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# GRASSROOTS TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL MOVEMENT ACTIVISM: THE CASE OF PEOPLES' GLOBAL ACTION\*†

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*The process of globalization has profoundly affected social movement activism. Globalization from above is countered by a globalization from below. Social movement activists in different parts of the world are linked by multiple formal and informal ties. This article argues that much of today's social movement activism takes place in a transboundary space enabling social movements to coordinate their activities. To theoretically account for this phenomenon, we need to move beyond the state-centric perspective that has informed most of the theories and analysis of social movements. This article illustrates this transnational social movement activism by describing the informal workings of the transnational network of Peoples' Global Action.*

The protest in Seattle in 1999 against the millennium meeting of the World Trade Organization brought to the world's attention another manifestation of an ongoing process of increasing transnational cooperation among a wide variety of social movement actors. Even though transnational movement activism is not *per se* a new phenomenon (cf. Keck and Sikkink 1998, Rucht 2002, Hierlmeier 2002, Seidman in Guidry et al. 2000:344), what distinguishes today's transnational movement from its historical precursors are the heightened capacities to co-operate and coordinate movement activities across nation-state boundaries. A geographically dispersed activist scene has become a challenging political force vis-à-vis power structures by staging simultaneous and concerted protest events. For instance, on the day when the counter-summit protest in Seattle took place, solidarity protests, taking reference of each other, occurred in over 100 cities around the globe. Even the centralized protest in Seattle, which received extensive media coverage, drew on ideas, resources, and protest participation from activists from far-flung places.

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This article attempts two things: First, it tries to conceptualize dimensions for the study of transnational social movements and empirically demonstrate them by examining the protest mobilization against the meeting of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in 2001 in Prague, in which the global activist network of Peoples' Global Action (henceforth PGA) played a major role. Second, based on the ethnographic study of PGA, the article highlights the importance and the prevalence of informal organizing and mobilizing structures for transnational movement activism.

## DEFINITIONS

Let me provide definitions of key terms that will be used throughout the paper. Social movements, according to my conceptualization, have to be understood as a sustained interaction (formal as well as informal) among individuals, groups, collectives, networks, and organizations that share a collective identity in order to bring about, prevent, or undo social, political and cultural change outside the established political institutions through extra-parliamentary tactics. Therefore, a social movement is the sum total of all actors that are banded together by a shared collective identity. This means that the network of PGA is one actor within the broader global justice movement, but not a movement in itself.

I use the term "global" to signify the geographic spread of activist groups to more than two continental regions. In distinction, the term "transnational" stands for the cross-national organizing processes among movement participants. A global social movement is, therefore, a movement whose participating actors can be found in at least three continents. A transnational movement, in contrast, may not necessarily be a global social movement but entails the communication and cooperation of movement actors from at least two different countries.

Supranational institutions are defined as economic, political, military, or cultural institutions whose functionaries and/or members come from more than two different countries and whose policies affect the lives of people that are not represented by fellow countrymen in those institutions.

Because one focus of this paper is on the organizational mechanism of the network of PGA, the word "organization" can be used in two profoundly different ways. First, the term "organization" stands for the formalization and institutionalization of movement activities. The establishment of formalized processes, such as pre-described posts, organizational charts with clear role descriptions, mechanisms of recruitment and clear membership criteria, legal status and resource management, etc. signifies the first meaning of organization.

The second meaning of organization refers to the activity of movement actors to purposefully pursue a specific movement goal, such as planning a protest event or an activist conference. To make those events happen, activists have to put energy into allocating human and material resources. This, however, does not entail the creation of a permanent institutional vehicle through which those activities are carried out.

This distinction is crucial because it dovetails with the argument made above that many social movement activities are carried out by informal and ad hoc arrangements and not through formal institutions.

### ***Informal Movement Structures***

There is a stark contrast in how distinct social movement theories depict core organizational processes of social movements. Scholars embracing the resource mobilization theory (RMT) pay great attention to the more formal and institutionalized mechanisms of movement activism. Coming out of the rational choice paradigm, the resource mobilization approach sees a social movement as a rational actor with clear political aims. In order to further their political interests, this theoretic paradigm argues that the key to the success or failure of social movements is their ability to garner and effectively manage scarce human and material resources. Formal and rigidly structured movements are seen as conducive, even imperative, to provide the organizational framework for effective resource allocation. Indicative of the importance of the formalistic entrepreneurial approach to social movements is the emphasis research mobilization scholars put on organizational leaders, clear membership definition and task description, as well as on the existence of effective communication networks (cf. Morris 1984; Jenkins 1983).

The new social movement approach (NSM), in contrast, argues that most crucial movement activities take place within loose and informal social circles. Rather than seeing movements shaped by professional movement entrepreneurs and formal organizations, this perspective posits that social movements are composed mostly of individuals and small groups that, on occasion, link up with each other to pull together their resources to stage movement events. Many movement activities occur through the interaction of activists in loosely bounded, fluid, and continuously changing informal networks. Gerlach and Hine (1970:xvii) aptly described these personal networks among activists as “polycephalous, cellular organization composed of units reticulated by various personal, structural, and ideological ties.”

Whereas the rational choice approach to social movements looks primarily at the consolidation of resource management under the canopy of mainly formal organizations (“organization” in the first sense elaborated above), the NSM approach highlights the sporadic and ad hoc nature of organization (“organization” in the second sense).

Piven and Cloward (1977) added another counter argument against the prevalence and superiority of formalized movement structures. They argue that disruptive and unpredictable approaches, rather than bureaucratic, leadership-driven movement structures, are crucial factors for the success of a social movement.

The subsequent empirical case study of the network of PGA will provide further evidence that many movement activities occur in mostly informal and fluid movement structures. It further illustrates that this informal mode of organization is capable of forging alliances among transnational activist scenes spanning different cultures, languages, issues, and peculiar local and national political opportunity structures.

### ***Transnational Dimension of Movement Activism***

The string of transnationally coordinated protest events against supranational institutions accelerated the theoretical and conceptual discourse among movement analysts about whether the state-centric paradigm can still assert its supreme theoretical position for understanding social movements. Not surprisingly, the literature on transnational social movements has been growing by leaps and bounds within the last couple of years (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Cockburn et al. 2000; Danaher and

Burbach 2000; Kaldor 2000; O'Brien et al. 2000; DeFilippis 2001; Starr 2000; Smith 2001; Reimon 2002; Walk and Boehme 2002; Yuen et al. 2002; Berg 2003).

For many decades the study of social movements has been approached from a state-centric perspective. Based on the historical research of Tilly and Tilly (1981) and Tarrow (1998), this paradigm claims that the emergence, shape, and trajectory of social movements is closely related to the circumstances--in terms of state repression, reception of protest issues, political allies, and resources--in the nation-state in which a social movement is embedded. In short, the nation-state structures social movement activities.

Even as the globalization debate had become a major theme in the social sciences, Kriesi et al. (1995:xii) re-assert the state-centric perspective:

We believe that one should be skeptical about explanations of movement politics that do not take into account the more specific aspects of the national political context in which mobilization of social movements take place. . . . Our contention is that the mobilization of social movements is closely linked to conventional politics in the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary arenas of a given country.

In light of the movement events in recent years, this state-centric perspective has become increasingly questionable. On what has been dubbed "Global Days of Action," coordinated protest events in different parts of the world took place parallel to the summit meetings of supranational institutions. Furthermore, the emergence of the World Social Forum, where movement actors from different countries network their ideas and establish new contacts with like-minded folks, seriously questions this state-centric approach. Acknowledging these developments, one wonders to what extent movement events in any given city or country are influenced by activist dynamics and structures that fall outside their respective local and national settings.

Movement scholars have only just begun to grapple with the theoretical and conceptual implications of this transnational phenomenon. According to Garner (1996:431), "movements are changing from fairly coherent national organizations into transnational networks, with highly fragmented and specialized nodes composed of organizations and less organized mobilizations, all of which are linked through new technologies of communication."

Despite the burgeoning academic literature on transnational social movements and the increasing insight that social movement practices cross nationally defined spaces, we still lack a coherent theoretical and conceptual foundation for studying this phenomenon. By embracing a grounded theory approach, I have developed a conceptual toolkit that, in light of my empirical research, attempts conceptual guidance for understanding current transnational social movement activism.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the following section, I will introduce several dimensions of transnationality that are useful heuristic devices for understanding not only the activism of the PGA network but which also apply to a much wider movement spectrum.

### *Transnational Networks*

This dimension of "transnationality" refers to the organizational aspects of transnational movement activism--the modes of organization in which actors involved in the PGA plan and carry out their activities.

The historical precursors of transnational social movements were predominantly formal and hierarchical organizations. The attribute “formal” pertains to the fact that there are clear rules of membership, stated principles of responsibilities and objectives of the organization. The attribute “hierarchical” refers to the organizational realities that particular movement actors were elected to, or otherwise chosen for, superior positions from which they could exercise power over other actors.

In contrast, current transnational social movements are predominantly organized in open, fluid, and informal networks, wherein membership criteria are vaguely defined; their mode of operation is elaborated in an ad hoc manner. Furthermore, they refrain from creating hierarchical structures by which leadership is determined by the position within the organizational apparatus.

This network form of organizing has proven suitable for transnational organizing mainly for two reasons: First, because of the vast differences that groups bring into transnational movement networks in terms of their ideological history, organizing mode, activist culture, issue-orientation, etc. These open, fluid and informal networks do not require participating individuals and groups to adapt to a host of existing and strangling rules. They leave participants with more autonomy and thus retain their ability to operate on what they find most congenial for their particular local circumstances. Thus, they reduce the pressure for conformity and yet enable circumscribed participation. They participate in activities of the network when they deem them worthy without subscribing to a host of formal procedures. The non-existence of codified procedural rules makes the barriers to entry and exit easily penetrable.

The open network boundaries are also conducive to the overlapping involvement of individual activists as well as groups in more than just one network. This overlapping involvement creates nested networks that tie different groups and networks together into a larger movement. These complex, mostly informal, interconnections among activists groups across different issues and geographies build the “connective tissues” (Tarrow 1998) along which resources, information, and repertoires diffuse transnationally.

A study of the European Social Forum (Andretta et al. 2003:180) provides statistical evidence for the thesis of overlapping membership. Based on the survey of activists at the European Social Forum in Florence in 2002, they report that 12.6 percent of the respondents belong to 6 or more groups and movement organizations; 10.2 percent to 5; 15.3 percent to 4; 22.9 percent to 3; 19.9 percent to 2; 16.7 percent to just one; and 2.4 percent are not affiliated at all.

Second, the loose and flexible nature of networks makes current social movements more adaptive and responsive to swiftly changing environments. As Keck and Sikkink (1988:200) have pointed out, “the agility and fluidity of networked forms of organization make them particularly appropriate to historical periods characterized by rapid shifts in problem definition.” With the help of modern communication technologies, a social movement can react instantaneously when new political opportunities arise, as was the case, for instance, in the global anti-war network that circulated a call to action within a few hours after the first US missiles hit Baghdad in April 2003.

### ***Transnational Spaces***

While the term “transnational networks” addresses the more general organizational mechanism of how activists and groups are connected, “transnational spaces” is a more focused account of where transnational exchanges take place. Transnational spaces

are sites where the interchange between network participants occurs. In other words, transnational networks materialize in transnational spaces.

This conceptualization of transnational space comes close to what Guidry et al. (2000) have termed the “transnational public sphere.” For Guidry et al. (2000:6-7), the transnational public sphere stands for “a space in which both residents of distinct places (state or localities) and members of transnational entities (organizations or firms) elaborate discourses and practices whose consumption moves beyond national boundaries.”

These spaces can be real places, such as official conferences of the United Nations, parallel conferences, counter-conferences, or convergence centers at summit protests. Virtual spaces are technologically mediated exchanges among network participants, such as mailing lists, collectively constructed web pages (“wiki web pages”), instant messaging, chat rooms, telephone conferences, and so forth.

Physical transnational spaces are particularly important for establishing and revitalizing transnational networks as well as for the elaboration of a collective identity, whereas virtual spaces have proven effective in providing a cost-efficient means for sustaining the transnational coordination and co-operation among already networked individuals and groups. They further provide a channel for the transnational diffusion of information.

### ***Transnational Political Opportunity Structure***

As the process of global integration has accelerated, nation-states have lost their all-encompassing capacity to regulate global forces. Many problems cannot be solved on the national level, and as a result, supranational institutions have gained significant political influence. To the extent that regulatory functions have increasingly shifted to supranational institutions, social movement actors have responded to new political opportunities that have arisen. This has led to the emergence of new allies and targets for social movements, and thus to the emergence of a transnational political opportunity structure to press their political demands vis-à-vis these institutions.

Those targets are socially constructed and subject to permanent shifting perceptions and definitions, contingent on their use-value and the political opportunity of the respective target for political mobilization.

### ***The Transnational Diffusion of Ideas, Tactics and Resources***

A logical consequence of the increase in cross-border communication and networking among movement activists is a greater degree of transnational diffusion of ideas, tactics, frames, and resources.

There are different channels of transnational diffusion, intentional as well as accidental modes of diffusion. At protest convergences, activists utilize those summit protests to consciously construct a space for information exchange and networking. These summit events almost always include educational activities ranging from lectures, reports about movement struggles, hands-on workshops, and strategy sessions to networking sessions among like-minded groups and organizations.

Conscious transnational diffusion further occurs over the internet. This form of computer-mediated diffusion ranges from specially designed web pages for the diffusion of ideas and tactical approaches, to list serves, chat rooms for activists, to internet media such as live streaming of radio and video programs. Like the up-and downloading of MP3

files over the internet, information about movement struggles and tactical innovations diffuse globally among like-minded activists.

### *Transnational Collective Identity*

The extraordinary lack of homogeneity in terms of social composition, issues, and tactics suggests the question: What holds this diverse and informal social entity together? The movement is held together by the construction of a shared imaginative and empowering collective identity. Scholars who adopt the new social movement perspective have pointed out that the construction and perpetuation of collective identities are crucial for the cohesion of social movements.

Collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their action takes place: by "interactive and shared" I mean a definition that must be conceived as a process, because it is constructed and negotiated through a repeated activation of the relationships that link individuals. (Melucci 1985:342)

Even though it is much more difficult for transnational social movements to construct a collective identity due to the lack of frequent face-to-face interaction, the case of Peoples' Global Action indicates that it is, nevertheless, feasible to construct a collective identity which is shared by movement activists beyond state-boundaries.

## METHODOLOGY

I adopted a qualitative methodological approach by applying different qualitative research techniques, such as participatory ethnography on groups involved in the network, content analysis of websites and mailing lists of the broader movement spectrum, and participation at protest events, conferences and informal meetings of the network.

A qualitative research design is appropriate for two reasons: First, because of the diffuse, fluid, and informal nature of the network of PGA, the boundaries of the network are not known at the outset of the research. The delineation of the network's boundaries has been one focus of this research. Because of the lack of data on who is involved in the network—there are no membership lists, official or otherwise—quantitative approaches have not been an option.

Second, many activists in the PGA network embrace disruptive movement tactics, such as civil disobedience and direct action. For this reason they have been subject to police repression and surveillance. In order to gain access to data about the network, one has to establish rapport and trust with activists in the network. My activist background in the peace and anti-nuclear movement in Germany provided some credibility with regard to my intention not to exploit the information I gathered to their disadvantage.

In order to obtain sufficient data about the transnational workings of PGA, I situated myself as a participant activist in two grassroots groups—one in Chicago and another in Berlin. According to Adler and Adler's (1987) distinction between the degrees of participation, my participation in the field settings permanently shifted between passive and active involvement in the field. Even though I share many concerns and political goals with the activists, I tried not to get too caught up in the all-encompassing activist life. The degree of my participation was based on the decision to avoid getting

sucked into intimate group dynamic processes. For this reason, I made individual travel arrangements to protest events, and I did not share sleeping accommodations with them. Even though I hooked up with the groups I had been studying, I consciously remained marginal in the staging and carrying out of concrete protest activities such as hanging banners, creating blockades, and so forth. There were few instances where this strategy of “one foot in and one foot out” did not work due to peculiar situational factors. In these few instances, it was either not possible, or due to my research goals, not advisable, to leave the setting. For instance, there were situations where leaving the scene (an impending confrontation with cops) might have jeopardized the rapport in the group. In order to build trust with activists, I took on a more active role for tasks where the danger of becoming too entangled in the social dynamic, either due to the task or the circumstances, was not that great. For instance, I moderated the global mailing list of the PGA, and I took on certain facilitating tasks for the network, such as writing meeting reports, leafleting, and helping with the organization of the conference.

The length of the fieldwork was 15 months on each activist group. The choice of selecting groups from two different countries was made in order to be able to evaluate country-specific differences. By attending their meetings on a regular basis and by attending activist events, particularly those for which the network of PGA was mobilizing, I have been able to collect data on how grassroots groups link up to the transnational network of PGA, the importance of summit protest events as spaces of exchange and mutual learning, and how transnational activist dynamics impact their local activism.

The ethnographic fieldwork also included active participation in the North American and European conference of PGA, attendance of several informal meetings of core activists within the network, and participation in international meetings of the network alongside other activist events, such as the NoBorder Camp in Strasbourg and the European Social Forum in Florence. I took field notes during my participant ethnography and coded those by using NUDist.

Another important data source has been the postings on the mailing lists of the PGA-affiliated movement spectrum. Through my active involvement in the network of PGA, I learned which mailing lists have been used as communication tools for the global, regional, national, and local PGA networks. In total, I subscribed to seven global, five regional, two national, and three local genuine PGA mailing lists.

Furthermore, I subscribed to several mailing lists of the wider global justice movement in order to capture the diffusion of information from the PGA to the wider movement spectrum. I did not apply a systematic methodology for choosing the mailing lists of the broader movement spectrum. The size of the number of subscribers to the mailing list ranged from 15 to 200, and the number of postings reflected the size of the mailing lists as well as the mobilization cycles. With the exception of one mailing list, all lists had an open subscription policy; therefore, I did not notify subscribers that I was conducting research.

The content analyses of websites focused on designated PGA websites. In addition, I also traced the hyperlinks on those websites, following the logic of Barry Wellman (2001), Rheingold (2002), Garrido and Halavais (in McCaughey and Ayers 2003), among others, that computer-linked networks are social networks. This analysis provided data about the network structure, the actors involved, and paths of diffusion.

For the analysis of my field data, I used the software package of NUDist. I coded the data according to criteria that evolved over the course of the fieldwork. The analysis was guided by several main strings, such as the kinds of groups and individuals that are involved in PGA (network structure), of what and how groups and individuals exchanged (transnational coordination of protest), and the discourse of activists (collective identity). I also looked at indications of transnational diffusion of resources, tactics, frames, and so forth.

The following empirical section will shed light on the transnational processes of the workings of the PGA network. By working with the concepts elaborated above, it should become evident that many social movement activities and phenomena cannot be understood from a state-centric perspective. Furthermore, this case study demonstrates the prevalence of informal organizing structures for maintaining the PGA network as well as for staging protest events.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE NETWORK OF PEOPLES' GLOBAL ACTION**

### ***The Historical Context for the Emergence of the Network of PGA***

Several interlocking historical processes led to the emergence of the network of PGA. First, the discrediting of socialism led to an ideological re-orientation of a sizeable portion of activists on the political left. Many left-leaning activists interpreted the fall of socialism as the result of the undemocratic, authoritarian and state-run orientation of its progenitor. Because the network of PGA clearly distanced itself from hierarchical organizing and attempts to seize state power, it attracted free-floating activists who were looking for new ways to engage politically.

Second, the availability and affordability of fast and reliable modes of communication and transportation provided the technological means for activists in different parts of the world to exchange their movement struggles and action plans beyond their national confines. This, in turn, provided the foundation for learning about like-minded movement activities on a global scale. Movements that started independently (i.e., the Zapatista movement, the transnational indigenous network of Via Campesina, the radical environmentalist movement in North Europe and the US Pacific Northwest, and the Cyber activist movement) were brought into contact with each other in the virtual and real spaces established by the network of PGA.

Consensus among these different movements was based on several principles: Political activism must come from the grassroots level and be organized in non-hierarchical and basic democratic ways. Sustainable and democratic social change comes about not by taking over state power or by gaining access to the negotiation table of the powerful but rather by creating autonomous spaces where alternative social structures can be implemented.

The Zapatista movement was the first crystallization of this ideological, organizational, and tactical transformation. By calling for an international gathering in the Jungle of Chiapas, that became known as "International Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism" or the first "Intergalactica," this international convergence was the "germ cell" from which the network of PGA sprang into existence. The call-out was distributed over the internet; in July of 1996, 3000 activists from 44 different countries gathered in the Lacadonian Jungle of Chiapas. This encounter ended with a declaration made by the charismatic spokesperson of the Zapatista

movement, Marcos, when he called for the creation of an international network of resistance against neoliberalism.

One year later a follow-up meeting took place in Spain where more details about this emerging global network were hashed out. The organization of this second Intergalactica set the precedence of the organizational workings of the developing network. Decentralized organizing committees, mainly scattered throughout Europe, but also in Sydney and Tokyo, dealt with the organization of this gathering (i.e., contents, contacts, finance, documentation, press and propaganda) via mailing lists and occasional face-to-face meetings.

In February 1998, the founding conference of PGA took place in Geneva, which was attended by 300 representatives of grassroots groups spanning the globe. This conference decided the nature and characteristics of this new activist network. According to the manifesto, which contained the political and organizational principles, the network of PGA is not an international organization, nor does it have a formal organizational structure. Furthermore, there was to be no spokesperson to represent PGA. Their organizing principles state that:

PGA is a tool for coordination not an organisation. . . . PGA has no members and does not have and will not have a juridical personality. No organisation or person represents the PGA, nor does the PGA represent any organisation or person. PGA will limit itself to facilitating coordination and exchange of information between grassroots movements through conferences and means of communication. (Peoples' Global Action 2003a)

Furthermore, the conference decided upon five defining principles that were amended at the last conference in 2001 in Cochabamba, Bolivia. These principles circumscribe the common political and organizational *Weltanschauung* of PGA. These five "Hallmarks" (Peoples' Global Action 2003b) read as follows:

- 1 A very clear rejection of capitalism, imperialism and feudalism; all trade agreements, institutions and governments that promote destructive globalisation;
- 2 We reject all forms and systems of domination and discrimination including, but not limited to, patriarchy, racism and religious fundamentalism of all creeds. We embrace the full dignity of all human beings;
- 3 A confrontational attitude, since we do not think that lobbying can have a major impact in such biased and undemocratic organisations, in which transnational capital is the only real policy-maker;
- 4 A call to direct action and civil disobedience, support for social movements' struggles, advocating forms of resistance which maximize respect for life and oppressed peoples' rights, as well as the construction of local alternatives to global capitalism;
- 5 An organisational philosophy based on decentralisation and autonomy.

Immediately after the founding conference, the first call for a "Global Days of Action" (GDA) was distributed to the virtual mailing lists of PGA and diffused within the broader activist milieu. The call for action asked for a massive protest mobilization against the anniversary meeting of the WTO in May 1998, and a central protest took place in Geneva with several de-centralized protests around the world. The first "Global Day of Action" was followed by a string of subsequent GDAs, such as 1999 in Cologne and Seattle; 2000 in Washington, Melbourne and Prague; 2001 in Quebec, Gothenburg, Genoa and Qatar; 2002 in New York City and Calgary; and Evian and Cancun in 2003.

### ***A Global Grassroots Network***

The network of PGA is global in scope according to the definition provided above. The list of groups and organizations that have participated at the global conferences indicate the geographic spread (available from author). The majority of groups that participated in the activities of the network were mainly from Latin America and Europe, and there is heightened awareness within the network of the need to facilitate greater participation of underrepresented regions through providing travel subsidies. The lack of participation of African groups was mostly due to the lack of pre-existing ties to activists in those countries.

***Informal and fluid network boundaries.*** There are no formal membership procedures for the network of PGA. To become part of the network, a group or individual does not sign a membership form or pay dues. On an abstract level, affiliation with the network of PGA is established by agreement to the Hallmarks of PGA (see above). Because there is no oath of allegiance or formal procedure by which an activist entity (an individual, group, collective, or network) officially endorses the Hallmarks of PGA or declares itself as part of the network, inclusion in the network is established through participation in the activities that have been organized by the network, or by organizing local/regional activities in the spirit of PGA. For instance, the activist coalition that mobilized against the Summit of the Americas in Quebec in 2001 stated in their outreach flyer that their campaign was “inspired by the network of PGA.”

As a rule of thumb, every individual activist, group, or network that shares the political perspective described in the Hallmarks and, in turn, contributes to the activities of PGA, can be considered part of the network of PGA. That means on a practical level that all those groups and networks can be considered part of the network of PGA as far as they respond to the call for Global Days of Action issued by PGA by mobilizing for protest activities.

Therefore, there is no group called “PGA,” and the best indication that a group is connected to the network of PGA is the hyperlink to the website of PGA. Another indication that a group is part of the PGA network is the statement on the mobilization flyers and outreach propaganda that the group’s activism is inspired by the Hallmarks of PGA.

In this sense, it does not make sense to speak of membership at all. Therefore, the composition of the network is established by participation rather than membership. Given the lack of a membership procedure, the network boundaries of PGA are very fluid and penetrable. Activist groups participate in the activities of the network without asking any board, such as a secretariat or movement functionaries, for permission to do so. The only guard against an intruder from a politically hostile or competing movement is the common awareness of all participating groups of the binding foundation of the network, i.e., the Hallmarks.

There have been several instances where rival activist groups participated in PGA activities. For instance, at the first European PGA conference in Milan, PGA-affiliated activists from England posted an alert on the European PGA mailing list that a Leninist organization had signed up to participate in the conference. The Leninist organization embraces a hierarchical organizational approach, which is not in accordance with principles of organizational decentralization and autonomy, as expounded by the PGA’s organizing principles. No procedure was in place to deal with this issue prior to the conference, and several hours of conference time were spent finding a workable solution

to exclude or contain the impact of this group. It was decided that members of this group could stay at the conference, but they were not allowed to offer workshops or take part in the decision-making of the conference.

***Diversity of participating groups.*** The second salient aspect of the network of PGA concerns the sheer diversity of groups involved. In Africa, groups involved in PGA work mostly on environmental, indigenous rights, and landless issues. In South Africa, participating organizations come from the indigenous, peasant, landless, and environmental spectrum. In North America, most groups involved are anarchist, student, and youth culture groups. Environmental, industrial and traditional workers unions, as well as peasant and landless groups, are involved in the PGA network in Asia. Groups from Australia and the Asian Pacific work primarily on migration and indigenous rights issues, but anarchists and environmental groups are also involved. Last, European groups involved in PGA include anarchist, youth culture, and international solidarity groups, but also groups that work on environmental, anti-racist and migration issues.

This list does not reveal the differences of the size of the groups. Whereas most groups from the Global South are partly mass organizations with several thousand members, most groups from the Global North seldom reach 100 activists (cf. Wood 2002:5).

### ***A Profile of PGA-Affiliated Groups***

Despite this immense diversity in terms of size, social strata, and issue orientation, there is a deeper affinity among the PGA-affiliated groups. A brief profile of several groups, on which I have been able to gather empirical data, illustrates a shared orientation that binds these groups together. These shared characteristics are the foundation of what I see as the transnational collective identity that holds this network together.

***Reclaim the streets (RTS) London, England.*** RTS was originally founded in 1991 by environmentalists who were affiliated with Greenpeace and Earth First! RTS London describes itself as the non-hierarchical, decentralized network that embraces direct action tactics. Any group can plug into the RTS network as long as they agree to the non-hierarchical organizing structure and the legitimacy of direct action. According to its own description, RTS is a “participatory disorganization.”

Because of its open network structure, RTS draws activists from a broad movement spectrum. For example, RTS London was actively engaged in the strike of the Liverpool dock workers, the anti-war movement, the mobilization against an arms trade show in London, and the campaign to turn the Underground of London (the Tube) into a free public good. Through these campaigns, as well as through the overlapping involvement of activists in more than just one activist group, RTS has been connected to environmental, feminist, queer, refugee, alternative media, anti-war, anarchist, and squatting groups and networks in the UK.

RTS became widely known in the global activist circle by its innovative protest tactic of “Reclaim the Streets” parties. This tactic strategically combines hedonistic and celebratory elements, such as playing loud music and dancing, with political elements such as occupying public and private premises, and by conveying a political message by hanging banners and distributing leaflets. This protest tactic, initiated by RTS London, diffused throughout the globe. RTS archives all street parties that happen around the world on their website: <http://rts.gn.apc.org/archive.htm>.

RTS London has been a convener group of the European PGA network. To

coordinate their involvement in the European and global network of PGA, RTS London has formed an RTS-PGA subgroup that meets occasionally to discuss PGA relevant matters, such as funding for PGA activities, organizational support for PGA gatherings, drafting call-outs for Global Days of Action, translations of documents, and providing information about the PGA network to the PGA-like movement spectrum in the UK.

***Karnataka State Farmers' Association (KRRS), India.*** Indian peasants, who experienced the deteriorating effects of globalization on their domestic agricultural industry, founded the KRRS movement in 1980. With increasing liberalization of the agrarian market, Indian subsistence farmers became victims of the volatility of the world-market prices on agricultural products. Thus, the KRRS has been targeting the World Trade Organization for creating an economic framework that unleashed a vicious cycle of economic competition. Furthermore, the reduction of trade barriers opened the market for multinational corporations (such as Monsanto and Cargill) to sell their genetically modified seeds that not only led to the reduction of biodiversity but has also been responsible for making farmers economically dependent on their products.

From this background, the KRRS was the first peoples' movement in India to organize massive mobilizations against supranational institutions like General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs and its successor the World Trade Organization. In addition, the KRRS organized civil disobedience against multinational corporations by burning off genetically manipulated plantations.

Because of its focus on fighting supranational institutions, the KRRS has been one of the founding groups and key initiators of the network of Peoples' Global Action. The caravan, organized by the PGA, wherein 500 Indian farmers toured throughout Europe, and which culminated in a demonstration against the G-8 summit in Cologne, was jump-started by the KRRS. KRRS is not only connected transnationally to the network of Peoples' Global Action but also to the peasant and farmers network of Via Campesina.

***Chicago Direct Action Network (CDAN), USA.*** Several Chicago-based activists who participated in the activist spectrum that carried out the direct actions in the Seattle protest in November 1999 founded the Chicago Direct Action Network. CDAN adopted organizing principles that were basically synonymous with the Hallmarks of PGA. The focus of CDAN is its engagement in grassroots struggles, the use of direct action tactics, a de-centralized organizational philosophy, and an anti-hierarchical and basic democratic mode of decision-making.

CDAN is organized as a network in which local groups and collectives can bring their action proposals to the weekly meetings with the aim of joint mobilization, financial support, or strategic action planning. The activities and campaign that were carried out and supported by CDAN are as diverse as the groups that entered the networking space of CDAN.

Because of the diversity of individuals and groups involved in CDAN, its activists have provided links to other local, national and transnational networks of anarchists, rank and file unionists, students, environmentalists, Latin American solidarity, queer, and media networks. CDAN was also the Midwest information hub for the North American network of PGA.

***Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST), Brazil.*** The history of the MST movement began in 1985 when landless rural Brazilians took over unused plantations by direct action. With this occupation of unproductive lands, they

started to create an alternative socio-economic model that was not guided by the logic of the capitalist market and commodity production. Their political activism aims to create an alternative and autonomous socio-economic system whose main objective is to produce for human needs rather than profit. From this perspective, they have been fighting against the incursion of the neo-liberal agenda that is promoted by supranational institutions.

MST is the largest social movement in Latin America and has been involved in the network of PGA as a convenors group. Furthermore, MST is connected to Via Campesina. A good indication of the dense web of transnational connections is that donations to MST can be made over their website, which is funneled via the San Francisco-based Global Exchange and which has been crucial for the emergence of the Continental Direct Action Network in North America, which, in turn, was crucial in sparking the so called anti-globalization movement in North America.

Furthermore, Global Exchange organizes educational tours of what they call "Reality Tours" to MST inhabited lands. Besides the educational character of those activist excursions, they also help building "people-to-people ties" (Global Exchange 2004). It is along those informal transnational connections, or in Grannovetter's (1973) terminology, the "loose ties," that information and resources diffuse transnationally.

What analytical insights can be drawn from these profiles? First, there is a strong affinity in terms of political orientation and organization among the groups active in the network of PGA. Most groups involved in PGA try to create alternative and autonomous anti-capitalist spaces such as land cooperatives, free shops, independent media, and housing collectives. A European PGA strategy paper puts it as follows: "With the clear failure and thorough discrediting of both parliamentary-reformist and vanguardist options, there is increasingly awareness that the only way to affect meaningful transformation is to put a renewed emphasis on building autonomous alternatives" (e-mail posted on the caravan mailing list on August 7, 2002).

Furthermore, they reject a hierarchical and an advocacy style of activism, where movement leaders represent and speak in behalf of the entire movement. Instead, most of the groups are organized democratically by rotating certain crucial tasks among participants and by making decisions by consensus.

Furthermore, all groups embrace disruptive tactics, such as direct action and civil disobedience. Blockading conference centers, burning genetically modified maize fields, squatting urban buildings, or blocking public traffic are examples of the tactical orientation of PGA affiliated groups.

In addition, for many groups involved in PGA the resistance to supranational institutions has been crucial for their emergence. This fact points to the importance of conceiving the mobilizations against supranational institutions as a transnational opportunity structure for two reasons: Those supranational institutions provided a unifying target for political protest. But even more, several groups emerged out of successful mobilization campaigns against supranational institutions.

Furthermore, the mobilizations against supranational institutions have provided the transnational space where different issue movements have been able to meet and link up their diverse projects. These counter-summit convergences have been strategically used to forge ties to like-minded groups that showed up at these spaces. The important role of the network of PGA was to coordinate these convergences.

Last, most groups involved in PGA are structured as networks. This not only created a broader movement spectrum at the local level, but also opened up greater possibilities to plug into diverse national and transnational movement networks such as human rights, squatter, peasant, environmental networks, etc. It is precisely through this overlapping involvement of actors in several networks that PGA deploys its particular movement dynamic by bringing together a wide spectrum of hitherto separate movement actors (farmers, anarchists, indigenous, feminists, environmentalists, etc.).

### ***How Does PGA Operate?***

Given the global spread of the network of PGA, the question arises of how this network coordinates and organizes activities on this planetary scale? In the following sections I want to shed light on the informal mode of its operation and to illustrate the transnational mode of the networks' mobilization capabilities.

***Rudimentary organizational structures.*** According to its founding principles, "PGA is an instrument for co-ordination, not an organization" (Peoples' Global Action 2004a). That means that PGA does not want to become another formal international organization such as Greenpeace or Amnesty International. This postulate is realized by the fact that nobody runs an office called PGA, nor is there any paid staff working for the network. PGA does not take on a juridical personality and no resources are kept under the name of PGA. Finally, there are no spokespersons whose job is to speak on behalf of PGA.

The tricky task at hand is how to facilitate the communication and co-operation of autonomous groups within this informal global network. To sharpen the problematic even more: How to ensure the functioning and growth of the network without resorting to formal modes of organizing? Is there a way to avoid the trap of bureaucratization and institutionalization to which previous movements succumbed and yet be organized enough for co-ordinating concerted collective action?

***Convenor.*** In order to facilitate the co-operation and communication among PGA-affiliated groups on the global and regional level, the network of PGA has put in place a rudimentary organizational structure: convenors, "secretariat," support group, and itinerant activists.

To ensure the representation of every continent in the network of PGA, every continental PGA network is called to select at least one group called "convenor." This convenor group relays the continental activities to the global network and is responsible for calling continental meetings. Furthermore, the convenor groups serve as contact points. The convenors committee, consisting of all continental convenor groups, will decide all questions related to global conferences (agenda setting, selection of delegates, spending of resources, interpretation of the manifesto, etc.). In addition, the convenor committee puts out calls for Global Days of Action.

The communication of the convenor committee primarily takes place on a closed mailing list. In addition, there have been occasional physical meetings alongside global conferences and summit protest events (e.g., Prague 2000, Mumbai 2004). Even though the tasks as well as the procedures for communication among the convenor groups have been laid down in the organizing principles of the network, reality shows a much different picture. There is almost no traffic on the convenors mailing list and there seems to be hardly any exchange among the convenors.

PGA has always had great difficulty maintaining communication and developing real working relations between convenors, precisely because the convenor organisations are not NGOs, but authentic grassroots organizations (in India for example operating exclusively with very few unpaid activists) engaged in huge, often critical and even desperate local struggles. International coordination has consistently been a last, neglected point of their agenda. (e-mail posted on several PGA mailing lists on January 29, 2004)

At the gathering of PGA-affiliated activists at the World Social Forum in Mumbai in January 2004, the lack of activity of the Southern convenors in the global communication of PGA surfaced during the discussion: “The future of PGA as a worldwide network depends on one absolute necessity: southern organizations (convenors and not only convenors) must find some time to contribute to the process!!! If you really want a radical network to exist, you must do the footwork!”

Because of its informal and decentralized mode of organization, several tasks—proposing and formulating a call for a GDA, for example—which, according to the stated organizing principles, should have been dealt with by the convenors committee, have been taken up by other groups as well as by committed individuals within the network.

Despite organizational difficulties with the convenor structure, the fluid and malleable organizing mode of PGA ascertained that other groups and individuals in the network filled the void even though they were not formally mandated. Particularly, certain activists from the Global North, most of them as part of the global support group, carried the transnational process forward by taking up organizational chores such as formulating proposals, sending out funding requests, and hooking up with other movement networks.

**Secretariat.** The network of PGA also has a secretariat which mainly functions as a mailbox for letters (snail and e-mail) sent to PGA. The task of the secretariat is not to represent the PGA network to the media. It is best described as an internal communication hub. For instance, inquiries (through the contact provided at [www.agp.org](http://www.agp.org)) that arrive at the PGA secretariat are forwarded to regional or local nodes as far as they are known.

Indicative of the informal organizing mode of PGA is the following episode: The activist, who facilitated the tasks of the global secretariat, posted a request on the global PGA mailing list (Caravan99 list) to rotate the secretariat chores to another group or individual within the network. I offered to mediate between the acting secretariat and the convenors committee, but people involved in PGA either did not know where to send this request, or, once it reached the convenors committee, no one responded.

This case exemplifies three major endemic organizational problems within the network of PGA. First, because of the informality of the network, in terms of who is involved and who is in charge of certain tasks, there is a great lack of transparency about who is acting in which capacity. Even individual activists, who have been involved in the network for some time, such as the secretariat, do not know whom to address. This opacity is a result of the decentralization of organizational tasks. In order to avoid the emergence and consolidation of power structures, tasks for the overall network are not concentrated in one specific place (e.g., at the site of the informal secretariat). For instance, even though the secretariat deals with the e-mail correspondence, the secretariat has no control over how to subscribe or unsubscribe to PGA-related mailing lists.

Furthermore, there is a dilemma regarding accountability. Things within the network are happening when a group or individual activist takes on a certain project. For example, the preparations of callouts for “Global Days of Action” are made by certain

regional convenors and support group members who then plug their proposals into the virtual and real PGA spaces. The only mechanism for making them accountable is the discourse on the mailing lists, where criticism can be articulated. Since there is no paid staff, the threat to withdraw material benefits is not available. Instead, all contributions rely on the energy put into the network by unpaid, committed activists.

**Support group.** To complicate the informal organizational structure of PGA even more, there is a handful of individual activists who are involved in certain support functions for the global as well as regional networks. Those support group members have not been elected at conferences of PGA. They were either involved since the founding of the network or they were asked by core activists to help with the facilitation of certain tasks. There is no formal procedure (i.e., election, nomination) or public announcement of who is involved in a support group. For example, four activists (two from Germany, Ukraine, France) maintain the global PGA websites. Furthermore, a support group moderates the global e-mail lists. Some support group people took on the task of raising money and handling visa requests for the global conferences. All these tasks are transnationally shared and not centralized in one activist group or country.

**Global spiders.** Last, itinerant activists, whom I call "global spiders," play a crucial role in connecting PGA-affiliated groups in different parts of the world. The following e-mail exchange gives a very good snapshot of the dense web of transnational interpersonal connections:

I am also sending a copy to Martin in London (who does the "Commoner" netmagazine and will certainly be interested and useful) and to Sarai Sagi and Medha Pinkar in India, as the ever continuing Narmada Dam struggle should really be included in this story. (There is also something on privatization of water in Sri Lanka on the web page. That would most surely send a new wave of refugees towards Europe.) And a copy to Raul Gonzalez in Madrid who may help with Spain. First off, what strikes me is that the water sent south to Andalusia will meet the flood of people sent north from Africa (or from Roumania) to work in the agribusiness. . . . So I am sending also a copy to Flores, but I guess you must be in contact since you seem to be connected with Andy. (e-mail posted on July 12, 2002)

Most of the "global spiders" met at one of the two intercontinental Zapatista *enquentros*. They constitute the social nucleus around which the network expanded. Those activists can be considered the collective memory of the network because their constant involvement helped to preserve the founding spirit, ideas, and energy.

From the posts on the mailing lists, it becomes clear that certain people have interpersonal contacts with activists in many parts of the world. Some of them are travelling movement reporters and they post information about grassroots struggles and solidarity calls to the mailing lists. For example, a German activist posted the following message on the virtual PGA space:

I'm currently in Ecuador, to help a bit in the organisation of the campamento. I'm sorry that I didn't write earlier, but the first two weeks I was busy with collecting information to understand what's going on here and who is doing what, travelling, writing articles and translations etc. (e-mail posted on February 20, 2002 on the PGA mailing lists)

Those global spiders are major networking hubs in PGA but the networking dynamic is not confined to these activists. At every protest, conference, or caravan, special networking sessions are offered. For example, at the European PGA conference, networking sessions have taken place along thematic lines. In workshops on independent media, free shops, Latin American and Palestinian solidarity, animal rights, etc., like-minded people and groups exchanged their experiences and forged ties

that can be tapped into for future mobilizations. The collection of contact information at those occasions became a standard repertoire and the main mechanism for the growth of the network.

**Communication infrastructure.** Besides occasional face-to-face meetings at protest events and conferences, the most important tools for the transnational coordination of the activities within the network of PGA are the mailing lists and websites. Besides mailing lists for the communication among the convenors, the support group, and the web-working group, there is a general global mailing list (Caravan99). The Caravan99 mailing list serves as an announcement and discussion list with a free subscription policy. At the time of writing, there are almost 200 activists from all continents subscribed to the Caravan99 list. The information about the existence of these lists either spread through word of mouth at activist convergences or through the subscription information posted on the global website.

Even though 200 subscribers seems a small number for a global network, messages posted there cascade through the inter-linked networks, and thus its reach dynamically multiplies. E-mails that are intended for wide-spread distribution, such as call-to-action and solidarity requests, carry a short note at the top of the message, such as “X-post” or “forward widely.” For example, when the Independent Media Center in Palestine was raided by the Israeli army, an immediate emergency call was posted on the Caravan99 lists. Just hours later the same message appeared on the European mailing lists and two days later it was posted by an activist in Chicago—who is not subscribed to any genuine PGA mailing list—on the mailing list of the activist group in Chicago. This case indicates that information posted on the PGA lists diffuse within a much wider circle than the core PGA space. There are also several regional, national, and local mailing lists for communication and coordination among PGA-affiliated groups.

At the global level there are two genuine PGA websites. The older website ([www.agp.org](http://www.agp.org)) contains all documents related to the development of this global network, its organizing principles, the manifesto, as well as the Hallmarks, conference reports and bulletins about the movement. This website is translated in seven languages and PGA taps into translation resources that are available through the overlapping involvement of activists in other movement networks such as the Independent Media Center.

**Transnational coordination of protest.** The counter-summit protest against the meeting of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in Prague from September 18-22, 2000, prompted the PGA network to put out a call for Global Days of Action (GDA). PGA-affiliated groups were among the major mobilization actors, providing a suitable case for grasping the mechanisms and the extent of the transnational coordination of protest activities.

Months prior to the counter-summit protest, one European convenor group was drafting a call for a GDA against the IMF/WB meeting in Prague. The draft was posted on the global PGA mailing list for discussion, and amendments were suggested. The final version was assumed after no further proposals were posted on the mailing list. At this stage an e-mail was circulated asking PGA-affiliated groups and individuals to translate the draft into as many languages as possible. Eventually the call for a GDA was translated into eleven languages which was distributed on the diverse mailing lists and websites of the broader movement. This call was made available on the PGA website as a downloadable pdf-file for local mobilization drives. Because the PGA network consists of many smaller nested networks (i.e., anarchist, environmentalist, queer, feminist,

farmer, media networks, etc.), which is due to the overlapping involvement of several individual activists in more than one network, the call diffused widely within a very broad movement spectrum. The core sentence of the call to action read as follows:

We call upon as many diverse groups and individuals to both support this call and to organise for the global action in September in Prague. There will be a week of action from 21st to 28th September, with a global day of action on 26th September. We call upon you to join the protests in Prague and organise actions in your own country. (Peoples' Global Action 2004b)

In order to make the protest call more appealing and relevant to local movement constituencies, local activist collectives included concrete local contentious issues in the call-out.

For making the transnational concerted mobilization more visible, local groups connected to the network of PGA were asked to report their local mobilizations to the web team of PGA, which put them on the internet. As a result, the global PGA webpage lists 117 local actions that occurred as part of the GDA around the counter-summit protest in Prague. That those local actions were not isolated protests but an integral part of a transnationally shared project becomes evident by the fact that local initiatives framed their local mobilizations in relation to this global mobilization effort. A mobilization flyer of the Chicago Direct Action Network put it as follows:

Today there is a growing and widening movement that is linking all over the world to fight back against the World Bank and IMF. In countries as diverse as Italy and Papua New Guinea, as Columbia [sic] and Canada, there have been militant protests, strikes, and mass movements that have openly confronted the legitimacy of the World Bank and IMF. . . . Join the upcoming events that will agitate, educate, and organize to stop the World Bank and IMF, and the global capitalist led attacks on working people.

Organizing the centralized protest in Prague itself had a profound transnational dimension. A local Czech group initiated a local coalition named Initiative Against Economic Globalization (INPEG), which provided the necessary infrastructure for staging the counter-summit protest. For instance, they took a large building that served as a convergence center, providing sleeping places and food, and they conducted the negotiations with the local authorities. Some activists in this group had prior links to support group activists of PGA. INPEG adopted the Hallmarks of PGA as the common platform. In short, INPEG provided the logistics and the local footwork, and the activist groups and networks that converged in Prague for the protest filled in the content for the days of protests, such as educational workshops, skill sharing, cultural activities; protest scenarios, media work, etc.

Due to the peculiar political/historical circumstances of the Czech Republic, the Czech coalition could not draw on a strong and experienced activist milieu for mobilizing a huge domestically-fed protest against IMF and World Bank. There was no elaborate historically grown movement milieu that could have provided the backbone for a strong Czech-based protest. For that reason, INPEG relied on substantial support from the activists from neighboring European countries. As one PGA activist put it: "Whereas the direct action groups in Seattle and A16 [protest in Washington, DC in April of 2000] had had funding, the support of NGOs and unions, and some highly experienced organizers, in Prague they had virtually no resources to draw on" (Starhawk 2002:50).

The supranational institutions of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank provided a common target that attracted activists from all over Europe and beyond for the centralized protest in Prague. There was substantial international participation

in the protest activities in Prague. The majority of the 30,000 protesters came from outside the Czech Republic. For instance, activists that converged in Prague as part of the PGA contingent came from countries like Panama, New Zealand, United States, Colombia, Ecuador, South Korea, UK, Spain, Austria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Honduras, India, and Canada. The ex-PGA convenor group YaBasta! from Italy alone was able to mobilize over 500 activists.

Leading up to the days of action, there had been extensive exchanges on the mailing list, that had been set up to help coordinate the upcoming event, covering a diversity of topics, such as tactical scenarios, legal matters, requests of the local coalitions of what activists should bring to Prague, translation requests, and general announcements.

Since most activist groups from the Global South could not afford the trip to Prague, the movement in the Global North tried to raise funds for the travel expenses. Since PGA does not collect membership fees, the funding of Southern participation relies on the voluntary efforts of groups committed to the activities of PGA. By posting a funding alert on the global PGA mailing list, activist groups in the Global North autonomously organized fundraising events (fundraising party, workshops, etc.) or wrote funding proposals to private donor institutions (e.g., The Ford Foundation, etc.), political foundations on the left-leaning political spectrum (i.e., Democratic Socialists of America, Rosa Luxemburg or Heinrich Böll Stiftung) or even to governmental funding programs (such as special programs funded by the European Union or the United Nations).

Activists from Germany supported the mobilization in Prague with resources that have been available to them through their activist collectives and historically grown mobilizing structures of the German social movements (student parliaments, self-organized social centers and activist milieu, foundations). For example, they utilized offices and supplies, computers, photocopy machines, university funding, and university halls for fundraising parties. Activists from other European countries carried with them logistical supplies, such as computer and radio systems, mobile kitchens, and materials for artistic tactics, such as costumes and instruments.

Days prior to the protest, an armada of foreign activists arrived in Prague and helped set up the protest infrastructure. An activist with the Chicago Direct Action Network told me that he stayed in Prague for three weeks, where he was involved in strategizing the direct actions (banner hanging, lock-down, banner painting, puppet making, outreach to the local communities, etc.). Furthermore, there have been over 40 American independent media activists alone who helped set up the infrastructure of the media network to cover protest activities and bring them up on the worldwide web. An American direct action trainer illustrates the transnational mode of organizing: she proposed a direct action workshop using the PGA's international mailing list. Ultimately, she held two three-day workshops—one in London and one in Prague.

The physical space of the convergence center is the core space for many activities at summit protest events. Activists from the different parts of the world plan the tactics for protests, listen, and get inspiration from the stories from other movement struggles. The conference center also functions as a workspace for producing banners and pamphlets for the protest. Or activists just “chill-out” and make friends during the downtime of the mobilization. This cross-fertilization of skills and the establishing of new ties to activists from different countries and issue networks must be considered the core strength of the PGA network.

## CONCLUSION

This article argued that in order to understand current social movement activism, researchers need to grasp transnational processes by which a sizeable movement spectrum organizes and mobilizes its activities. Intricately linked, these transnational processes take place mostly in informal movement networks. It takes only a rudimentary organizational framework to make this transnational activism possible. This article illustrated both features through the empirical study of the activist PGA network.

Both arguments depart from widely accepted paradigms that hitherto guided the research of social movements as well as the social scientific interrogation of social organizations. The argument challenges the understanding of the state-centric paradigm by showing that local activism is not only contingent on the immediate local and national circumstances, but also on transnational circumstances. The empirical study shows that local events are influenced by factors that transcend national borders through the co-operative and concerted efforts of transnationally-linked activists. Howard Rheingold's (2002) study of the "smart mob" provides further support for this claim. According to his study, people from different places are able to act in concert beyond the constraints of their immediate context by creatively and ingeniously using modern communication technologies.

However, what distinguishes the smart mob phenomenon that Rheingold describes from the case I have been studying is that the concerted action of the smart mob has a very short life-span: they come and go and leave nothing behind. The smart mob, also called "flash mobs," where people flood shopping malls, for instance, is the brief convergence of people with transient and disparate interests. In contrast, the protest mobilizations of the PGA network are not single episodes but sustained efforts to bring about social and political change. What binds the activists in PGA together, in contrast to older types of social movements, is not an elaborate and well-defined political ideology but a basic, transnationally shared framework on which their autonomous but linked activism rests. This shared framework provides the substance of a transnational collective identity. According to Castells (1997), "the power of identity" provides the social cement that links actors in a global network society.

In the case of PGA, the points expressed in the Hallmarks of the network distill core convictions that hold this diverse network of grassroots groups together. One ingredient of this basic framework is their bold rejection of hierarchical and bureaucratic modes of organization. Despite drawing on different historical experiences, for instance, PGA-affiliated groups in Western Europe lament the transformation of radical social movements into tame formal movement organizations; network participants in the Global South reject this formal organizing model on the grounds of what they see as an intrusion of the imperialist Western mode of organizations. Groups in PGA are bound together by organizing their concerted activism in an autonomous and basic democratic manner without creating a formal institutional apparatus.

Another crucial ingredient in the transnational collective identity is the anti-systemic stance embraced by participants within the network. This anti-systemic stance has been expressed in the Hallmarks of the network in terms of an all-encompassing opposition to social and political systems of oppression with which participants in the network are confronted. Thus, the network not only rejects capitalism, but also other forms of domination, such as feudalism, imperialism, patriarchy, sexism, racism, and ethnocentrism.

The last aspect of the shared transnational collective identity lies in the realm of shared movement tactics. Rather than sharing the vision that social and political change come about by trying to lobby political and economic institutions, network participants share the perspective that fundamental change comes only by working outside the establishment by creating massive pressure from the streets (lock-downs at the conference centers, burning maize fields, destroying a McDonalds restaurant, occupying unused lands, etc.) and by creating parallel alternative institutions to implement a new social, economic and political order in the here and now (free-shops, alternative media centers, communal living arrangements, neighborhood assemblies, etc.).

In summary, despite the vast differences in social strata, issues, activist histories and the immediate local and national contexts in which the activism of PGA-affiliated groups is embedded, there is an overarching transnational collective identity by which activist groups not only recognize each other as belonging to the same movement spectrum but which also provides enough cohesion that this transnational network does not evaporate at the end of a mobilization campaign.

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