sup>rd</sup>-1999, 4<sup>th</sup>-2001, and 5<sup>th</sup>-2003) and served, among other aims, to articulate progressively the issue of UN democratization. These were public meetings with around 300 participants each time. The meeting organization was centered in a podium with keynote speakers coordinated by Peace Roundtable team. Invited participants were selected by the Peace Roundtable that also covered their flight and accommodation costs.

**PASSIGNANO.** The meeting of the WSF International Council held in Passignano sul Trasimeno on 4-7 April 2004. This was an internal meeting with around 20 participants organized on a roundtable in which strategies and agenda setting were formulated. This was a key “diplomatic” moment for the campaign for it was in this occasion that the issue of the UN reform was discussed and finally accepted within the WSF agenda.

**PADUA.** The International seminar on the future of the UN and the International Institutions Reclaim Our UN took place in Padua on 19-20 Nov. 2004. This public meeting gathered around 600 people. It was the key moment for deepening the bulk coalition that sustained the campaign, but it was also an important moment for getting on board new organizations. It was organized with thematic sessions in which keynote speakers, coordinated by the would-be rapporteurs (members of the campaign), addressed the audience from the podium and a debate on the reports took place following those. The discussion was flowing and quite open to new perspectives. After the thematic sessions, a general session with keynote speakers from the podium coordinated by the Peace Roundtable team was held, in which a key documents of the campaign (based on the reports of the thematic sessions and prepared by a small group of experts close to the Peace Roundtable) was approved by acclamation.

**PORTO ALEGRE.** Two meetings of the campaign on Exigir nosso seminário internacional da ONU: sobre o futuro da ONU e as instituições internacionais and Exigir nossa agenda da ONU 2005: por uma ordem internacional justa, pacífica e democrática took place at the 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, 28<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2005, 12-15 and 16:30-18:30. These public seminars gathered around 200 people/140 organizations each. They took place in the context of the WSF, this entailing the participation of both experts in the field and occasional WSF participant. The meeting had invited speakers talking from a podium, after which a public debate coordinated by Peace

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Federation of Trade Unions (Morocco); NGLS Unctad; Oxford Research Group (England); Pax Christi (Italy); Peace Boat Europe; Rodheci (Democratic Republic of Congo); Romania in the world cultural association (Romania); SID – Society for International Development; Social Watch; South Centre (Switzerland); The Socialist International; Transnational Institute; UFPJ - United For Peace and Justice (United States); Umoja As One (Kenya); University of Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic); UN Millennium Campaign; WCL - World Confederation of Labour; World Citizens Movement; World Federalist Movement.

Roundtable team took place. At the end, a final document mainly based on the declaration drafted in Padua was approved by acclamation, except for an objection that was raised concerning the beginning of the declaration which was considered as an illegitimate act of claiming to be representative of the entire WSF. A very brief debate followed and the text modified thereafter.

NEW YORK. The UN informal interactive hearings with civil society actors on UN reform (New York, 23-24 June 2006) was a semi-public meeting with selected organizations invited by an ad hoc UN committee. The event was criticized for being held two months before the General Assembly meeting, thus keeping civil society actors far from the decision-makers.

PERUGIA 2. The 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Peoples' UN, Save our UN took place in Perugia on 8-10 Sept. 2005. This was a public meeting that was held in coincidence with the UN General Assembly meeting. It gathered 500 people in the two days preceding the mass demonstration (see below). It was organized with thematic sessions with discussion, and a general session with invited speakers talking from the podium. All was pretty much coordinated by the Peace Roundtable team. A final document was approved at the end of the general session by acclamation.

PERUGIA3. A public street demonstration called Reclaim our UN took place in Perugia on 11 Sept. 2005, just after the 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly. The demonstration gathered around 250.000 from all Italy and with some delegation from abroad. At the end of the demonstration, a number of speeches have been given from the Podium.

NAIROBI. The final meeting of the campaign, "Reclaim our UN: Let's build a universal Convention on the future of the UN", took place again at the 2007 World Social Forum, that was held in Nairobi, 19<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2007, 18.30. A public seminar was organized that gathered around 250 people. The session was organized with invited speakers talking from a podium, and with a public debate coordinated by Peace Roundtable team.

Even at a first glance, it is evident how the dialectic between the local and the global remains a key characteristic of the campaign. Being born in the local activism of the promoter organization, Peace Roundtable, the campaign grew each time it went up a layer in the scale of transnationalization. At the same time, however, in order to keep a solid grassroots bases it had to keep on balance the national commitment with the transnational dimension. The interminglement of local and global activism constitutes a clear trend in the development of the campaign. And yet, it also constitutes a critical aspect in terms of failed objectives, as it is lamented by some of its participants.

So far, the paper has reported on the political development of the campaign in its external domain. In order to capture more fully the overall nature of the campaign it is necessary, however, to examine also its internal dynamic as unfolded mainly through discursive practices. This will allow to grasp the internal politics of the Reclaim our UN campaign, and will thus provide hints for understanding the political forces underpinning transnational campaigning.

#### **4. The discursive practices and internal dynamic of the Reclaim our UN campaign**

Following a constructivist approach, this section analyses the role played by discussion and participation of different groups in the campaign. In this regard, four main dimensions can be identified. They were the following:

INTERNAL 1                      The internal discursive practices of the promoter organization Peace Roundtable (with regard to the activities associated to the campaign Reclaim Our UN).

INTERNAL 2                      The discursive practices of the international campaign Reclaim Our UN.

EXTERNAL 1                      The discursive practices at the events organized by the campaign Reclaim Our UN within the 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre.

EXTERNAL 2 To this, it is also interesting to add as a further layer the forms of interaction and discussion with the UN institutional counterpart and with national governments. This allows to highlight the external discourse embedded in the broader interaction with centers of political power.

Focusing on key issues of the discursive practices of the campaign, it is possible to delineate the different discursive moods adopted in each dimension of the campaign. In order to identify these different moods, it is necessary as a first step to analytically associate the discursive issues of the Rucht's protocol to each of the four key dimensions of the campaign. Though participatory observation of the meetings attended (see appendix for a list of attended meetings), it is possible to notice that the most intense levels of discursive practice are the internal levels 1 and 2, whereas the external levels 1 and 2 are much thinner in terms of real dialogue. It is also interesting to note that agenda-setting and bargaining was presented in both the internal discussion of the Campaign proper and (especially so) the internal practice of the Peace Roundtable, this confirming the strong leadership role of the coordinating organization. It is also worth noticing that while rules were settled for decision-making in public meetings, rules were not explicit for the decision-making internal to the Peace Roundtable. Relating these issues with the aforementioned dimensions, we can draw the following table:

Issues	Dimensions			
	Int 1	Int 2	Ext 1	Ext 2
Possibilities of participation in the agenda setting and institutionalized meta-talk	v	(v)		
Role of deliberation within the campaign		v		
Presence of asymmetry and the type of power deployed in the internal meetings of the campaign		v	v	
Speaking opportunities and formal rules of discussion		v	v	
Degree of reciprocal listening		(v)		
Existence of dialogue that bridges divergent perspectives		v		
Bargaining dimension	v	v		

Aiming at understanding the kinds of discourse and subsequently the kinds of democratic model that were adopted by the campaign, it is possible to associate the four ideal-types of discursive practices—pressure, bargaining, agitational persuasion, and deliberation (Rucht, 2006)—to different phases of the campaign. Crossing the relationship of participants (asymmetry or symmetry) with the type of power used (hard or soft power), it is thus possible to associate (as a primary but not exclusive association) the four ideal-types of discursive practices to the different meetings of the campaign.

Key meetings for the development of the campaign have been Padua and Perugia<sup>2</sup>. These meetings were mainly meant for consensus building. There, it was therefore necessary to find a mutually agreed platform for the campaign to which each active organization could feel committed and thus be motivated to invest resources. This especially occurred during side-discussion and the thematic sessions (in particular, Observation of meetings 1 and 4). In them, expert organizations had the chance to debate a number of issues although the range of possible divergence from the main Peace Roundtable project was limited. During the thematic sessions of the Padua meeting, for instance, economic and social issues were raised as equally worth of attention in the would-be

campaign. The issue was discussed and eventually even included in the final declaration, but it was eventually de facto dropped out. Beyond discussion on content with expert organization in order to build consensus, the campaign has also to broaden participation by attracting new expert and non-expert organizations. This was indeed possible thanks to the previously consolidated relationship that were built through the slow bargaining process occurred in the previous editions of the Assembly of the Peoples' UN (i.e., Perugia 1). During the previous Assemblies, the coordinating organization was able to construct a robust credibility that could be “spent” in this new initiative.

In opposition to the first, “preparatory” meetings of the campaign (i.e., Perugia 1, 2 and Padua) which were marked by a relative symmetry, the other subsequent meetings were characterized by asymmetry among the participants. In particular, Passignano, Padua, and New York were characterized by a mood of dominating pressure aiming to refine strategy and to deepen commitment. Passignano was a critical moment in which the campaign had to struggle to insert the issue of global democracy and the UN reform within the agenda of the World Social Forum. Beyond constructing consensual commitment, the Padua meeting also served to refine strategic decisions by way of pressure. The other public meetings of Porto Alegre, Perugia 3, and Nairobi were, instead, meant for broadening participation by attracting new non-expert organizations to “sign” an already decided project, thus acting through agitatory persuasion and by acclamation. In Porto Alegre in particular, the tone of the speeches was explanatory and inclusive, much more than in other meetings. The results were however modest. The stand/room where the meetings took place was full, but the organizers expected more people to participate. Beyond political reasons, the simultaneous presence of hundreds of alternative meetings created a very competitive environment for the campaign to attract effectively new organizations. As a consequence, in the final Assembly of the Social Movements of the WSF, the issue of the UN reform was included, but in a marginalizing mood.

The following table summarizes such associations.

		Relationship of participants	
		Asymmetry	Symmetry
Type of power	“Hard” power (decisions on strategy definition-deepening)	Pressure (dominance)  PASSIGNANO PADUA NEW YORK	Bargaining (compromise)  PERUGIA1
	“Soft” power (meetings for consensus construction-broadening)	Agitatory persuasion (acclamation)  PORTO ALEGRE PERUGIA3 NAIROBI	Deliberation (consensus)  PADUA PERUGIA2

Concentrating on the internal dynamic, it is possible to develop a number of observations. To begin with, as it is often the case in transnational campaigns, a broad distinction can be traced between two levels: the level of the discussion among expert organizations, and the level of mere adhesion without (an in-depth) discussion of non expert organizations. The novelty of the Reclaim our UN campaign concerned exactly this second level. Discussions among experts on global issues occur from time to time within the social movements and civil society domain. With special regard to the UN, the discussion on the UN reform is as old as the organization itself. What is claimed to be new in this campaign is the broadening of the range of activists involved and consequently the widening of the dissemination of the theme of global democracy (Interview 1). Many organizations that previously did not have on the agenda the reform of the UN decided to discuss the issue and eventually to join the campaign. This spill over effect is definitely one of the most interesting aspects of the campaign.

A key challenge of the Reclaim our UN campaign consisted thus in involving organizations that were not previously receptive to the issue of global democracy. This was possible because the promoter/coordinator, the Peace Roundtable, had a previous trusty relation with the other organizations on other, especially peace-related issues. Thanks to such reciprocal trust, they accepted to get involved into the campaign. Robust trust built through past common mobilizations on consistent issues made the access to the campaign open to new subjects, to subjects that were not previously engage in activism for the democratic reform of the UN (Snow & Benford, 1988). Moreover, the fact that the mobilization was on a very practical and specific issue, rather than grand ideological perspective, definitely facilitated the opening up of their attitude (Interview 1). In addition, the possibility of partial joining, i.e., each organization was free to join any specific part of the mobilization, also helped broadening participation.

In addition to these “previous friends”, two other kinds of organizations joined the campaign: experts on UN reform and groups with a broad commitment to global justice and democracy. Organizations with expertise on reforming international institutions formed the backbone of the campaign. Key experts in this regard were the Ubuntu network, the Marcosur feminist network, United for peace and justice, the French peace movement, the Trade unions network, and the Organizing committee of the Mumbai WSF. But there has also been new political subjects with which the campaign had not previous contacts. These groups were mainly convinced by the idea of the campaign, perhaps lacking the capacity to organize a mobilization on this issue. Filling this gap, the campaign provided some times just an idea, and some other times an operationalization of such idea, i.e. a concrete mobilization on global democracy<sup>76</sup>.

The specific content of the campaign was constructed together by the expert organizations during the meetings in Padua and Perugia, although the coordinating organization kept a firm lead in every step. Such content was then disseminated and discussed with the other members of the campaign. Creating communication channels between expert organizations was not an easy task. (Sometimes very) different positions and histories had to be reciprocally accepted. Organizations with a great potential for mobilization had to be in agreement with highly expert quasi-academic organizations. This was the case of the divergence between the Peace Roundtable and the Ubuntu network. While Ubuntu, being an almost academic group, was interested in the specific proposals to advance (content), the Peace Roundtable was more interested in generating the political will (provoked by mass mobilizations) for the implementation of the proposals (since many proposals have already been formulated along the UN history). Such divergence of strategy, i.e. content vs. mobilization, provoked tense debates and was only partially reconciled (partic. observ. meeting 1). No agreement was finally found for a common effort to organize a single and wider mobilization in September. Instead several demonstrations in different places and with different dates took place.

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<sup>76</sup> A further group is composed by all those organizations that did not join the campaign from the beginning. Despite previously in contact with the Peace Roundtable, they did not share the objective and strategy of the campaign. A bridging dialogue was attempted, but with limited results.

The campaign was characterised, as it is often the case especially for transnational campaigns, by a intense tension between the search for consensus and the need for practical effectiveness. On the one hand, the campaign adopted the principle of consensus. Conflicts among participants had to be solved with gradual and at time lengthy dialogue. No majority voting was used, but only consensus-based decision were taken (partic. observ. meetings 1-2-3-4)(della Porta, 2007a). This was due to the need for strong motivation to join actively a transnational campaign of this kind (Marchetti & Pianta, 2008). No group actively joins a campaign without such a strong motivation (obviously, formal joining with zero resources investment is, instead, always an available option). Genuine consensus is the only proof that the motivation is strong and that the group will actually take action within the campaign. Bargaining on fundamental issue is thus not possible. In other words, without consensus the campaign inevitably loses motivation and consequently also participation, which occurred on a limited number of de facto withdrawal. On the other hand, however, the campaign has also to manage demanding practical constraints. As a matter of fact, the key meetings of the campaign were few: the WSF seminars, the Padua seminar, and a number of meetings with reduced number of participants. Collective moments of discussion have been limited, especially because of the financial and chronological difficulties that affect any transnational campaign. Consensus was accepted (at least in principle), and yet constraints of time and money were pressing. Decisions have been taken, but criticisms have nonetheless been raised on their accountability and inclusiveness.

A first criticism that was raised concerns the method according to which a small group of experts formulated strategies and ideas, and larger galaxy of other non-expert organizations joined the proposals coming from such small group of promoters (partic. observ. meeting 2-3). The response to this kind of criticism points to the lack of resources—primarily time and money—that is typical of any transnational mobilization (Interview 1). It is often the case that most motivated (and financially capable) organizations take a lead, with the other marginally interested group joining for specific actions. With reference to the Reclaim our UN campaign, the stretch of time for building up the mobilization was very short. The first meeting within the WSF IC was in spring 2004, then the following fall the meeting in Padua (that was key for building up relationships and trust), then after another two months the meeting at the WSF in Porto Alegre, and finally the demonstration in fall 2005. Moreover, in parallel to the international dynamic, the promoter had to take care also of the national dimension. This latter dimension in fact remained crucial for the final street demonstration that gathered around 250.000 people. “Foreigners can join the demonstration, but in order to reach such a wide participation you inevitably need support from local group”, the campaign coordinator holds (interview 1). The construction of the Italian component of the campaign took time and effort. Even in Italy, where a UN sensitivity is present, the number of political actors dedicating time to such topic is almost nil. Not all organizations were easily available for fully supporting the campaign strategy. There were, for instance, groups such as Arci, who opposed the demonstration on September 11<sup>th</sup> in the first instance. Convincing them required time-consuming negotiations and dialogue (interview 1). What is important to note, however, is that no group formally withdrew from the campaign, though few abandoned it de facto due to lack of consensus on specific issues.

A second line of criticism concerns the decision-making method within the small group of expert organizations. Criticisms were raised of limited inclusion, of “Peace Roundtable-centrism”, and consequently even of Western-centrism (Interview 2). Differently from loose networks which tend to be more flexible, the campaign had a “structured” organization. The coordinating organization had a central role, which while on the one hand provided more organizational efficiency, on the other damaged the process of coalition-building. As mentioned, beyond restricted meetings to which usually participated only those groups with a strong motivation, strong expertise, and sufficient financial capacity, the other major tools for dialogue were telephone calls and e-mails. In particular, documents were elaborated via e-mail through several rounds of revisions among campaign’s members. The decision-making method was essentially based on informal contact

between a limited number of subjects. This few organizations acted then as “multipliers”, with a relative degree of legitimacy, but still with little possibility to modify the agenda. Within the restricted group, a few controversies arose, but they concerned minor issues, not the overall perspective (Interview 3). The meeting in Padua was meant as a turning point: it was supposed to map and confirm the coalition, but also to expand it. While it certainly contributed to consolidate the relation among the inner circle of expert organizations centred on human rights in institutional terms, it failed in enlarging the campaign to other perspectives such as those focussing on social and economic rights at the local level. With organizations of this latter kind, full recognition and engagement in political discussion did not occur. This observation leads to a third major criticism to the campaign.

The third and most incisive criticisms of the campaign regards the overall strategy adopted. According to Miranda and Tricarico, the campaign did not managed to have a balanced relationship between the local and the global dimension, in that it missed some important dissemination targets (Interview 2 and 3). According to criticisms, in fact, its weakness especially resided in its lack of roots in a number of key countries of the south. The issue at stake is here a matter of different political strategy. As reported earlier, the campaign pursued a strategy of diffusion from “above”, i.e. it identified and took advantage of WSF as the centre of global aggregation of social movements, the semi-public Passignano meeting being crucial here. In opposition to this, a number of other components of the campaign lamented the lack of a slower and more inclusionary discussion from below. These criticisms advocated a more local strategy in which the principal focus are the local and national domains, and in which social and economic rights have priority over political rights. It is there that the campaign should have concentrated for generating locally the belief in the necessity and urgency of global institutions. Overlooking this dimension, the campaign did not manage to enter into cooperative relation with a number of movements (especially Asian and farmers ones) who have a more marked national/regional and social perspective. National and regional debated, in sum, has not be sufficiently considered by the campaign.

More specifically, it is not enough, according to this line of criticism, to have a strong bases in the north, to take part in the WSF, or to target directly the UN as an institution. The more global the campaign, the more it needs to have solid local roots in terms of national/regional political struggle. The attack to the UN may be launched for activating protest in several countries, but then it is at the local and national level that contentious politics has to be developed. It is never enough lobbying simply the UN functionaries, for key issues are decided by national representatives who are directed by national governments. It is thus at the national level that political pressured has to be mounted. In this context, it is national and regional politics that count as a unique place for political change. This was probably a too complex social enterprise in such a short period of time for the campaign (Interview 3). The campaign coordination decided for a more straightforward strategy of inserting the issue within the big discussion of the WSF. But this was not enough in that it missed the engagement with the local grassroots level of many southern countries. Due to its high number of expert organizations that were also part of the WSF IC, the campaign become a sort of “caucus” within the WSF but did not achieve sufficient local spreading in southern countries. This, together with the declining trend of the WSF (i.e., regional dis-aggregation), proved fatal for the campaign which failed to mobilised at the local level world-wide. Having analyzed its emergence, development, internal dynamics, and discursive practices, it is thus now time to move to examine the political impact of the Reclaim our UN campaign.

## **5. The political impact of the Reclaim our UN campaign**

The results of the Reclaim our UN campaign were below the expectations, and yet allegedly important. They weighted much more on the internal side of the sphere of social movements interaction than on the external side of diplomatic politics. Internally speaking, for the first time a wide array of social movement organizations from different countries that were not specialized in

the issue of global democracy joined the campaign thus becoming aware of the urgency of the issue. Different social movements and civil society organizations active on different themes within the global justice movement for the first time coalesced for the objective of the democratic reform of the UN. Beginning with such a vast array of organizations and ending by agreeing on a platform, signing an appeal, and launching an initiative can indeed be considered a positive result in itself, despite one that is mainly internal to the dynamics of the SMOs. For what concerns, instead, the external impact, the campaign failed. The outcome document of the UN General Assembly was very limited in terms of democratic institutional reforms. A council on human rights was established, together with a Peace-building commission. A democracy funds was also created together with an intense negotiation on article 51 on the right of preventive/pre-emptive war. All in all, these reforms were however limited, not fully implemented, and went in a fundamentally different direction from the one pointed to by the campaign (Archibugi & Marchetti, 2005; Marchetti, 2005; Archibugi & Marchetti, 2008).

The most important impact of the Reclaim our UN campaign was on the internal domain of social movement organizations. In total between 300 and 400 organizations joined the campaign, and among them many were networks. No campaign on the UN reform ever reached such a wide consensus before. Also in terms of heterogeneity of partners the campaign was successful. It gathered groups as different as feminist, environmentalist, research centres, and local associations. This was particularly noteworthy in that at the global level the divergence in political terms can be radical and yet a common strategy was found. The only homogeneity was in fact provided by an overall agreement with the trajectory of the WSF.

The linkage with the WSF proved important for the campaign. This increasingly constitutes a key factor for what concerns the impact on public opinion within social movement environment. In this campaign, such impact, tough limited, was possible because the campaign managed to insert the issue of the UN reform and more in general of global democracy within the WSF. This was not an easy task. To prove that the sensitivity to this issue remains low even in SMOs, it suffices to mention that as recently as in the first draft of the Nairobi programme there was no space for the issue of the UN reform. Inserting the issue of global democracy with the WSF was thus not for granted. The Reclaim our UN campaign managed to do that thanks to the credibility of the Assembly of the Peoples' UN. Since the Assembly and the Peace Roundtable were known, then a proposal from them, despite being innovative, was eventually accepted. In addition, their credibility was also stronger because of their participation to the IC of the WSF almost from the beginning, and because of their availability to host several meetings of the IC, including the one in Passignano that costed around €100.000. In sum, the inclusion of the theme of the UN reform was possible because of the credibility of the Peace Roundtable, and this was in turn sustained by its membership of the IC and its hosting of several IC meetings, but also by the fact that many members of the IC participated in the previous meetings of the Assembly of the Peoples' UN. And yet the campaign was innovative since when it begun nobody in the IC was spending time on the issue of the UN reform. The degree of unity and convergence achieved by the campaign's members (within and outside the IC) by 2005 was a positive result, but allegedly not enough for keeping the mobilization growing so much as to be able to achieve a substantial impact in outer politics. The lack of convergence is an alleged limits of the campaign that has consequence on its political impact (Interview 1).

Beyond the internal impact, the campaign also aimed to have an impact on institutional decision-making, in particular on the intergovernmental decisions taken within the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary General Assembly of the UN. Contacts were attempted with the UN (specifically with the secretariat of the SG), and several governments including Brazil, Italy, Spain. But all of these political attempts failed because most pressing national interests were prioritized, as in the case of the Brazilian Government with the run for the permanent seat in the SC or of clash between the agenda of the USA and of the Southern Countries. Internal factors to the campaign, however, also damaged its external effectiveness. In particular, limited resources in terms of partial political convergence and

scarce finances of the campaign did not allowed for a deeper political action towards governments. The absence of a vertical coalition between civil society and governmental organizations constitutes a reason for the external failure of the campaign. SMOs managed to ally with governmental institutions for strengthening democratic practices in international institutions in other occasions. In this regard, a few successful campaigns of the 1990s can be mentioned as examples (Coates & David, 2002) such as the campaign for the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) (1995), which led to the approval of the Rome statute (1998); the Jubilee campaign on Third World debt (1996), which induced the creditor governments and the International Monetary Fund to take the first steps toward debt relief of the highly indebted poor countries; the international campaign to ban landmines (1992), which managed to secure support in the intergovernmental conference in Ottawa where the Mine Ban Treaty was signed (1997) (Pianta & Marchetti, 2007; Marchetti & Pianta, 2008). Recent experience thus shows that changes in international norms are possible only when a mixed coalition is created with selected (non G5) governments and transnational civil society. While the first ones aim to reduce their subaltern position within the organisation, the second has more genuinely democratic objectives, which are centred on a greater inclusion of non-traditional political agents within the institutional life at the international level.

A major impact on the level of global public opinion was the coupling of the issue of global democracy to the fight against global poverty. The Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) was the only international coalition that decided to mobilize for the millennium +5 meeting (5 year after the Millennium declaration on the Millennium Development Goals-MDGs). At the beginning their focus was uniquely on fighting poverty. After the encounter with the Reclaim our UN campaign, however, the focus widened to include the issue of institutional reforms. As a consequence, the platform of SMOs organizations working on the UN-related issues in 2005 included both the fight against global poverty and the fight for global democracy. This marked a considerable achievement that signals the move from a mere protest to a more constructive politics as based on a more comprehensive and deeper proposal of reform.

In conclusion, while an immediate impact on institutional politics was not achieved, few positive results on peripheral domains were achieved, and these might prove important in an indirect way in the future. They include the following three. First, the campaign proved that a global mobilization on the UN reform is indeed possible, despite the (at times radical) divergences among civil society actors. With a better organizational structure in terms of finances, expertise, etc., a mobilization aiming at making citizens of the world aware of the UN relevance is possible. Second, the occurrence of the campaign might prove important for any institutional actor aiming at democratising the UN. Having people on the street makes (at times) the institutional argument put forward by some UN public officials stronger. This is not enough to make thing changing, but it is an additional and important element for a politics of change. Third, the campaign had an impact on the US civil society, notably a key nodes for a change in global politics. The case of the United for Peace and Justice-UFPJ is significant in this regard. After the Porto Alegre seminars, the UFPJ accepted the mobilization for global democracy, but not for what concerned the UN because it considered the UN a tool in the hand of the US government, thus not a tools for peace. The discussion initiated during the campaign, however, had a (not immediate) consequence. In the last WSF in Nairobi (2 years after the campaign) the UFPJ organized on its own a seminar on the peace movement and the reform of the UN. The UN reform did not happen, but the idea that a reform of the UN is needed spread around and entered into the discussion of new circles. In the long term this could cause a more significant effect.

## **6. Conclusions: Democracy at the transnational level**

This paper analyzed the key characteristics of the Reclaim our UN campaign, as an illustration of the development of a typical international campaign in terms of democracy. Through the multilayered analysis of the different dimensions of the campaign (i.e., internal to the Peace

Roundtable, internal to the campaign, external within the WSF, and external to the UN), the paper clarified its key dynamic. The local social dimension (rooted in the experience of the Peace Roundtable of Perugia) was from the beginning intertwined with the global dimension of transnational social movements (namely the discussion within the International Council of the WSF). At the same time, however, the relationship with the political institutions, in this case the UN, was also cared for through both formal and informal contacts, as well as the relationship with a number of sympathetic governments. The gradual development of a transnational campaign is here clear: from a local experience motivated by global issues the mobilization slowly grows over a period of time and only later undergoes a scale shift towards forms of global activism that could eventually also activate local experiences in other places. This locally-rooted-later-global pattern is common to many transnational organizations active in the global justice movements. The global scale shift was indeed implemented and only possible thanks to the international relationships and contacts that the Peace Roundtable, the campaign coordinator, and Assembly of the Peoples' UN developed during their previous activities. What did not occur in that brief period was the last bit of the cycle: the activation of local mobilization in southern countries where the focus was more on socio-economic rights rather than political participatory right within the UN framework. All of this may prove discomfiting to all those that would like a quicker social mobilization, but it may also illustrate a on-going strategy for pursuing global democracy, a strategy that inevitably has to pass through a gradual, long-term, and complex balancing between local resources and global principles through transnational networking.

More in particular for what concerns the specific issue of democracy at transnational level, the campaign analyzed also offers a good entry point to understand the political debate on global democracy. The Reclaim Our Un campaign is a good example of a campaign that demands access, participation, accountability, transparency, and respect for international law, thus providing an radical and peaceful alternative to two dominant political positions, liberal internationalists and third world advocates. While the former accept the influence of leading countries and aim to promote marginal changes under the leadership of internationally minded establishment figures, especially former diplomat, the latter takes issue especially with economic institutions such as the WB, IMF, WTO, and consider the UN marginal in the global fight against injustice. It is against these two positions that the campaign studied in this paper developed. As a radical transformer type, it tried to shift control of global destiny from powerful states to more popular democratic forces channeled through political institutions (Falk, 2005, 150). In opposition to project of reform of the UN from within and from above, it fostered a reform from below, a reform initiated by civil society forces, though at times also open for coalition with reformist governments and UN like-minded officials. In this way, it showed the way for a new kind of globalism that remains markedly different from traditional diplomacy.

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### **Appendix 1: Details on observations and interviews**

The following international public meetings of the campaign were personally attended:

(Meeting 1) International seminar on the future of the UN and the International Institutions, Reclaim Our UN (Padua, 19-20 Nov. 2004).

(Meeting 2) Exigir nosso seminário internacional da ONU: sobre o futuro da ONU e as instituições internacionais (Porto Alegre, 28th Jan. 2005, 12-15).

(Meeting 3) Exigir nossa agenda da ONU 2005: por uma ordem internacional justa, pacífica e democrática (Porto Alegre, 28th Jan. 2005, 15:30-18-30).

(Meeting 4) 6th Assembly of the UN of the Peoples, Save our UN (Perugia, 8-10 Sept. 2005).

(Meeting 5) Demonstration Reclaim our UN (Perugia, 11 Sept. 2005).

A number of interviews were carried out with the following activists:

(Interview 1) The campaign coordinator, Flavio Lotti (Peace Roundtable, Italy), on April 27, 2007, in Rome.

(Interview 2) A key partner in the campaign, Moema Miranda (Ibase, Brasil), on December 3, 2006, in Milan.

(Interview 3) A rapporteur for the Padua seminar, Antonio Tricarico (Campagna per la riforma della banca mondiale-CRBM, Italy), on September 15, 2007 in Rome.

(Interview 4) A key opinion leader of GJMs who attended several Assemblies of the Peoples' UN, Richard Falk (University of California Santa Barbara-UCSB, USA), on December 18, 2006 in Rome.

## Concluding observations

By Donatella della Porta and Dieter Rucht

*(European University Institute and Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung)*

The above presented reports on 12 groups in six countries and one campaign at the international level provide us with rich and detailed information on many aspects, ranging from the groups origins and background to various forms of leadership and power to experiments with democratic ways of decision-making. In following, far from being able to draw on all these many and interesting findings, we limit ourselves to a range of observations that in one way or another relate to the theme of power and democracy in small group settings of the GJMs.

### 1. The spectre of observed groups

Although we aimed for selecting small local groups that could be neatly attributed to GJMs, it turned out that the spectre of the actually studied group is more heterogeneous than we initially expected.

There is no doubt that most of groups under study can be clearly attributed to the GJMs. This is reflected by their self-understanding, their aims, their ties to other groups, and their participation in broader campaigns of these movements. However, our sample also includes two groups which, though having sympathies and partial thematic overlaps with the GJMs, at least according to their self-conception, cannot be seen as an integral part of these movements. This applies to one British case (Conscious Consumers at the University of Kent) and, probably to a lesser extent, to the Spanish Córdoba Solidaria, a network created to facilitate the flow of information and coordination among a large variety of locally-based groups in this area.

In four out of the six countries, Attac groups were studied, allowing for some cross-national comparison of the groups belong to the same umbrella organization. In the French case, the Attac group under investigation was not a local chapter but the national board. Due to its specific role as a nation-wide steering committee composed of elected members, this group differs in many ways from the strictly locally-based Attac groups in the three other countries. Also the second French group under study is specific insofar as it is, nominally, a network of groups from many countries whose probably most important circles happens to meet in Paris.

While in the initial research proposal we have suggested to study at least one group per country, we later opted for studying two groups, if possible, preferably one of a homogeneous and one of a heterogeneous shape (the latter consisting of members/delegates from different autonomous groups). This criterion could be largely met in Switzerland and Spain. In Germany, while from an initial viewpoint the selected groups in Germany also seemed to conform to this criterion, it turned out that the one formerly rather heterogeneous group (Berlin Social Forum) gradually turned into a homogenous one. Hence in this regard it became rather similar to the second group studied in Germany. In the remaining countries, for various reasons (e.g., familiarity with the group, easy access) this selection criterion was overruled – not to the disadvantage of our overall research, as it can be seen in retrospect because some parameters (local vs. non-local; local chapter vs. national board of the same organization) obviously had an impact on the patterns of communication and related internal problems of the group. Because our selection was never intended to be representative, we are quite happy about the great variety of the investigated groups. From a theoretical viewpoint, this variety enriches our perspective and draws theoretical attention to aspects that otherwise would have been overlooked. The same applies to the study of the transnational campaign which, by its very nature, offers a contrast to the eleven local groups which meet on a regular basis in the same place.

## **2. The observation**

Interestingly, access to the groups was much less of a problem than we expected. To be sure, some groups asked detailed questions about the purpose of the research and, more particularly, on the financing institution (which provoked critical comments in one case at least). But none of the approached groups flatly denied access. It seemed that after a while the observer simply became part of the group although differences to the "regular" members remained.

The period of participant observation was generally in 2006 and/or 2007, though with considerable differences in the length of the observation period. Actually, it ranged from four months (Attac Florence) to almost two years (Attac group "Financial Markets" in Berlin). Accordingly, also the number of observed sessions varied greatly, with 3 sessions in the case of the Swiss Lemanic Social Forum and national meetings of the Italian water campaign to 14 sessions of the British student group Conscious Consumers. Also the frequency of regular meetings differed. It was weekly (in the case of Attac Florence for most of the observation period) but only every four to six weeks for both of the French groups. Meetings tended to be relatively short for some groups but lasting, as a rule, for eight hours or more in the case of the French Attac board – a group which is fraught with a densely packed agenda and the expectation to take a series of decisions at every session. In addition to the time consuming participant observation, researchers usually conducted a number of informal and/or more formal interviews. In some instances, particularly in the British case, most of these interviews were tape recorded. Moreover, in several cases, additional interviews were carried out with people in the immediate environment of the groups. Not in all cases research results were fed back to and discussed with the group under study.

All in all, the decision to conduct participant observation in combination with interviews proved to be a fruitful research strategy. It provided us with many insights that otherwise we would have been completely missed. Only some of these results will be presented in the remainder of this chapter.

## **3. Group structures**

When looking at the kind of groups under study, it becomes clear that they also differ widely in terms of their structure, though most of them are fairly small. The two largest groups, measured by the regular number of participants in its meetings, is the French Attac board with 42 elected members (plus two staff and a varying number of guests of whom, interestingly, most are researchers), and the nation-wide meetings of the Italian water campaign with up to 85 participants. The majority of groups, however, has only around ten participants or even less.

While some groups include people who all became involved into politics roughly at the same time and therefore had a similar level of experience, other groups also involve both a generation of oldtimers and a generation of newcomers. As several examples demonstrate, however, this does not necessarily lead to a hierarchy on the basis of varying experience. In one case, it was a newcomer full of energy who revitalized the group and quickly became an informal coordinator. In most other cases, the more experienced activists are usually those who also have a greater impact on the agenda and on matters that are discussed, or even decided, in between group meetings. As a rule, this does not provoke any criticism and opposition as long the group does not feel to be ignored or overruled by its informal leader or coordinator.

Almost all groups are dominated by middle class people with a high educational background. This even applies to No Vox (France), an organization fighting for the rights of marginalized and excluded people. One of the British groups is campus-based and composed of students only. Other groups are more variegated in terms of age and occupations. Overall, the groups include, particularly when compared to more formal associations such as trade unions and political parties, a

large proportion of women, usually ranging around 40 percent but reaching in one case even 60 percent (Thanet Friends of the Earth). An outlier case was a meeting of a local group meeting of the Italian water campaign where among 12 participants only was female.

Participation can be based on formal election (French Attac board), formal or informal delegation (Córdoba Solidaria), formal (due paying) membership and/or simply personal interest, hence without any formal requirement. Formal membership of a certain number of people is required in one British case (in order to be recognized by the student union) but does not play a role in practice.

The oldest group (Córdoba solidaria) under study was created in 1994. The two youngest groups (both from Britain) did come into existence only in 2006, shortly before the participant observation began.

All groups tend to be open, though some of them do not seem to attract newcomers but tend to shrink. Some groups have an elected chair; others have informal coordinators (usually those who spend most time for the group); still others have a rotating facilitator or none of these roles. Yet even in those latter groups some people take a lead in some situations, usually based on their experience, know how, or valuable contacts to other groups.

#### **4. Group atmosphere**

Conflict per se as rarely perceived to be negative but rather a "natural" element both within the group and with regard to other groups. With the exception of the French Attac board which was shaken by a deep organizational crisis of the overall French organization (culminating in a complaint about electoral fraud), the atmosphere of the remaining groups tended to be very relaxed and mostly friendly. In some groups, news on personal issues (e.g., job problems, illness, travel tours) are an integral part of the communication. Notably in the French No Vox, communication is not structured along a prefabricated agenda and by the desire to take decisions.

Even when people disagree, they rarely attack each other at a personal level. In some cases of disagreement or conflict, ironic comments did even provoke a laughter on both sides of the conflict line. Yet there were also a few examples of pejorative speech acts and of serious criticisms that caused some participants not to show up in the subsequent meetings. Generally, participants tend to be very keen to maintaining a spirit of friendliness and respect even when there is a particular member who speaks too much and too long or who, at some occasions, tends to be stubborn.

#### **5. Power, participation and equality**

Generally speaking, the groups are extremely sensitive to aspects of power and inequality within their own ranks. In one Spanish group this seemed to be even the overriding concern, considering the group not as a mean to reach a political goal, but as a goal in itself, namely to practise (radical) democratic. We also observe the phenomenon of "reluctant leaders" (British report, p. 21), i.e. group members who effectively have acquired a kind of leading role without really wanting it. These leaders tend to invite other members to take the initiative or they make offers for a division of labor, including, for example, a rotating chair. It is also a common practise in some groups to initiate a "go around" at the beginning of a new issue or when there is the feeling that the discussion is stuck. Clearly, one of the two British cases (Conscious Consumers) is at the opposite side of the spectrum with "little reflection on group structure, discussions, decision-making".

Two groups (Attac France and Córdoba solidaria) have elected presidents who, therefore, are "naturally" accepted to chair the sessions. Due to the specific, though different, roles of both groups (one as decision-making body, the other as a coordinator and facilitator without a distinct political agenda), these chairs are not questioned as such. This, however, did not prevent some group members of Attac France to criticise the "presidential style" of the chair. All the other groups have either widely accepted coordinators (formal in the case of Thanet Friends of the Earth, informal in

the case of the two German groups and the Conscious Consumers in Britain) or no such a role at all (the Spanish Ecologistas en Acción).

As a rule, from the reports it follows that younger but deeply committed activists, especially women, are more critical towards the negative aspects of formal and informal power than the older activists who, in quite many cases, have been politically socialized in trade unions, political parties and other established organizations. It also appears that those groups that are rather at the margins of the GJMs (the two British groups and Córdoba solidaria) are less concerned with internal power structures and the issue of equality than those groups who belong to the movements' core. While these latter groups recurrently struggle to reduce imbalances of power and occasionally make it a particular issue of discussion, the French No Vox does not seem to be hampered by this question at all. It has no formal rules, little if any informal leadership and hierarchy. Moreover, its casual habits (meetings start up to one hour later than scheduled), its erratic way of discussion (without a prior agenda and a frequent move back and forth between different topics) which an outsider may perceive as chaotic is not seen as a problem by the groups members but rather as an asset. These erratic and unstructured discussions contribute to a "common micro-culture" which seems to be appreciated by all members. Contrary to these practices, in two other groups some members have articulated dissatisfaction with unstructured discussions that do not lead to clear decisions and actions, hence being a "waste of time" (e.g., Conscious Consumers). In this latter case, means and ends are clearly separated: "Internal group affairs are not regarded as political acts in their own right but as a means of achieving political acts." (British report, p. 4)

## **6. Conflicts, deliberation, and decision-making**

When it comes to express dissent within the group, again the British Conscious Consumers and Thanet Friends of the Earth – as the two groups which are probably most detached from the GJMs – are outlier cases. Several group members tend "to remain quiet when they disagree with something" (British report, p. 34) – a behaviour that would be unusual in all the other groups. Of course, also in those groups dissenting members may become silent at some point of time (because they feel that they are isolated or because they do not want to prevent a joint decision). But they do so only after having expressed their views.

Occasional conflicts are far from being rare. Mostly however, they are restricted to a brief signal or remark. Yet there are also controversies as defined in our code book. As far as numbers have been provided in these reports (leaving aside the quantitative analysis to be presented in an edited volume), up to every third agenda item registered by the observer can be, or can turn into, a controversy (26 controversies out of 76 agenda items in the case of Attac Geneva). On the other end of the spectrum, the proportion of controversies can be lower than ten percent (Conscious Consumers).

Deliberation (as defined in the code book) actually occurs. This is by no means evident, since there are voices among theorists arguing that deliberation is simply a dream but never occurs in reality. There are instances when people initially disagree but finally, based on the exchange of arguments and viewpoints, reach a consensus (as opposed to a compromise) everybody feels happy with, regardless of his or her initial position.

However, deliberation in the strict sense of the term remains a relatively rare event. Whether based on deliberation or other forms of communication, mostly groups eventually decide on the basis of tacit agreement or nodding. This is particularly true for groups which explicitly value the consensus principle (as opposed to voting or especially the majority rule). Even a relatively formal group such as Thanet Friends of the Earth did not practise, at least during the period of observation, the majority rule. This kind of implicit decision-making usually requires strong ties among the group members. The more these members feel to belong to the same "family" and trust each other, the less they feel a need to make explicit decisions. In this regard, No Vox is an impressive

example. The group explicitly refuses to vote. It stresses, similar to Attac Florence, Ecologistas en Accion and the Lemanic Social Forum, the process, allowing at best the role of a facilitator in group discussions. Quite telling is the sentence of one participant who, when asked what the group will decide, answered "the discussion will decide" (French report, p. 34). In other words: No Vox is "socialisation-oriented" (French report), whereas most other groups are more action-oriented or decision-oriented.

Whether or not consensus is reached is not always clear. Sometimes, this may lead a participant to ask what eventually the agreement was (Conscious Consumers). Sometimes, group members wrongly assume to have reached a consensus but afterwards become aware that differences have remained. In some instances, a group member may explicitly asks his/her comrades if everybody "can live" with the outcome of a discussion or if somebody disagrees. In other instances or other groups, a kind of test voting is done simply to see that a supposed unanimity does indeed exist. Some groups, however, do not shy away from taking a majority vote either as a common habit (Attac France board) or as an exception (Conscious Consumers).

The high appreciation of the consensus principle usually goes hand in hand with some scepticism regarding the principle of delegation. This was very explicit in the case of Attac Florence where representation and delegation are considered as part of the traditional established mechanisms that have to be overcome. Even the French Attac board as a group designed to make decisions prefers consensus though it often resorts to votes, particularly because it has a very pronounced and vital minority faction within their own ranks.

## **7. Meta-communication**

Meta-communication, i.e. communication about the ways and rules to communicate, does not seem to appear as a consciously applied tool in debates. In some groups, particularly those acting on the basis of a pre-set agenda, formal roles and rules (chair, majority vote), meta-communication does not appear to occur. In other groups, particularly when a situation of deep conflict and stalemate emerges, meta-communication is used to find out, for example, whether there is a hidden agenda in a particular conflict, whether personal tensions are underlying an allegedly factual or value-oriented conflict, or which are the boundaries that all group member should definitely respect. Such a communication may be limited to very brief remarks (e.g., "this comment on me is mean"; "I better not react to this insult"; "Let's not all talk at the same time"). Yet it may also lead to a more elaborated discussion about the need to listen to minority voices, about the legitimacy of certain techniques, if not tricks, to push a certain viewpoint, or about the need for a better organization of group discussions by nominating a moderator or facilitator, setting an binding agenda before or at the beginning of a sessions, etc.).

## **8. The group context**

Almost all the observed groups, regardless of being completely autonomous or a section of a larger organization, define themselves as part of a broader movement, though in some cases (especially UK) more implicitly than explicitly. Accordingly, in their meetings the groups occasionally reflect on the overall situation of the movement on all levels, ranging from the local to the global. It appears that the overall situation of the movements, at least with regard to the national level, is perceived in very different ways. While in Spain, from the viewpoint of the two groups under study, there seems to prevail a rather optimistic perspective, just the opposite holds for Italy where the movement is perceived to be "in crisis" and repeatedly signs of frustration and demobilization are mentioned.

In general, the groups under study have a complicated and highly ambivalent relationship with potential allies, in particular with trade unions and political parties. This becomes very clear in the

case of the French groups and Attac Florence. Some members of these groups are at the same time members or sympathizers of such more formal associations and therefore promote alliances and cooperation with these associations. On the other hand, because these associations tend to pursue their own political agenda and sometimes to instrumentalize autonomous movement groups, the latter are very careful in keeping their potential partners at arm length. Moreover, close collaboration with one particular union or party may estrange other group members who are closer to a "rival" union or party. For No Vox, even collaboration with informal core groups of the GJM is perceived to be highly problematic because even these groups, in spite of all their rhetoric of solidarity and justice, tend to marginalize the "movements des sans".

More generally, it seems that among GJM groups there is a strong tendency to remain independent and autonomous, though cooperation is accepted or even sought for specific campaigns. Particularly those movements groups which favour grass roots democracy, "horizontal" structures and the consensus principle tend to distrust the more formal organizations not because of their goals but because of their structures.

All the more there prevails a critical view on the established ways of representative democracy at the large (national) scale. The groups tend to view this kind of democracy as dominated by power games instead of substantive political goals such as intense participation, equality, solidarity and justice. In other words: These groups are extremely sensitive to the *forms* of politics, the way of discussing, organizing and decision-making at all levels. To them, democracy has to be learned and practiced first of all at a small scale, that is in the movement groups. And if democratic principles failed to be realized at that level, there would be little hope to meet these principles at the larger scale, let alone the global level.

## **9. The role of action**

For all groups, political action seems however to play a fundamental role in keeping them together, stimulating commitment and solidarity, which in fact tend to grow during periods of intense activities. An orientation to action seems common to all groups observed, although actions could mean different things--from street protest to educational campaigns, from lobbying to participation in institutional politics. Even though it includes different forms, action seems therefore important not only for its "public", i.e. visible side and its external effects, but also for the intensification of interactions and emotional involvement inside the group. In particular at the transnational level, a main effect of the protest campaigns seems to be the cross-fertilization in terms of themes and the building of links of reciprocal knowledge and trust (see Marchetti's chapter). At the same time, however, the perceived urgency of action can reduce the time devoted to deliberation and therefore the quality of communication.

## **10. Similarities and differences: some concluding remarks**

Summarizing, we noticed some striking similarities in the democratic functioning of the groups. By and large, we found a significant degree of participation as well as good standards of communication. Participants tend to respect each other and welcome the full deployment of individual skills and propensity. In general, attitudes are inclusive and a strong sense of autonomy in the choices of actions prevails even within groups that are formally a chapter of a national or supranational organization. Consensus is a widely supported principle; taking a vote is rare. Additionally, various rules (facilitator and note-taker roles, distribution of information, anti-hierarchical settings) develop in order to improve communication and participation (see, e.g., Bandler, Giugni, and Nai's chapter).

At the same time, however, informal leaders tend to emerge (even involuntarily, as "reluctant leaders", as Clare Saunders put it). A main source of informal power is commitment, with a tacit

recognition of decision-making power of those who invest more time and energy in the group. Additionally, all groups seem to have some difficulty in getting new people involved, as disagreement often tends to be expressed in terms of exit instead of voice (see chapter by Teune in collaboration with Yang). The frequent conclusion of discussion through (assumption of) tacit agreement often makes such decision-making procedures intransparent and results in unclear decisions (Bandler, Giugni and Nai's chapter).

In their activities most groups are outward-oriented, addressing institutions at different levels. In interactions with institutional politics—from the student councils to the UN—the groups under study express a strong critique of organizations that follow a logic of delegation and majority rule. However, these interactions are framed within a strong criticism for what is perceived as a misfit between the way in which these institutions function, and the democratic ideals of the groups. Interactions are therefore only accepted to the extent that they are considered as necessary in order to make “another world possible”.

Other observations refer, however, to some differences we noticed in particular along two main dimensions: the degree of homogeneity and the territorial level of the group. As for the degree of homogeneity, it appears that divergent opinions are more easily expressed in groups which are homogeneous in their ideological and cultural conceptions as well as the generational and social background of their activists. Instead, the perception of heterogeneity generates reluctance to express a dissent which is perceived as potentially more disruptive. Often, homogeneity also comes along with more frequent meetings and an interaction of political and social ties. Also, a trade-off was found between internal solidarity and the involuntary exclusion of potential new comers. The groups we studied tend to be stabilized by a small and consistent core of very committed activists. This core is complemented by a fluctuating circle of supporters that tend to rise in number in times of protest campaigns. In heterogeneous groups, the (formal or informal) recognition of more influence of the founders can reflect a search for integration (see Attac-France, French chapter).

In terms of the territorial level of activities, strong differences emerge between the mostly local groups studied at the national level and the transnational organizations. In a transnational campaign, in particular, different circles of committed activists seem to emerge among the organizations that participated in the network. In general, more decision-making power is implicitly granted to those groups that invest more time than others in the specific campaigns. Large degrees of heterogeneity are reflected in a much higher tendency of members to dropping out rather than voicing their dissent.



## Appendices. Designing the Instruments<sup>77</sup>

By Dieter Rucht, Christoph Haug, Simon Teune, Mundo Yang

(Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung)

### Appendix A: General description/portrait of the group<sup>78</sup>

In the following, the general categories for the group portrait are illustrated by information on the attac group working on financial markets (in italic letters). The “attac group financial markets” is part of the wider “Attac Berlin” network.

#### Group history

- Phases: beginning, growth, maturation, decay, stagnation, ups and downs

*Foundation in 2001 with the beginning of Attac in Berlin. Quite mature group. Members participate since years. After a phase of entryism by a lot of trotzkyists the work has stabilized. Besides this episode membership was always around seven to ten persons. There have been minor problems in the past with single persons who did not fit the group for personal reasons. At the moment membership stagnates.*

- Decisive fluctuation of membership

*For the past see above. At the moment there is not much fluctuation.*

- Decisive breaks, new-orientations, conflicts

*See above.*

#### Explicit role of deliberation and participation as an group aim

*Neither deliberation nor participation is mentioned by the group.*

#### Visions of democracy in the group

- concept of internal and external democracy
- references to new institutional practices of deliberation such as “participatory budget”, “municipal democracy”
- crisis of participation (means crisis of conventional participation within liberal representative democracy?\*)

*There is no explicit concept of internal democracy. External democracy: group is producing proposals to change governance arrangements (international taxation and debt cancellation) in order to enhance democratic control of financial markets. No references to new institutional practices of deliberation are visible.*

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<sup>77</sup> This material is partly based on a several earlier papers of the authors, including “Norms and Practices of Discourse” (Dieter Rucht, Simon Teune, Mundo Yang, Christoph Haug, May 2005), “Propositions for WP6” (Dieter Rucht, November 2005), “Überlegungen zur teilnehmenden Beobachtung” (Christoph Haug, October 2005).

<sup>78</sup> In the following we summarize what should be included in the general description of the groups studied. The list is based on Dieter’s, Massimo’s papers and Mundos suggestions. This is a list for a short description/portrait of the groups studied. It is not an exposé for explanation. Research question are to be further elaborated. The list seems long. But in the end a lot of items can be described very shortly (For example: “The attac-group has no formal leader. But normally person X sets the agenda, invites, coordinates and speaks for the group. All meetings are held in the attac-office fortnightly...)

### **Institutionalized meta-talk**

- For example, regular meetings to discuss the work and communication of the group.

*No such meta-talk.*

### **Relation of intra- and inter-group communication**

- Do groups differ in their practices of intra- and inter-groups communication? Do they separate concepts applied to the group or movement from concepts applied to society as a whole?

*The group is part of Attac-Berlin. Debates with other groups of Attac are more controversial than debates within the group. Communication with outside institutions is seen quite more instrumentally and power driven than communication within the group. In many instances group members repeated that it is useless if you try to convince conservatives, neo-liberals or power holders. Instead, the group concentrates on those who at least share some ideological ground with the group (trade unionists, church activists). These outside groups are accepted as equal discussants.*

### **Ideology/frame/identity/goals/conflicts**

- What is the political goal of the group? What is its political role?
- How important is the group to its members (“like family” or “just interesting”).
- What are group boundaries, bonds and group norms?
- Dominant group ideology/ cultural values like: “we-feeling”, “self-realization”, postmaterialism, power concepts, means-end-relation, anti-hierarchic vs. hierarchic values, radicalism vs. reformism
- Heterogeneous vs. homogenous frames
- Multiple vs. single issues
- Emphasis upon mobilization vs. lobbying
- Are group internal affairs political (“private is political”)
- Level of conflict (local, supra-local)
- Perception of political opportunity structures

*The group protests against the current global regulation of financial markets. All members of the group know each other well. Some group members have quite intimate relations. They work together outside the group. After session usually all go drinking a beer. The group is open to everyone who wants to participate. The common denominator is the narrow thematic focus on international financial flows and markets. The group has a quite egalitarian and open culture. Most attendants emphasize personal perspectives/motivations rather than their belonging to a community/collective. It is possible to bring up private problems and frame them in political terms. Offensive speech hardly occurs. Humour and a friendly, harmonic atmosphere dominate the group sessions. The group tends to the “power with”-side rather than to the “power over”-side. Regarding the means-ends problem the group occupies the middle ground. The group sees itself as radical and reformist at the same time. It is oriented toward official political agendas/opportunity structures more than towards genuine inner movement agendas. The group approves both lobbying and protest mobilization, but engages only in protest and political education. It hardly wants to engage in lobbying. It rejects pure criticism and revolutionary ideology, but also a politics of compromise. The group members have quite homogenous frames.*

## Group structures

- Size of the group

*Around seven persons regularly involved.*

- Main group functions (multiple functions possible): e.g. self-help/self-awareness raising group, task-group, discursive space, evaluative committee, coordinating group, network node, strategic decision-making, brainstorming workshop, identity building, problem identification, help-desk, media group, culture group etc..

*Preparing Protest and political education.*

- How self-organizing/-regulating is the group? Unpaid or paid participants? Voluntary group?

*All members are voluntary, unpaid participants. The group is autonomous in deciding activities, which are within the framework of Attac. For major financial means the group has to apply at the Attac-Berlin assembly.*

- How formalized is the group?

*The group has one official delegate at the assembly of Attac-Berlin but no other formal rules/positions.*

- Membership rules

*No formal rules. Everyone can participate.*

- “First order group”, group of individuals, micromobilization context or “second order group”, group of delegates/networkers, mesomobilization context

*All members attend as individuals but not as delegates.*

- Joint session description (How often, how regular, how many of the formal members do attend, has the group an own room, a fixed but borrowed place or changing rooms, spatial context of the session room, what is the function of sessions)

*Sessions continuously are held fortnightly (more exactly: twice a month). Normally three fourth or more of the members attend sessions. The group sessions are held in the same room located in the bureau of a NGO, where some participants work as paid staff. All decisions (with minor exceptions) are taken in the sessions.*

- Preparation of session, invitation to session, agenda setting, action/session calendar

*There is a rough annual agenda (first half of the year: international taxes, second half: debt cancellation). Sessions are usually prepared and invitations usually are made by the same two persons. Everyone can bring points on the agenda.*

- Seating order

*Always circle.*

- Other discursive spaces, partial spaces (preparatory meetings, implementing meetings, mailing list, websites)

*Mailing list is used to prepare sessions, circulate information, but not for discussion. No other meetings.*

- Leadership, coordination, responsibility, moderation, facilitation, keeper of minutes/ note taker

*Usually, the same two men who invite to sessions and prepare the agenda, moderate and keep minutes. No leader, only one delegate.*

- Rules of internal communication/decision, participation, roles, functions, competencies

*Some members are accepted as being experts.*

- Relation between newbies and oldtimers

*There is a harmonic relation of newbies and oldtimers.*

- Gender composition

*Only two women.*

- Age composition

*Two persons are around forty years old. Two persons are around thirty years old (the two who prepare sessions). Other participants are around 20-25 years old (students).*

- Ethnicity

*White.*

- Socio-economic position (e.g.: mobile, middle class intellectuals)

*All participants are academics. Those who work mainly work in the thematic field of international financial relations. Students mainly study arts and humanities.*

- Parallel agendas (for example: projects developed outside joint sessions)

*None.*

- Central figures, cliques, outsiders, fellowship, tutelage, friendship, authority, factions, coalitions (Who speaks most with whom? Who is most asked by whom? Who always decides with(out) whom? Who works most with(out) whom?)

*Two men are the central figures. They work together in the place where the sessions are held. They are professional experts. They prepare sessions and agenda. One of them used to be a central figure within Attac Germany. The other manages the finances for Attac-Berlin. Also, one elder man and a young woman are quite active within the group and Attac-Berlin as coordinating members. These four people can be seen as the core of the group. They frequently attend meetings and participate the most. The remaining peripheral participants participate less and often miss sessions. But all members are quite well integrated and equally treated. Central persons do not like their role, because it means more work and responsibility. They try to delegate tasks and avoid influencing too much the group decisions.*

- General atmosphere (respect, use of slang or highly intellectual terminology, aggression, harmony, identity politics)

*The atmosphere is relaxed, jolly, and harmonic. Neither identity politics against persons nor any kind of aggression is visible. A specific mix of every day language and highly intellectual terms is used.*

- Social/emotional homogeneity/heterogeneity of the group,

*High degree of social and emotional homogeneity is visible. That means that all participants are accepted with their differences and therefore are treated as equal participants.*

- Cohesion, integration into the work, group part of the identity of members

*The group is quite cohesive. All participants have common goals and are quite interested in common goal attainment. Integration into the work of the group is only high for the central people, since the peripheral participants lack time and intellectual resources. The group is only for the peripheral participants the main political project. The other participants engage in different context too.*

## Environment of the group

- Parent organizations and networks  
*Attac-Berlin as a part of Attac-Germany*
- Other affiliations with social movements  
*The group takes part in campaigns for international taxes.*
- Competitors/“other”  
*The group distances itself from the German Jubilee network. It sees itself more radical and protest-oriented. But members know that more radical groups like “dissent” do not want to cooperate with them, because they are too moderate.*
- Adversaries/partners outside movements (political parties, trade unions, own organization...)  
*Trade unions, churches, the “Linkspartei” are seen as partners for ad-hoc coalitions. International financial institutions, neo-liberal governments are adversaries.*
- Fluctuation, instability due to socio-economic constraints (“I can not participate, I have to work”, “we can not discuss today, we have no room”)  
*Only some participants lack the time to participate regularly.*
- Degree of autonomy from the environment  
*The group is relative autonomous from its environment. As long as the group roughly keeps its thematic focus and a very general left-progressive political line, there will no interference from the broader Attac network.*

## Action repertoire

- Non-violent vs. violent repertoires  
*Non-violent.*
- Creative vs. non creative tactics  
*Participation in creative tactics. For example participation in protest with paper aeroplanes.*
- Use of new technologies for outbound activities  
*None.*
- How outward-oriented is the group?  
*All activities are related to outward oriented protest or political education.*
- Protest, lobbying, intellectual work, education...  
*Protest and political education.*
- Develops actions on its own or joins pre-structured actions (like urgent actions of amnesty international)  
*Participation both in given and own activities.*
- How dependent are group activities from parent organisations or joint group decisions?  
*No activities without common internal group decision are possible. Activities usually do not need approval by Attac-Berlin.*

## Appendix B: Codebook

### B.1 Session Report

The session report consists of two parts. The first collects data referring to the session's framework and its course (participants, timetable, and agenda). The second part leaves room to note significant differences of the session when compared with previous meetings of the group (e.g. deviating routines, new members, changing roles, etc.). This part is covered in the last string variable SPARTIC<sup>79</sup>.

Up to now, it is open to what extend the data collected in the session report will be used for a systematic contextualisation of the discourse protocols in the sense of proper statistical variables. At least basic session data will be attached to discourse-related data. Therefore, possible variable names are printed in grey for the present. However, the categories will help to keep a systematic and comparable documentation of the group's sessions.

#### **SID Session ID**

*Four-digit code:*

*1 Country*

*2 Serial number of the observed group assigned by the national team*

*\_\_ \_\_ \_\_ 34 Serial session number for the observed meetings*

#### **Country code** to be used for SID

*1 Italy*

*2 UK*

*3 Germany*

*4 France*

*5 Spain*

*6 Switzerland*

*7 Transnational*

#### **Group**

String *Name of the observed group*

#### **SDATE Date**

*Observation date*

#### **SOBSERV Observer**

*Observer's name*

#### **SATTTOT Number of attendants**

*N Total number of attendants.*

As it is likely that the number will fluctuate, please provide the **maximum number**.

#### **SATTFEM Number of female attendants**

*n ♀ Maximum number of female attendants.*

---

<sup>79</sup> Note: The logic of variable names is as follows: the first letter indicates the level of analysis (Session, Agenda **IT**em, Discourse followed by an abbreviation of the variable name (e.g. PARTIC for particularities)

**SDURA Duration**

(min) *Duration of the whole session.*

The duration of the session is easy to register if there is a moderator/chair who opens and ends the session “officially”. If this is not the case, try to identify start and end through the setting and content of discourse (i.e. private issues changing for group or general political issues, speakers address the assembly as a whole, not one or two participants only).

**Time measurement**

In general, we found it useful in our observations to note the time exactly. However, a watch is a must have for the participant observation. We write down the time at least for each agenda item. Additionally, we take the time for every speech act in case of conflict. This is not obligatory but it proved to be helpful to reconstruct the session and assess the participation of single participants. For the purpose of the Session report it will suffice to estimate the duration of agenda items and breaks.

**SBREAK Breaks**

(min) *Total duration of breaks in minutes.*

Breaks are those interruptions of the session that are agreed upon by the assembly or suggested by the moderator/chair.

**SFLUCT Has there been significant fluctuation in the number of attendants?**

String *Records major fluctuation during the session.*

Has there been significant fluctuation in the number of attendants? At the beginning/the end? Related to which issue? **Note only if fluctuation exceeds 20 percent.**

Major fluctuation can be a sign of “voting with the feet”: participants may show their dislike of an issue/discussion by choosing the exit option.

**ITEM Agenda item**

1 ... n *Serial number of agenda item under discussion.*

A session is divided analytically into agenda items understood as separate segments within the session. An agenda item typically comprises a discussion or a cluster of contributions related to one issue. Excurses or subordinated discussions are considered part of the related agenda item. Of course, moderation and/or an agenda distributed in advance are helpful to identify separate agenda items. Aberrations and blending with other issues, however, are likely to appear in reality and make the distinction of agenda items much harder. Changes in the type of communication and/or transitional phrases (“so much for this issue”, “any further questions?”) will help to identify a new agenda item.

Note: single items might vanish because of the intense discussion of another issue (record in variable for session particularities SPARTIC).

Similarly, ad hoc items may emerge.

**ITDUR Duration of agenda item**

Duration (min) *Estimated duration of discussion related to the agenda item in question.*

**ITDES Description of agenda item**

string *Description of the main issue under discussion and the most relevant related information.*

Guiding questions to be considered are the following: What is at stake? How does the discussion proceed? Is the agenda item related to an issue internal or external to the group? Is there a proposal discussed? Is there a hidden conflict? Who are the main actors/factions? Is this an ad hoc agenda item (not on the agenda initially agreed upon).

**ITCOM1 Type of communication 1**

**ITCOM2 Type of communication 2**

*Chronologically first/second dominant mode of interaction observed with regard to the agenda item.*

A brainstorming regarding the text for a banner is followed by a discussion. ITCOM1=[4], ITCOM2=[3]

1 *Input*

Speech, mostly to inform others on a specific issue.

An invited guest holds a speech about changes in the Bolkestein directive to keep the assembly informed about gains and losses in the struggle against it.

2 *Separate contributions*

Several speakers address the assembly in unrelated contributions.

Solidarity round: a dozen speakers tell the assembly about upcoming events.

3 *Discussion*

Participants debate a specific issue (or several issues at the same time).

4 *Brainstorming*

Participants exchange associations with regard to a specific issue.

Brainstorming can be observed particularly when the group deals with an issue in an early stage.

The group thinks of possible ways to express their protest against the visit of Vladimir Putin. Everybody who has an idea, shares it with the others.

5 *Go-Round*

Every participant gives his opinion on a specific issue. In contrast to [4 Brainstorming] a go round aims at assessing different opinions, not vague ideas, in a late stage of discussion. Mostly, a go round is a means deliberately chosen by the moderator to integrate all participants and obtain an impression of the group opinion.

6 *Suggestion*

The agenda item consists of a suggestion presented to the assembly. That suggestion might then be dealt with in a discussion or in a voting.

A sub-group needs money for an action and suggests taking it from group funds.

7 *Output production*

Participants exchange about the production of a tangible output, i.e. the text of a flyer. This situation is more likely to be observed in small groups.

**ITPART Participation related to the agenda item**

*Participation during the course of the agenda item.*

Participation is estimated for the course of the agenda item as a whole. Active participation means to make at least one statement that receives full attention of at least a considerable part of the attendants.

1 *Only one person is talking (e.g. an input not followed by questions)*

10 – 100 *If more than one speaker is involved, participation is estimated in steps of 10 percent **around the attributed value.***

Accordingly, 50 means: about half of the attendants were involved in the discussion

**ITDID Conflict**

*If a discourse protocol exists for a conflict that emerged in the context of the agenda item, please provide the discourse ID. If there is no such protocol, leave blank.*

----- Discourse ID of related discourse

**ITDEC Mode of Decision**

*Indicates how a decision was taken*

Note the difference between everybody agreeing [4] and nobody contradicting [1].

1 *Nodding, tacit agreement*

Is coded when a proposal was made and nobody objected so that it was clear to everyone that this is the decision of the group.

2 *Straw poll*

Is coded when a straw poll was made so formally no decision was taken, but the 'balances of power' became visible to everyone.

3 *Majority vote*

Coded if there was an explicit majority vote (by raising hands, casting ballots etc.)

4 *Unanimous vote*

Is coded when there was explicit consent by everyone (either by a vote which was intended to be a majority vote but turned out to be unanimous or by everybody agreeing explicitly.)

9 *Not applicable*

Coded if no decision was taken

**ITOUT Result of agenda item**

string *Outcome of a decision*

Results of a discussion without tangible consequences should be written down in the description of the agenda item ITEM.

    Maria writes a press release in the group's name.

    Three quarters of the group voted against the text for a flyer proposed by one faction.

**SPARTIC Session Particularities**

string *Actions, group behaviour and constellations in the observed session that deviate from group routines as they are specified in the group report.*

Please note all particularities regarding: preparation of the session, place of meeting, type of invitation, seating order, composition (roles: facilitator, note-taker, guests, newbies; gender; age; minorities), agenda-setting, hidden agenda, rules of discussion/decision-making, participation, atmosphere, respect, conflict-cooperation, power, time-constraints, taboos

B.2 Session Report – example

<b>Session ID</b>
-------------------

<b>Part 1: Obligatory Information</b>	Group <i>Attac-Berlin</i>	Date <i>26.3.06</i>	Observer <i>Mundo &amp; Simon</i>	Duration (start, end) <i>2½ hours (8.15-10.45)</i>	Breaks <i>½ hour</i>
---------------------------------------	------------------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------------	---	-------------------------

Has there been significant fluctuation in the number of attendants? <i>Yes. Many participants left too early to discuss the last item</i>	Number of attendants: N (♀/♂) <i>15 (6/9)</i>
--	--

Agenda item	Duration	Description (what is at stake (is there a proposal)? Internal/external impact? Hidden conflict?)	Type of communication	Participation (1; 10-100)	Discourse (DID)	Decision mode	Decision result
1	12 min	<i>Report about demonstration by one coordinator. Low mobilisation was criticized by some people. The potential conflict about the low mobilization was not discussed further.</i>	<i>Input by a single person</i>	1	no	n.a.	none
2	20 min	<i>ad-hoc issue: Reaction to repression at the demonstration: diverse forms of action are being raised. Law-suit against police is too time-consuming to some in the group.</i>	<i>Brainstorming / followed by discussion</i>	60	yes (see no. 1)	consensus	<i>delegated to a committee who checks opportunities for a law-suit</i>
3	22 min	<i>Participation in a campaign to promote international taxation: should the group take part in the campaign. Some participants want more information on the campaign</i>	<i>Go-Round (every participant gives his opinion) / followed by straw poll</i>	100	no	postponed	none
4	10 min	<i>Proposal by preparatory group: Financial support for posters of a sub-group. Reveals organisational conflict between two subgroups</i>	<i>Discussion for decision</i>	70	Yes (see no. 2)	Voting	<i>50 € allocated to sub-group</i>
5	15 min	<i>Miscellaneous: reports about activities of other groups, calls for participation</i>	<i>single, separate contributions</i>	30	no	n.a.	none
6	35 min	<i>leaflet editing: concerns about wording in a proposed text for a leaflet. Search for alternatives ends with an agreed upon text-version.</i>	<i>output production</i>	40	no	no concerns left	<i>leaflet ready for press</i>
7	2 min	<i>Proposal that all should make donations to improve the current financial situation of the group is suggested to be postponed to the next session.</i>	<i>procedural suggestion by a single person</i>	1	no	postponed	none

<b>Part 2: Session Particularities</b>	Could you observe a deviation from the standard praxis of the group with reference to one of the following issues? Please note all particularities regarding: preparation of the session, place of meeting, type of invitation, seating order, composition (roles: facilitator, note-taker, guests, newbies; gender; age; minorities), agenda-setting, hidden agenda, rules of discussion/decision-making, participation, atmosphere, respect, conflict-cooperation, power, time-constraints, taboos
--	---

*two newbies made the internal discussion about the allocation of money more moderate.*

*Still, the atmosphere was not as pleasant as normal. A conflictual, antagonist attitude prevailed.*

## Appendix C: Codebook

### C.1 Discourse Protocol

A discourse protocol is coded for every explicit conflict emerging in the discussion. Discourses are referred to in the session protocol in variable ITDID.

#### **DID Discourse-ID**

Eight-digit code:  
1 Country (see SID)  
2 Group (see SID)  
34 Session Number (see SID)  
56 Agenda Item Number  
78 Discourse Number

----- Composed of the following Variables

#### **Agenda Item Number**

*Issue code to be used for DID*

Corresponds to the issue number stated in the left column of the session report.

1 .. n *I = first observed meeting of that group etc.*

#### **Discourse Number**

*Discourse code to be used for DID*

Starting from 1 for each Session, assigned by each observer

1 .. n *I = first observed discourse in that session etc.*

#### **DSUBJ Subject of discourse**

string *Description of the subject of this discourse.*

Describe the main question which the debate was focused on. In case of two or more independent discourses taking place at the same time, relate to one discourse only. If there are sub-questions, list the relevant ones.

Should the group participate in a forthcoming demonstration organized by the trade unions against cuts of welfare subsidies?  
Subordinated question: does it make sense to mobilise on the date foreseen by the unions?

#### **DREF1 Main reference point of discourse (numeric)**

#### **DREF2 Second important reference point of discourse (only coded if necessary)**

*Classification of the subject of this discourse*

Reference point for the analysed discourse. Relevant for the coding is the way in which the main question stated in DSUBJ is debated by the group. DREF2 is coded only if the discourse has an ambiguous reference point.

If the debate does not target principal grounds but rather whether or

not the participation of the group will make any difference in a demonstration of an estimated few thousand participants, [4] is coded. [7] would be coded if the discussion eventually turned into a principal debate about the groups relation to the unions.

1 *Internal organisation*

Questions which mainly regard the rather practical organisation of the group itself or the organisation of the meeting. Questions of rather short term relevance. Does not comprise questions which are meant to have a long term effect on the groups structure (see code 2)

Should the press release written by Elena checked by another member of the group?

2 *Internal structure*

Questions which mainly regard the group itself but not just organisational matters but more fundamental issues of the long term structure of the group

Should the network against the privatisation of the municipal water company have a formal speaker?

3 *External delegation*

Questions about the delegation of group members for a meeting of another group (or subgroup).

Should we send anyone to the meeting of the euromayday-preparatory group?

Note: If the main question is however, whether the group should participate in the Euromayday at all, then [4] is coded, even though this discussion might also comprise the question of delegation.

4 *External group action (organisation/tactics)*

Questions of collective actions carried out by the group.

5 *Strategic decision*

Questions of collective strategy of the group, i.e. decisions which are not primarily directed at a concrete collective activity but which have a long term perspective regarding the group's strategic orientation.

Does it make sense to address our target group in press releases or should we try to concentrate on influencing people directly?

6 *Metadiscourse*

A discourse about the discussion: style of speech, personal conflicts impeding a factual discussion, but also discussions about what the result of the preceding discussion is supposed to be.

Does Muriel take advantage of her role as a moderator to support her faction of the group?

7 *Value conflict*

Questions of principle addressing fundamental values of the group. This type of discourse might evolve from another discourse. Of course, it is also possible that a principal debate about values is foreseen on the agenda.

Do we encourage resistance in case of police repression?

9 *Other*

**DREFOT1 Specification of DREF “other”**

**DREFOT2**

string *Specify type of discourse. Try to be precise enough to allow recoding into new value for DREFOT1 and DREFOT2.*

**DDURA Duration of discourse**

*Duration of this discourse in minutes*

A discourse starts, when the first person contradicts another person and ends when nobody addresses this issue any longer. If no detailed record of the discourse is available, the duration has to be estimated (see TIME MEASUREMENT, SDURA).

1 .. n *Value in minutes*

**DATTTOT Number of attendants**

1 .. n *Number of people present during this discourse*

**DPART Number of participants**

*Number of people who actively participated in this discourse*

Active participation means to make at least one statement that aims at receiving full attention of the whole group.

1 .. n *Number of active participants*

**DFPART Number of female participants**

*Number of women who actively participated in this discourse*

Active participation means to make at least one statement that aims at receiving full attention of the whole group.

1 .. n *Number of active female participants*

**DRECI Reciprocity**

*Degree of reciprocity in this discourse*

Indicates whether most speakers referred to others' positions during the discussion implicitly or explicitly or whether they made statements regardless of what other speakers said before. Consider also the intensity and explicitness of reciprocity to differentiate the code.

Note: see also DFOCUS

1 *Low*

Most or all speakers did not refer to other speakers

2 *Medium*

There was a significant number of speakers who did not refer to others

3 *High*

Most speakers referred to one or more speakers

**DSYMM Symmetry**

### *Symmetry of relations between speakers*

Indicates to what degree speakers treated each other as equal discussants. This variable does not refer to the quantitative distribution of speech-acts but to the way the speakers relate to each other. In an asymmetric constellation one side is considered/treated as inferior or less important than the other side.

Note: Asymmetry should not be confused with “uncivility” (DUNCIV), e.g. old friends, who respect each other as equals might in a heated discussion call the other an idiot. In this case, this speech-act is not an expression of asymmetry but of uncivility. However, in other situations, attacking someone personally might very well be an expression of asymmetry.

- 1 *Very asymmetric*  
In most speech acts the speakers did not treat each other as equals.
- 2 *Asymmetric*  
In most speech acts others were not treated as equals, however a considerable minority of speech acts did treat the others as equals
- 3 *Symmetric*  
In most speech acts others were treated as equals, but a considerable minority did not
- 4 *Very Symmetric*  
With one or two exceptional speech acts the speakers treated each other as equals

### **DPOWER** **Type of power**

#### *Type of power relevant in this discourse*

This is to grasp the dimension of soft-power (SP) versus hard-power (HP). SP is communicative power based on words and symbols. Arguments are the key source of SP.

HP is non-communicative power ultimately based on material, physical or similar kinds of sanctions, e.g. expressing a veto, threat of exit, rule of majority

The scale measures the degree, to which hard power was present in the discourse. A high degree of hard power is present when either many speakers rely on some kind of hard power or when one or a few speakers use hard power to such a degree, that the whole discussion is dominated by this. Typical speech acts addressing hard power are offers as well as demands.

One way to assess the importance of hard power is a thought experiment: Whenever it makes an important difference *who* (or how many) put forward a certain argument or position, there is relevant hard power. There can be various reasons why a specific speakers arguments count more which will be coded in DPSOUR.

Note that hard power can be used in a symmetric as well as an asymmetric manner, so asymmetry should not be confused with power.

The group is divided into two factions regarding the question of whether or not the group should support the demonstration of the

unions. Since the group has a long tradition of internal conflicts, they know that even though the two positions are very distinct (one side is absolutely in favour, the other absolutely against), this issue is not going to split the group. But they have to find a consensus of what to do. Since the pro-faction is the majority, they discuss about a demo-appeal which is to be published beforehand and which shall include some criticism directed against the unions. The discussion about this appeal is quite controversial but all diverging opinions are respected. Since both sides know each others positions already very well, there are not a lot of arguments exchanged but mainly different demands and offers are made and either rejected or accepted until the leaflet is finished. This is an example for code [4] (very hard power) because the discussion was primarily based on the veto position of the minority. (Note: DSYMM would be coded [4])

An example for asymmetric soft power:

In a group, there is a big value conflict about whether to cooperate with unions and NGOs. The discussion is very emotional and heated because this conflict has been latent for quite some time. People shout at each other. Both sides however try to convince those who did not yet take sides, putting forward the various arguments each side holds. Since in this heated debate it is not relevant who says which arguments, it does rest mainly on communicative power (Code [1]). Due to the asymmetric behaviour, DSYMM would be coded [1].

- 1 *Soft power clearly prevailing*
- 2 *Rather soft power*
- 3 *Rather hard power*
- 4 *Hard power clearly prevailing*

#### **DPSOUR Source of hard power**

*Source of hard power relevant in this discourse*

To be coded if DPOWER is not [1]. This applies also vice versa: If a source of hard power is coded here, then DPOWER has to be [2], [3], or [4].

Specifies what sources of hard power speakers could rely on. If different speakers had different sources of hard power, then the most important source is coded. The most important source is that source which at the end of the discussion made the biggest difference, i.e. influenced the decision the most or (if there was no decision) helped to make one position hegemonial.

- 0 *Not applicable*  
Coded if no relevant hard power  
In the second example given above in DPOWER the code would be [0] because there is no hard power involved.
- 1 *Reputation*  
Speakers hold authority because of the reputation they have in the group, e.g. because they are experts.
- 2 *Representation of others*

In their contributions, speakers refer to others they represent. This includes 'others' present and absent in the meeting.

In the first example given above in DPOWER the code would be [2] because all or most speaker gained their weight by speaking for one of the two sides, i.e. they represented a number of others.

3 *Threat/disruption*

Speakers gain power from posing a threat to others or disrupting the discourse, e.g. they show their ability or will to disrupt the meeting, leave the group, split the group, give insider information to enemies or harm the group in other ways.

4 *Procedural authority*

Speakers resort to their role to influence the course of the meeting. This is mainly the authority of the facilitator.

5 *Commitment/initiative*

Speakers gain power from their readiness to take over a specific task or from their 'credits' they have earned with their extraordinary commitment in the past.

9 *Other*

**DPSOUROT Specification of DPSOUR "other"**

string *Specify other source of hard power. Try to be precise enough to allow recoding into new value of DPSOUR.*

**DCOOP Competitiveness**

*Degree of competitiveness between speakers*

Indicates to what degree the discussion was a competition between the various positions of the speakers. The dimension ranges from competitive relations to cooperative speech acts.

Indicators for high competitiveness are speech acts in which speakers give no indication that they are ready to change their position, e.g. when they seem quite convinced that there is no form of power (neither hard nor soft) to make them change their mind. This might be indicated by an assertive speech style as well as through continuous repetition of the same position.

Indicators of low competitiveness (high degree of cooperation) are such speech acts where speakers signify that they are prepared to change their position, e.g. when they seem unsure of whether their opinion is right or even when they are convinced about their position but are willing to compromise with the others. This might be explicitly indicated by speakers ("This is just a spontaneous thought but I think....", "How about if we...", "If you are ready to delete this sentence, I will be fine with the press release" etc.) or signified by tone of voice, thinking pauses etc.

Note: This variable relates to the attitude/behaviour of speakers, not to the envisaged outcome of the debate, i.e. if speakers argue in favour of a compromise, this does not necessarily mean, that they are cooperative. For example, if they continuously uphold a specific compromise, arguing that this is the best compromise and everybody should agree, then this is a competitive behaviour.

- 1 *Cooperative*  
Most or all speakers showed a cooperative attitude
- 2 *Rather cooperative*  
A cooperative attitude was prevalent but a considerable minority acted in a competitive way
- 3 *Rather competitive*  
A competitive attitude was prevalent but a considerable minority acted in a cooperative way
- 4 *Competitive*  
Most or all speakers showed a competitive attitude

#### **DCONFL Conflict situation**

##### *Type of conflict situation*

Describes the type of conflict situation during the discourse regarding identifiable 'camps' or factions amongst the discussants.

- 1 *Dissent by one or a few*  
One main faction is challenged by just one or a few people
- 2 *Dissent by a considerable minority*  
One main faction is challenged by a minority
- 3 *Bipolar*  
Two factions of about the same strength are identifiable
- 4 *Multipolar*  
Several different factions are identifiable
- 5 *Diffuse*  
No clear factions are identifiable

#### **DUNCIV Uncivility**

##### *Degree of uncivility amongst the discussants*

Describes to what degree speakers addressed others in an uncivil way. Indicators for an uncivil discourse are especially personal attacks (they do not need to be very fierce) but also riotous speech against groups of people who are present.

Note: see also DSYMM.

- 0 *No uncivility*  
No personal attack whatsoever.
- 1 *Rare uncivility*  
Just one or two uncivil interventions, though they might have been harsh.
- 2 *Some uncivility*  
Uncivil behaviour occurred to a considerable extent
- 3 *Frequent uncivility*  
Uncivil behaviour dominated the discussion

## **DFOCUS Focus of discourse**

*Degree to which the discourse is focused around one question (“focusedness”)*

This measures the degree to which (temporally) consecutive interventions relate to the same question (as specified in DSUBJ).

The issue at stake is clearly the approval of the budget for the next year but some people talk about activities planned for the next year, others talk about money in general and again others do make proposals on the issue of the budget. This debate is unfocused or maybe semi-focused, depending on whether the three issues addressed take up about the same time (=unfocused) or one of them takes up clearly the biggest part (=semi-focused).

In a situation with a long list of speakers, where it takes quite a while until a speaker who raises their hand finally gets to speak, several questions might be discussed at the same time and speakers might clearly address the specific question which they relate to but since other issues have been addressed by most the speakers before and after, this is coded as an unfocused discourse [1].

Note however: Since most speakers did address the specific question about which want to make a statement (thus implicitly relating to other speakers positions in that debate), this example discourse will be coded DRECI = [2] or even [3].

- 1 *Unfocused*  
There is no clear focus on a specific question (various or no clear question is addressed by the speakers)
- 2 *Semi-focused*  
There is one question which most speakers address, but a significant proportion of interventions is not about this subject
- 3 *Focused*  
There is clearly one question being debated with no or negligible interventions directed at other issues.

## **DATMO Atmosphere**

*Degree of negative emotional tension during discourse.*

The coding of this variable largely relies on the observers' impression of what most people in the group feel.

Note that a heated and emotional debate does not necessarily imply a tense atmosphere because this depends on the discussion culture of the group. A battlesome group regularly involved in heated debates will not feel a tense atmosphere during such debates. So generally, the coding should be considered relative to the standard of each group.

Indicators for increased tensivity are: The audience moaning, making shirty comments or of course speakers explicitly addressing the uncomfortable atmosphere.

Whenever a single provocative intervention by one speaker does not lead to people being upset, visibly angry, etc. but on the contrary, the

group deals with this provocation in a relaxed way, then this incident is *not* an indicator for a tense atmosphere but in the contrary it underlines how relaxed the atmosphere is. If however, the majority seems quite angry about the provocation but this is not addressed, and speakers *pretend* to be cool about the issue, then this is not a relaxed atmosphere.

- 1 *Relaxed*
- 2 *Mixed*
- 3 *Tense*

#### **DDECMOD Mode of decision**

*Indicates how a decision was taken*

Note the difference between everybody agreeing [5] and nobody contradicting [2].

- 1 *Not applicable*  
Coded if no decision was taken
- 2 *Nodding, tacit agreement*  
Is coded when a proposal was made and nobody objected so that it was clear to everyone that this is the decision of the group.
- 3 *Straw poll*  
Is coded when a straw poll was made so formally no decision was taken, but the 'balances of power' became visible to everyone.
- 4 *Majority vote*  
Coded if there was an explicit majority vote (by raising hands, casting ballots etc.)
- 5 *Unanimous vote*  
Is coded when there was explicit consent by everyone (either by a vote which was intended to be a majority vote but turned out to be unanimous or by everybody explicitly agreeing.)

#### **DDECOUT Outcome of discourse**

*Outcome of a discourse when a decision has been made.*

Note that the word consensus is used in a much broader sense by activists. It very often comprises the categories [5], [6] and [7] below.

- 1 *None*  
No decision was taken
- 2 *Postponing*  
The decision was explicitly postponed to a later point in time
- 3 *Delegation of decision*  
The decision was delegated to a different group or person
- 4 *Decree*  
The decision does not reflect the preferences of all participants. It was taken notwithstanding objections against this decision.

- 5 *Acclamation*  
One proposal received positive reactions (e.g. applause) and is thus conceived hegemonic. This is not necessarily considered a decision however.
- 6 *Compromise*  
A compromise was reached, different preferences remained however
- 7 *Full consensus*  
All or most participants are fully convinced by the decision taken.

## **DORIGIN** **Origin of conflict**

*Describes the previous history of the conflict*

Note: Point of reference is the actual discourse, not the subject in general.

Note that “pre-structuration” [2] and “preset on agenda” [3] are not mutually exclusive. It is very likely that the prepared proposal was also preset on the agenda.

- 1 *Continuation of an earlier discussion*
- 2 *Pre-structuration*  
The subject of the conflict has been dealt with in a preparatory stage.  

A proposal was prepared by a working group in order to discuss it in this meeting
- 3 *Preset on agenda*  
The debated question was either explicitly announced as an agenda item or there was an agenda item of which it was obvious that this specific debate (or a very similar one) would evolve
- 4 *Gradually evolving*  
The question discussed evolved from a discussion about a different issue or a primarily very unfocused/general debate which eventually centred on this question.  

Note: for a conflict to be coded as “gradually evolving” it does not suffice to have a presentation about the subject or a general exchange of information about the subject. There has to be some other controversial discussion prior to this discourse. Otherwise [5] is coded.
- 5 *Spontaneous*  
The conflict did not evolve and was not foreseen but was addressed by one or more speakers, e.g. when after the break a group of three people said they wanted to talk about the macholike behaviour of some men in the group.  

One person complains about a speech held in Turkish during the demonstration which she could not understand and was therefore unsure if she agreed with the speaker. Other speakers react and say that Turkish was a legitimate language in an immigrant neighbourhood.

## **DPRESS** **Time pressure**

*Time pressure (related or unrelated to decision)*

Time pressure can result from external pressure (e.g. a deadline or an event

that requires a reaction) or internal necessities (e.g. time running out for the actual session). It is coded to the extent the discourse is affected.

1 *None*

Time was not relevant during this discourse.

Note: a group might also perceive time pressure, but deliberately choose to ignore it.

If we can't find a consensus we will have to go on with the debate next week. We will not let this kind of external pressure affect our decision.

2 *Somewhat*

Time pressure played a role in the discussion, but it did not affect the discourse significantly. (e.g. Time pressure is mentioned during the discussion or people start to leave, because it is late)

3 *High*

Coded if time pressure is high and obviously affects the discussion

### **DDECORI Decision-orientation**

*Degree to which the discussion is oriented towards a decision*

Relevant is the proportion of speakers who make explicit proposals for a decision in relation to those who merely give their opinion without expecting or hoping for a decision on the matter.

'Decision' refers this specific session. A debate which is expected to finally lead to a decision (maybe in a couple of weeks) is not considered decision-oriented.

0 *No decision-orientation*

The discussion was just an exchange of opinions with no explicit relation to a decision to be taken in this session.

1 *Some decision-orientation*

Some speakers made a concrete proposal or stated their preferences with regard to other proposals, but it remained unclear if a decision would be taken or at least some speakers did not expect a decision to be taken.

2 *Definitely*

Most speakers made a concrete proposal or stated their preferences with regard to another proposals, expecting (or wanting) a decision to be taken on the matter.

### **DMODERA Role performance of moderator**

*States whether the moderator is mainly active or passive*

Note: An active moderator does not necessarily need to be a partisan moderator, actively taking sides for a specific position. (DMODDIS)

1 *Active moderation*

An active moderator actively listens and tries to structure the discussion, makes summaries, presents compromise proposals, gives additional

information to clarify misunderstandings etc.

2 *Passive moderation*

A passive moderator understands his role limited to a minimum of tasks, such as starting the meeting, calling people to the floor, calling the next item on the agenda or perhaps asking for silence.

**DMODDIS Moderator as discussant**

*States to what degree the moderator implicitly acts as a discussant*

0 *No*

The moderator distinguishes between his role as a moderator and as a discussant e.g. by leaving the chair

1 *Hardly*

2 *Strongly*

C.2 Discourse Protocol - example

DID	six-digit code: 1 Country 2 Group 34 Session number 56 Agenda item number 78 Discourse number	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td style="width: 12.5%;">3</td> <td style="width: 12.5%;">2</td> <td style="width: 12.5%;">0</td> <td style="width: 12.5%;">2</td> <td style="width: 12.5%;">0</td> <td style="width: 12.5%;">4</td> <td style="width: 12.5%;">0</td> <td style="width: 12.5%;">1</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="font-size: 8px;">1</td> <td style="font-size: 8px;">2</td> <td style="font-size: 8px;">3</td> <td style="font-size: 8px;">4</td> <td style="font-size: 8px;">5</td> <td style="font-size: 8px;">6</td> <td style="font-size: 8px;">7</td> <td style="font-size: 8px;">8</td> </tr> </table>		3	2	0	2	0	4	0	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
3	2	0	2	0	4	0	1												
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8												
DSUBJ	Subject of discourse (string)	Should the group participate in a forthcoming demonstration organized by the trade unions against cuts of welfare subsidies?																	
DREF1 DREF2	Reference point of discourse (numeric): 1 Internal organisation 2 Internal structure 3 External delegation 4 External group action (organisation/tactics) 5 Strategic decision 6 Metadiscourse 7 Value conflict 9 Other	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">4</td> <td style="width: 65%;"> <i>the issue is not debated on principal grounds but rather whether or not the participation of the group will make any difference in a demonstration of an estimated few thousand participants</i> </td> <td style="width: 20%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: right;">DREF1</td> <td style="text-align: center;">DREF2</td> </tr> </table>	4	<i>the issue is not debated on principal grounds but rather whether or not the participation of the group will make any difference in a demonstration of an estimated few thousand participants</i>			DREF1	DREF2											
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DREFOT1 DREFOT2	Specification if DREFER „other“	DREFOT1	DREFOT2																
DDURA	Duration of discourse (in minutes)	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">0</td> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> </tr> </table>			2	0													
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DATTTOT	People present during the discourse	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">5</td> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> </tr> </table>			1	5													
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DPART	Number of participants who made statements	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> </tr> </table>			1	2													
	1	2																	
DFPART	Number of female participants who made statements	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">5</td> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> </tr> </table>				5													
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DRECI	Reciprocity: 1 Low 2 Medium 3 High	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="width: 85%;"> <i>most speakers referred to one or more other speakers</i> </td> </tr> </table>		3	<i>most speakers referred to one or more other speakers</i>														
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DSYMM	Relationship of speakers: 1 Very asymmetric 2 Asymmetric 3 Symmetric 4 Very symmetric	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="width: 85%;"> <i>with one or two exceptional speech acts, the speakers treated each other as equals</i> </td> </tr> </table>		3	<i>with one or two exceptional speech acts, the speakers treated each other as equals</i>														
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DPOWER	Hard vs. soft power: 1 Hard power clearly prevailing 2 Rather hard power 3 Rather soft power 4 Soft power clearly prevailing	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">4</td> <td style="width: 85%;"> <i>the speakers tried to convince each other to participate or not participate in the demonstration</i> </td> </tr> </table>		4	<i>the speakers tried to convince each other to participate or not participate in the demonstration</i>														
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DPSOUR	Source of hard power: 0 Not applicable 1 Reputation 2 Representation of others 3 Threat/disruption 4 Procedural authority 5 Commitment/initiative 9 Other	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">0</td> <td style="width: 85%;"> <i>no use of hard power</i> </td> </tr> </table>	0	<i>no use of hard power</i>	DPSOUROT Specification if DPSOUR „other“														
0	<i>no use of hard power</i>																		
DCOOP	Cooperation vs. Competition: 1 Cooperative 2 Rather cooperative 3 Rather competitive 4 Competitive	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="width: 85%;"> <i>nobody insisted on his/her position too strongly. There was obviously the will to find a solution that satisfies everybody.</i> </td> </tr> </table>		1	<i>nobody insisted on his/her position too strongly. There was obviously the will to find a solution that satisfies everybody.</i>														
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DCONFL	Conflict situation: 1 Dissent by one or very few 2 Dissent by a considerable minority 3 Bipolar 4 Multipolar 5 Diffuse	2 <i>during the first half of the discourse, around one third of the speakers opted against participating in the demonstration</i>
DUNCIV	Uncivility: 0 None 1 Rare 2 Some 3 Frequent	0 <i>except one brief remark, no signs of uncivility</i>
DFOCUS	Focus of discourse: 1 Unfocused 2 Semi-focused 3 Focused	3 <i>almost all statements referred directly to the issue</i>
DATMO	Atmosphere: 1 Relaxed 2 Mixed 3 Tense	2 <i>there was a short moment when two people became angry</i>
DDECMOD	Mode of decision: 1 Not applicable 2 Nodding, tacit agreement 3 Straw poll 4 Majority vote 5 Unanimous vote	4 <i>at some point, a quasi-straw poll was made on who would actually participate in the demo; around two thirds raised their hands; 2 speakers of the remained third said, they would only participate because of their sense of group solidarity; 3 others said, they would not want or have no time to participate</i>
DDECOUT	Outcome of decision: 1 None 2 Postponing 3 Delegation of decision 4 Decree 5 Acclamation 6 Compromise 7 Full consensus	1 <i>there was no decision on whether or not the group as a whole should participate; the choice was implicitly left to each individual group member</i>
DORIGIN	Origin of conflict: 1 Continuation of earlier conflict 2 Pre-structuration 3 Preset on agenda 4 Gradually evolving 5 Spontaneous	3 <i>the moderator said in the beginning that the issue of the group participating in the demo should be decided in this meeting</i>
DPRESS	Time pressure, related or unrelated to decision: 1 None 2 Somewhat 3 High	2 <i>some time pressure because two people mentioned during the debate that two other and probably time-consuming items are on the agenda</i>
DDECORI	Decision-orientation of discourse: 0 None 1 Somewhat 2 Definitely	3 <i>for most parts of the discussion, a group decision was sought but eventually this idea was abandoned in favour of an individual decision</i>
DMODERA	Role performance of moderator: 1 Active moderation 2 Passive moderation	2 <i>the chair of this meeting served as a quasi-moderator but was fairly passive during the discourse</i>
DMODDIS	Moderator acts as discussant: 1 No 2 Hardly 3 Strongly	2 <i>the chair once argued in favour of a group decision but later seemed to tend towards an individual choice without taking a strong and clear stance</i>