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This is an author produced version of a paper published in:

Organization Studies (ISSN: 0170-8406)

Citation for the published paper:
Haug, C. (2013) "Organizing spaces: Meeting arenas as a social movement infrastructure between organization, network, and institution". Organization Studies, vol. 34(5-6), pp. 705-732.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0170840613479232

Downloaded from: http://gup.ub.gu.se/publication/178329

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Organizing spaces: Meeting arenas as a social movement infrastructure between organization, network, and institution

[published in: *Organization Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 5-6, pp. 705–732.]

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"A movement consists of diversified and autonomous units.... A communication and exchange network keeps the separate, quasiautonomous cells in contact with each other. Information, individuals, and patterns of behaviour circulate through this network, passing from one unit to another, and bringing a degree of homogeneity to the whole. Leadership is not concentrated but diffuse, and it restricts itself to specific goals. Different individuals may, on occasion, become leaders with specific functions to perform. This structure … makes it extremely difficult to actually specify the collective actor. Contemporary movements resemble an amorphous nebula of indistinct shape and with variable density" (Melucci 1996: 113–114).

Introduction

In recent years, social movement scholars have shown increasing interest in the internal lives of social movements and what we might call the 'backstage' of protest. They investigated questions of internal democracy and democratic practices (Della Porta 2009b; Graeber 2009; Leach 2009; Maeckelbergh 2009; Polletta 2002), consensus decision-making (Haug 2011; Della Porta 2009a), deliberation (Della Porta 2005), multi-lingual communication and translation (Doerr 2009), the role of online and offline communication (Kavada 2010), various dimensions of social

[1] This research was made possible by a grant from the Hans-Böckler Foundation and the support of the Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB). Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the 5th Organization Studies Workshop in Margaux in May 2010, the 27th EGOS colloquium in Gothenburg in July 2011, the 10th ESA conference in Geneva in September 2011, and the 1st CSM workshop at the University of Gothenburg in October 2011. I am grateful to the participants at these occasions and other colleagues for their helpful comments, especially to Göran Ahrne, Nils Brunsson, Carl Cassegård, Kerstin Jacobsson, Urs Jäger, Bertil Rolandsson, Linda Soneryd, as well as to the four anonymous reviewers and the editors of this special issue who provided essential direction and advice.

movement culture (Hart 2001; Summers-Effler 2010), the interactive formation of collective identity (Flesher Fominaya 2010), practices of network organizing (Juris 2008, 2012; Maiba 2005), tensions between different approaches to political practice (Flesher Fominaya 2007, in press; Pleyers 2010) and the related politics of organization (Böhm et al. 2005), the role of everyday routines (Glass 2010), social movement scenes (Haunss and Leach 2007), or the creation of public spheres within movements (Doerr 2010; Haug 2010b). Rather than studying the 'frontstage' of protest as it appears to the general public or regarding social movements as more or less homogenous actors with a given goal and strategy, these studies attend to social movements as action *contexts* or collective *spaces* in which activists find themselves and which they aim to shape and organize according to their needs and visions. The concept of activism is thus extended from mobilizing actors to organizing spaces. The aim of this article is to theorize the previously neglected dimension of social movements that is emerging in this new body of literature. *Table 1* summarizes what I mean by this (relatively) neglected dimension by juxtaposing it with the more commonly discussed aspects of social movements.

TABLE 1 about here

The turn from 'social movements as actors' to 'social movements as spaces' is not only a reflection of the importance that contemporary activists have attributed to the internal structure and decision-making processes of their movements, it also reflects a growing recognition among researchers of a the cultural dimension of social movements and social change (Goodwin and Jasper 2004) (*Table 1*, C). Especially a younger generation of scholars is looking for conceptual tools to grasp movements as (sub-)cultural spaces in which the incitement of protest may only play a secondary role (Baumgarten et al. in press).

Although a whole strand of social movement research known as the framing approach (Snow 2004) has paid much attention to the role of communication, the focus has to a large extent been

on mediated communication.[2] In contrast, an emergent topic in the above diverse set of studies is the importance of face-to-face meetings and assemblies in activist life (*Table 1*, D). And indeed: who would deny the trivial fact that activists spend more time in meetings than in the street? Similar to Mintzberg's managers (1973) who spent 69 percent of their working time in meetings, 'social movement entrepreneurs' use meetings to mobilize constituencies and to form alliances. In fact, even less engaged activists probably spend most of their activist time in meetings. "Movements begin when people get together to think out loud about the kind of city they might help to create. One person said, 'Freedom is an endless meeting'"(An SDS paper qutoted in Miller 2004 [1987]: 399). However, in contrast to management studies, where meetings have increasingly become a category of research (Cooren 2007; Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 1997; Asmuß and Svennevig 2009; Schwartzman 1989; Boden 1994; Dittrich et al. 2011; Hendry and Seidl 2003), no similar focus on meetings has yet been developed in social movement studies.[3]

Free spaces

There is, however, a body of social movement literature that has considered "free spaces" as a resource for the mobilization of oppositional identities (Polletta 1999). An activist meeting can be a "free space" in relation to certain dominant structures of society, but in other respects, it may well constitute a dominated space, as when Evans and Boyte (1986: 102) identify the "margins of big meetings" as a "specifically female social space" that allows women to develop alternatives to the male dominated 'main' meeting. The analytic strength of the free space concept is hence to identify spaces in society that are free from control and surveillance by dominant powers and which therefore provide fertile grounds for social movements to thrive or

[2] Ironically, David Snow says that although this may not be explicit in his writings "it was through the attendance at meetings that the idea of the importance of framing began to percolate" (personal communication on 25 June 2011 and 31 October 2011).

[3] For a discussion about why meetings tend to be "invisible", see Schwartzman (1989: ch. 1). As an anthropologist, she argues that because the meeting as a social form is so familiar for our culture, we need to defamiliarize it before we can see it. Organizational meetings were unveiled first because such meetings often appear as preventing members from getting "real work" done. In social movements, meetings are so normalized, that it took some extra effort to expose them.

to hibernate in times of abeyance. Free spaces are not necessarily constructed by the movement itself. In contrast, they "are often associated with the most traditional institutions: the church in Southern black communities; the family in Algeria and Kuwait; nineteenth-century French peasant communities" (Polletta 1999: 5), but also schools, political parties, the American Friends Service Committee, or other established institutions (Polletta 1999: 9). And Kellogg (2009: 686) identifies the "afternoon round" in a hospital as a free space that was critical for successfully challenging dominant work practices. What makes free spaces such a crucial resource for social movements as well as organizational change is that they facilitate meetings and other kinds of face-to-face encounters that provide the kinds of associational ties that foster the "capacity to identify opportunities, supply leaders, recruit participants, craft mobilizing action frames, and fashion new identities, tasks essential to sustained mobilization" (Polletta 1999: 8).

The essential role of meetings in mobilizations is hardly surprising, given the "nebulous" structure of social movements, to use Melucci's term quoted above. In contrast to the formal organizations, the relationships among activists are not pre-defined by formalized rules and roles, and even their goal may be unclear and contested. Under these circumstances, meetings are the natural way to establish and stabilize social relations and create a social order that facilitates collective action and fosters social change.

In fact, organizational research has found even formal organizations in constant need of meetings to stabilize and reproduce themselves in meetings (e.g. Boden 1994; Schwartzman 1989), rendering their formal structure little more than a "myth and ceremony" (Meyer and Rowan 1977). But while the need for meetings in formal organizations might be dismissed as failure of formal structures and workflows (Schwartzman 1989: 52), a proliferation of social movement meetings indicates the success of the movement (in the sense that participation is thriving). This is so because a social movement involves, by definition, "a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations" (Diani 1992: 13),

i.e. interaction *across* organizational boundaries, which means that they cannot easily be replaced by formal organizational structures.

One could, of course, contend that these interactions may well be achieved by other means than face-to-face meetings. This is certainly true for certain periods and under certain conditions, but empirical evidence suggests that due to the crucial role of trust in social movements they cannot survive without face-to-face meetings (I discuss these studies in the final section of this paper). So when social movement research focusses on SMOs (and interpersonal networks) as the key mobilizing infrastructure, it neglects what I call meeting arenas as the place where these organizations and networks are (re-)produced (*Table 1*, E).

Mesomobilization

The current lack of conceptual tools to grasp the role of meeting arenas as a social movement infrastructure becomes all the more apparent, when we consider the distinction between micromobilization and mesomobilization introduced by Gerhards and Rucht (1992): Micromobilization is about mobilizing individuals, while mesomobilization is directed at groups and organizations. Activities at the level of mesomobilization fulfil two functions:

> "First, they provide a *structural integration* by connecting groups with each other, collecting resources, preparing protest activities, and doing public relations. Second, they aim at a *cultural integration* of the various groups and networks in developing a common frame of meaning" (Gerhards and Rucht 1992: 558-559; orig. emph.).

The clarification of the different functionality of these two levels of mobilization that Gerhards and Rucht provide constitutes an important step in the study of social movement infrastructure. By making it clear that mobilization is not just about mobilizing individuals to change their mind and join the right group or organization, but also about forging solidarity *between* these diverse collectivities, the concept of mesomobilization takes the researcher's gaze away from

SMOs, where it has lingered all too long, and directs it towards the *inter*-organizational domain (*Table 1*, F).

However, even though these authors move beyond organizations and micromobilization, their conceptualization of the meso-level is still bound to an *actor* centred view. Although they registered 475 preparatory meetings and similar activities (1992: 561), their study is not about meetings but of mesomobilization actors ("committees", "task-forces", "preparatory teams"). And although it is evident that these actors must have had some vibrant discussions before they arrived at a joint statement signed by more than 100 groups, we learn nothing about these interactions. Like so often in framing research, the authors merely reconstruct the negotiations as a *cognitive* process in which the diverse frames used by the supporting groups are distilled into the more general masterframes directed against "imperialism" and "hegemonic power" (*Table 1*, G). To flag the importance of social interaction in such framing processes I therefore introduce the term *mesomobilization meeting* to refer to a meeting whose purpose it is to assess the mesomobilization potential and coordinate the activities of micromobilization actors.

It is this type of meetings that ought to be at the centre of analysis of a social movement *as a movement*, i.e. at the movement level. Otherwise social movement research risks either being taken in by conceptions of the movement as a mere black box or as an aggregate of black boxes or ending up studying a single group or SMO as representative of the movement as a whole. As I will argue in more detail below, this implies a shift from the common conceptualization of face-to-face interaction as group interaction to interaction in meetings whose participants may not share a stable group identity (*Table 1*, H). Larger mesomobilization meetings are often prepared by a series of (smaller) preparatory meetings (Haug et al. 2009), and in that sense, the infrastructure of a mobilization consists of meetings and sub-meetings preparing larger meetings preparing protest events. With different, sometimes competing, mesomobilization meetings oriented towards the same protest, this apparently linear infrastructure becomes a complex figuration of meetings and sub-meetings that researchers and activists find when they

enter the “nebulous” reality of a social movement. Mapping this infrastructure can be a first step towards understanding a movement’s scope and its internal dynamics and cleavages.

But does it make sense to conceive of meetings as an infrastructure? Are meetings not too transient to pass for ‘structure’? This brings us to the main argument of this paper. In the next section, I will examine the ambiguous character of meetings as event *and* structure, and as actor *and* space, and I will develop the concept of meeting arena to refer to the structural and spatial side of the meeting (*Table 1*, I). I will then show how figurations of meeting arenas constitute an important infrastructure for social movements. In the subsequent section, I then examine more closely how meeting arenas produce the social order of a movement. Drawing on Ahrne and Brunsson’s (2011) distinction between (partial) organization, institution, and network, I distinguish three types of social order that are under constant tension with each other and whose relative importance is negotiated in meetings. One important aspect of this discussion is that it moves us beyond the common view that organization implies hierarchy by seeing it as based on decision instead (*Table 1*, J). In the concluding section, I then outline some heuristic, methodological, and theoretical implications of the overall argument. Amongst other things, I suggest that attending to meeting arenas as a social movement infrastructure allows us to approach the question of leadership in new ways. In particular, I argue that a focus on meetings reveals the importance of the roles of the meeting organizer and facilitator (Haug 2010a: 223–225) . These backstage leaders may not be the same as the charismatic leaders that represent the movement in the general public (*Table 1*, K). One of the methodological suggestions is that those researchers, who actually go out and engage with their subjects, may find it useful to anchor their fieldwork in meetings as their main unit of analysis rather than focus on individuals or organizations (*Table 1*, L). As my main theoretical implication, I also propose that the distinction between mobilizing and organizing, as two intertwined but essentially different types of social movement activity – both of which are closely linked to meetings – could be used to develop the neglected organizational dimension of social movement activism further (*Table 1*, M).

Meeting arenas as social movement infrastructure

To avoid confusions with various common notions of 'meeting', it seems advisable to start with a definition: the meeting can be defined as an episodic gathering of three or more co-present participants who maintain a "single focus of cognitive and visual attention" (Goffman 1963: 89) while engaging in multi-party talk that is ostensibly related to some common business of the participants (cf. Schwartzman 1989: 7; 61; 274-275; Boden 1994: 90-99, 102-106). The meeting has clearly marked boundaries in time and space and these boundaries partially suspend the social structures of its environment, creating a relatively autonomous unit of social life (Hendry and Seidl 2003: 183; cf. Giddens 1984: 73). A meeting constitutes a public situation in the sense that the communication between two participants is subject to monitoring by a third, which hence distinguishes it from private communication in networks (Haug 2010b; Strydom 1999).

According to this definition, meetings are distinct from other forms of interactions such as lectures (single-party talk), a chat at the check-out (no common business), an informal business conversation on the plane (no clear beginning and end), or a dinner with friends (multiple foci of attention possible). Larger meetings that allow for more "side involvements" (Goffman 1963: 43) among participants without threatening the single common focus of the ongoing meeting are commonly called *assemblies;* and a *conference* is a set of meetings held in spatio-temporal proximity to each other.

Activity and structure: meeting event and meeting arena

Meetings can be seen as both a structure and an activity; they are vivid illustration of what Giddens (1984: 25) called the "duality of structure". A meeting is the result of the participants' interactions while it simultaneously structures these interactions. Put differently: for each participating actor, the meeting appears as an action space which constrains their agency in various ways; but at the same time, this structure is also produced and reproduced by these same actors.

In order to flag the dual character of meetings, I distinguish between the *meeting event* as the actual interactions of the participants on the one side and the *meeting arena* as structure or setting in which the meeting activity takes place. In this paper, I focus on the structural side, the meeting arena. In Giddens' terms: I engage in "institutional analysis" (1984: 288), leaving aside the systematic analysis of activities that produce, reproduce, and transform this infrastructure (for a more interactional perspective see Haug 2011, 2012). Nevertheless, I will use the term 'meeting arena' only when referring exclusively to the structural side of meetings while using 'meeting(s)' in all other cases where the distinction is not essential.

Spaces and actors: meeting arenas and groups

But why use the concept of arena to grasp the structural side of the meeting? Doesn't the group concept provide an adequate tool? – Both the meeting arena and the group constitute a social structure that persists over time, and meetings are "a conditio sine qua non for the survival of groups" (Neidhardt 1994: 140; my transl.). But while a group is constituted through relatively permanent relations among its members (Neidhardt 1994: 137) even when they are not assembled, an arena does not have permanent members.

A meeting arena is a socio-political setting which evokes expectations regarding appropriate conduct, the existence of certain roles, the definition of the situation and other aspects of the interaction order that potential participants can expect to find during a meeting in a particular arena (e.g. an organization's staff meeting or the preparatory meeting for the anti-G8 protests). Typically, these expectations include an idea of the purpose of the meeting, its duration, the range of topics to be discussed, the types of participants, the rules of conduct, and the arena's relation to other arenas. Depending on the characteristics of a meeting arena, these expectations may *also* be closely linked to and include a specific place, seating arrangement or particular objects that are considered part of the arena (e.g. a whiteboard or a microphone), but the participants do not simply 'find' an arena, they construct it interactively. And the participants'

expectations are not static but are continuously negotiated and adjusted to the situation they find themselves throughout the meeting.

It is true that groups are sometimes also understood as such a setting and in some cases it may indeed be pointless to distinguish between the group and the arena in which it meets, but most groups have several arenas with different rules of conduct, legitimate topics, etc. Differently said: a group can have different types of meetings. Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003: 737) are certainly right to identify a "group style" that characterizes every group across its different arenas. But just like their concept of group style sensitizes us for the variety of translations of a society's collective representations such as 'the culture of individualism', the concept of meeting arena allows us to understand the variety of behavioural patterns *within* the same group in different settings.

But the concept of arena does not just allow us to 'zoom in' and make further differentiations within a certain group. The main strength of the concept lies in its capacity to theorize the collaboration *between* different groups and organizations. In my own research on decision-making in social movement meetings (Haug 2010a), I found it increasingly inaccurate to conceptualize these inter-organizational meetings as groups, not only because fluctuation between meetings was often high but also because participants in many cases did not perceive these meetings as the meetings of a designated group but as open meetings of different groups and individuals. Organizers of these meetings often emphasized that they started convening these meetings in order to "establish a space"[4] where the activities of various actors could be coordinated and where experiences could be shared. They are organizing spaces; and what's more: these spaces are themselves often spaces for organizing other spaces. It is not uncommon to have a preparatory meeting for the preparatory meeting for the meeting to prepare a big assembly, conference, or rally. In other words: meetings are organizing spaces in the double sense of the term.

[4] Interview with a member of the European ATTAC network which holds regular transnational meetings (19 February 2008).

As mentioned earlier, these organizing processes lead to complex figurations of meeting arenas that constitute a social movement infrastructure. I will now explain why it is important to acquire an overview of this figuration when studying a movement of a particular segment of it.

Figurations of Meeting arenas

Schwartzman (1989: 216f) suggests that rather than drawing organizational charts focused on individuals and their formal positions, we can learn more about an organization by mapping the meeting arenas of that organization. In the alternative health care centre that she studied, "[p]ower … did not flow as much from individuals, or from individual offices, as it did from particular meeting contexts or groups." I suggest that it may be similarly instructive to map the complex figurations of meeting arenas of a movement or a particular mobilization to help us understand the role of each arena in a larger context. In fact, what gives social movement brokers influence is precisely this kind of contextual knowledge and overview. But also 'ordinary' participants of a meeting need a basic understanding of the relative position of the meeting arena in a larger context in order to make sense of the discussion and to be able to make meaningful contributions.

The meaning of an arena is defined by its relations to other arenas in its environment, i.e. in its position within a wider network of meeting arenas. Some of these relations are pretty straight forward. For example, a working group meeting is first and foremost defined through its relation to the meeting that initiated it (often referred to as 'plenary' or 'main assembly') and to which it is expected to report back. Others are more difficult to grasp and often contested. For example, in the mobilizing process for the G8 summit protests around Heiligendamm (Germany) in 2007, various sovereign mesomobilization arenas existed side by side, each attracting their clientele and coordinating specific activities. Most of these streams of preparations (i.e. multiple series of preparatory meetings) were not isolated from each other, they observed each other and even converged at regular 'top level meetings' as well as a number

of action conferences during which a common “Choreography of Resistance”[5] was negotiated. Similarly, various authors have written about the contested preparatory process for the European Social Forum in London in 2004 (e.g. Doerr 2010; Dowling 2005; Kavada 2010; Maeckelbergh 2009). These conflicts between the so called ‘verticals’ and ‘horizontals’ were clearly conflicts between different organizing logics – especially logics of organizing meetings.

Meetings are, therefore, the site where actors negotiate not only their individual positions (and that of their organization) in a larger field of action but also the relative positions and legitimacy of the various meeting arenas in the field. – ‘How do we relate to a breakaway meeting of a certain faction of the movement?’, ‘Should we allow right-wing activists to participate in our meeting?’, ‘Who shall convene the next meeting?’ The answers to these questions are not usually re-negotiated at every meeting but become sedimented in the definition of the arena.

But meeting arenas are not only passively defined by their context, they can also be in the position to actively define some rules that govern a larger field, prescribing, for example, the use of non-violent forms of protest. In that sense, meeting arenas constitute what Fligstein and McAdam (2011: 5) call “governance units” of “strategic action fields”.

Another type of interrelation between meeting arenas is exemplified in a diverse series of mobilizations in 2011, all of which had in common the act of occupying squares and holding popular assemblies there: the popular uprising in Egypt (Tahrir Square, Cairo), the *Indignados* in Spain (Puerta del Sol, Madrid; Plaça de Catalunya, Barcelona), the occupation of Syntagma Square in Athens, and the Occupy Wallstreet movement (Zuccotti Park, New York) which sparked similar occupations and rallies in hundreds of cities worldwide. The meeting arenas created in these public squares resemble and inspire each other. Holding a meeting under the label of *#Occupy <city name>* inevitably defines the arena in relation to the corresponding arenas around the world and creates expectations regarding meting practices, such as the use of the “human microphone”.

[5] See http://dissent-archive.ucrony.net/dissentnetwork/node/3518.html

The mapping of a meeting arena therefore has two sides: identifying the characteristics of the singular arena (meeting frequency, types and number of participants, organizers, typical topics, catchment area, meeting style, etc.) and identifying its relationships with other arenas in the same field of action, i.e. the figuration of arenas in the field. Meeting arenas can be mapped along many dimensions, perhaps the most important ones being time and space (when and where meetings take place), but one could also, for example, imagine an emotional map, a map of ideologies, cultures, discourses, or power. The location of a meeting arena on the map and its internal characteristics then reveals a description of the social order that characterizes this particular arena.

But how is this order brought about and stabilized? Having identified the meeting infrastructure of a movement, mobilization, or campaign, the question arises, how we can explain this infrastructure or how it can be changed and perhaps be improved. Far from providing a general answer to these questions, my aim in the next section is to provide a conceptual framework that might catalyse efforts to understand any particular meeting infrastructure.

The order of meeting arenas: organization, institution, network

The basic argument of this section is that the order produced by meeting arenas can be understood in terms of three principles of social order: organization, network, and institution. Building on Ahrne and Brunsson (2011: 84; 88-89), I define these concepts as follows: organization is a *decided order*, a network is an order sustained through *interpersonal relations of trust*, and institutions are orders based on *taken for granted beliefs and norms*. These definitions are deliberately narrow in order to make it possible

> "to see the phenomena they stand for as alternative forms of order with different characteristics, causes and consequences. (…) Furthermore, the way we use these concepts makes it possible to understand the complex interplay and relationships among all these forms" (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011: 84–85) .

The pathbreaking idea of Ahrne and Brunson's article is to extract the principle of order that characterizes formal organizations and apply it to their environment, where it exists as "partial organization". In doing so, they claim that the distinction between the organization and its environment, which has carried organizational studies for 50 years, is less important than the distinction between the different forms of order, organization, network, and institution. This is what makes their approach so useful for the study of social movements which can be characterized in many ways as taking place in the space *between* organizations, a space that social movement scholars have conceptualized in terms of interpersonal networks and institutions (cultural norms, collective identity), but not in terms of organization. I will show that meeting arenas constitute partial organiation.

While complete organization has membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring, and sanctions, partial organization relies on "less than all organizational elements" (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011: 84). What characterizes organization in contrast to network and institution (which could be conceived as also having some of these elements) is that in an organized order, the relevant elements have been decided: "We see decision as the most fundamental aspect of organization" (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011: 85).

FIGURE 1 about here

Figure 1 summarizes the argument that will follow, i.e. that the social order of meeting arenas is partially organized, partially networked, and partially institutionalized and that the tensions between these different logics help to understand key challenges of internal social movement dynamics.

The corners of the triangle represent the three (idealtypical) types of order, and the sides between them represent the tensions between each of them (indicated by arrows). Each side of

the triangle also represents a specific resource that the two connected types have in common in contrast to the respective third one: organization and institution share a degree of *unity* (whereas a network is diverse and has no clear boundary); they differ, however, in the modality of that unity: in organization the unity is a formal one while an institution creates an informal sense of unity. Institution and network both build on *trust* (whereas the formal character of organization is designed to avoid issues of trust); at the same time, network and institution differ in the modality of their trust: networks rely on personalized trust, while an institution relies on generalized trust. Finally, the common characteristic of network and organization is that they dwell on differences and hence the *diversity* of the actors they assemble (whereas an institution relies on equality); they differ, however, in the modality of the diversity: organized diversity is instrumental in that it is organized in order to achieve a specific goal, while networked diversity is reciprocal in the sense that it is not a means to a collective goal but a result of mutual valuation of each interpersonal tie.

While the triangle represents the structural side of the meeting (the meeting arena), the activity side of the meeting (the meeting event) is represented at the centre of the triangle. The arrows pointing inwards from each of the three corners indicate that each of the three principles structures the meeting in a different way, as will be discussed below. In order to keep the figure simple, there are no arrows outwards from the meeting event to the meeting arena to indicate that the meeting participants actively produce and modify the meeting arena throughout the meeting. This omission is does not mean that structure is given any precedence over action here, but merely reflects the methodological bracketing of institutional analysis mentioned above. Also omitted from the figure are the relations to other arenas.

I will now elaborate the different logics in more detail and show how the principle of organization prescribes a plan according to which the meeting is supposed to be run; how the principle of institution relies on routines and traditions; and how the network principle governs

the meeting through interpersonal friendship relations. In order to clarify the interdependency between these logics, I will also reflect on the inherent limitations of each logic.

Organization: meetings as planned events

Through the lens of organization, the meeting appears as a planned event. A plan is necessary because the coming together of multiple participants implies an almost infinite number of contingencies which constitute risks for achieving the goal of the meeting. For example, participants may not agree on the topics that need to be discussed, how they should be discussed, in what order, and what needs to be decided, or how decisions should be made. Participants may not trust each other or rivals may engage in infighting, jeopardizing the goal of the meeting.

The logic of organization attempts to address these risks through formalization, i.e. by deciding various aspects of the meeting. These decisions "are statements representing conscious choices about the way people should act or the distinction[s] and classifications they should make" (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011: 85). Ahrne and Brunsson's concept of partial organization helps us to observe different degrees and various qualities of organization, depending on how many and which elements of organization are present in a particular meeting: membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring, and sanctions.

Membership

A meeting arena may be open for anyone to attend – which means that it does not distinguish between members and non-members – or it may be reserved to a specific group of people (members). Perhaps some guests are allowed with reduced participation rights. In order for an arena to be organized in terms of membership these decisions about exclusion and inclusion need to be consciously and explicitly made. Given the aim of social movements to maximize participation, decisions about membership are rare. In fact, the act of asking for permission to participate may stigmatize you more as an outsider than not asking in the first place. Inclusion and exclusion tends to be informally regulated through style, sub-cultural codes, and shared

knowledge, but some explicit decisions may be made based on certain unacceptable (sexist, racist, etc.) behaviour or membership in organizations of the 'enemy' (fascist groups, (secret) police, etc.).

Hierarchy

Social movements are known more for their informal hierarchies, but formal hierarchies do exist and the place to find them is in meetings. A formal hierarchy centralizes the right to make certain binding decisions and the source of this hierarchy is itself a decision – "the decision about who shall decide" (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011: 86). Meetings introduce decided hierarchy into social movement networks in two ways: first, by assigning certain roles that give participants privileges or authority during the meeting, such as the role as chair or facilitator, the minute taker, the expert, or the rapporteur; and second, by creating auxiliary arenas for certain tasks (e.g. working group meetings) which are subordinate to the main, sovereign arena and thus have to report back.

Rules

Even in formal organizations, meetings are often held in an informal way in order not to jeopardize the friendly atmosphere: You cannot ask a friend to be formal with you: "To demand or initiate formal communication is a way to avoid tests of trust and to achieve more certainty – often at the expense of the network, which is thereby de facto rendered superfluous" (Luhmann 2006 [2000]: 23; my transl.). Nevertheless, meetings still seem to be the most rule prone entities at the movement level. Time and place of meetings need to be decided, their frequency, their purpose, their agenda. In order to facilitate equal participation, it is sometimes decided that the maximum speaking time per speaker is limited 3 minutes or that every second speaker should be a woman, or that participants who have not yet spoken may skip the queue (Haug 2012).

While these rules are short term or ad hoc, there may also more durable rules governing not just one or a few but all meetings in a particular arena. Such rules are commonly referred to as by-laws or statutes. In social movements, such rules are rarely drawn up specifically for a

particular meeting arena but they exist as standards (cf. Ahrne and Brunsson 2011: 87) in the form of procedural handbooks such as *Robert's Rules of Order* for "deliberative assemblies", first published in 1876 and widely used in all sectors of society in the U.S. Not surprisingly, activists try to establish their own (emancipatory) standards (e.g. Gelderloos 2006; Haverkamp et al. 2004 [1995]), but many times, meeting participants shy away from deciding on formal rules and still manage to hold meetings reasonably well (Haug and Rucht in press), while others cannot overcome fundamental disagreements about the meaning of consensus (see e.g. Maeckelbergh (2009: 77–79) for a vivid example). Again others, especially radical activists with an anarchist background, routinely decide on formal rules and use them to organize in an egalitarian manner (Juris 2008: 199–231; Graeber 2009: 287–356; Haug 2012).

Monitoring

The democratic equivalent to top-down monitoring is transparency. And as we have seen above, mutual monitoring is part of what characterizes meetings as a social form. The decision to meet is simultaneously a decision to monitor. One of the main functions of mesomobilization meetings is to exchange information about what is going on in different parts of the movement but also to follow up on issues that have been discussed in previous sessions, to check if tasks have been fulfilled and how. Many meetings are set up exclusively for the purpose of sharing experiences and general discussion.

We can distinguish a number of deliberately decided monitoring mechanisms: First, *evaluation meetings* are set up after protest events or conferences with the explicit aim to jointly monitor and assess what has been achieved and which mistakes were made. Second, *reports* from working groups or leaders often take up significant amounts of time in meetings. This allows participants to monitor also those parts of the organizing process in which they do not directly participate. Third, a meeting can be monitored by non-participants through *written minutes*, which are taken care of by one or more designated minute takers. Fourth, almost every face-to-face arena is paralleled by an email-listserv to which participants and often also non-participants can subscribe and thereby monitor discussions related to that meeting arena. In

some cases, such a joint mailinglist is also the place where the agenda for the next meeting is prepared so that its genesis becomes more transparent to all (potential) participants.

Sanctions

Activists participate voluntarily in their meetings. They attend a meeting either because they want to use it as a platform to reach a larger audience or because they are interested in what others have to say (or both). One way to sanction their behaviour is therefore to exclude them from the meeting or to deny them the right to speak. Such negative sanctions are rare in practice since such a decision is likely to be contested and hence lead to even more trouble. Positive sanctions (incentives) are more common as meetings have positions of power to offer. These may be confined to the meeting event (e.g. the chair) or reach beyond it (e.g. the right to report on behalf of the meeting). Even when such offices are not attractive in themselves, they – like a formal award or diploma – increase a person's status as a trusted and merited activist. In some cases, when mesomobilization meetings get to decide about funds, participants may even compete over an employment position as campaign-coordinator or so.

In sum, then, we can see that meetings are partially organized entities. Some of the practical limits of formalizing all organizing decisions have already been mentioned. But there are also some inherent limits to the logic of organization.

Who decides? the inherent limits of organization

An important feature of *deciding* various aspects of the meeting is that decisions not only 'resolve' contingencies but also make them explicit as such and, in doing so, make themselves prone to criticism: calling something a decision always actualizes the fact that alternative (and possibly better) choices could have been made (Luhmann 2006 [2000]: 170). Compared to network and institution, organization is therefore a rather fragile order as it "constitutes *attempts* to create a specific order" (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011: 90).

This ever looming possibility of failure entails the question of responsibility. Organization emphasizes human control which is deemed to be in the hands (and free will) of the decision-

maker(s): "Making decisions is, perhaps, the most effective way of assuming responsibility available to us" (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011: 90). This, in turn, raises questions of accountability. Accountability is a problem within the particular logic of organization rather than that of institutions or networks because institutionalized norms make it evident what is right and wrong and because trust substitutes control; friends do not keep accounts of each other's mistakes.

Consequently, decisions often raise more questions than they answer: who can decide what and on what grounds? If we attempt to answer this question through another decision, the logic of organization – ultimately subverts itself by diverting energy from goal achievement to decision-making, from ends to means. The blind spot of the organization logic is therefore in the decider. Who decides who shall decide? Trying to find an answer to this question within the logic of organization leads to infinite regress. The vicious circle can only be broken by either taking the decider for granted or by trusting him or her. In other words, organization has to on at least one other form or social order, institution or network.

Institution: meetings as routine events

From the perspective of the institutional logic, a meeting is an event where latent agreement is actualized and affirmed through rituals and routines. Contrary to the organizational approach, there is no risk that the meeting takes a wrong direction because participants can trust that fundamental agreement exists among them. Expressed disagreements are considered superficial and will eventually be resolved as the participants develop a deeper sense of community. There is hence nothing to be planned beforehand.

Meeting arenas tend to be taken for granted by participants, especially when they have existed for a while. For example, between 2002 and 2008, the European Preparatory Assembly was generally recognized as the central decision-making body in the organizing process of the European Social Forum (Haug et al. 2009) and moreover as an important meeting arena for transnational activists in Europe.

But not only the meeting arena itself can become institutionalized within a larger field of action, also the procedures and practices within an arena. Glass (2010: 207, orig. emph.) emphasizes the importance of routines and taken-for-granted practices for maintaining free spaces in social movements such as the two Zapatista community centres he studied:

> "The meetings of both Winston St. and the Unity Center had a predictable format that followed the procedures of participatory democracy. There are written accounts of how to do participatory democracy…, but participants generally pass down these practices from generation to generation. (…) Meetings started with people forming into a circle (and *always* a circle) to start the meeting. They were ordered through regular structures, including 'agendas' …, 'reportbacks' …, 'proposals' …, 'go-arounds' …, 'introductions,' and 'announcements.'"

I refer to this established cultural practice as the *meeting style* of a particular meeting arena (Haug 2012). For example, one meeting might have a very egalitarian culture while another values the ideal of strong leadership. In some arenas, a harmonious atmosphere is important while others cultivate conflict (Leach 2009). And Flesher Fominaya (in press) recounts the clashes between the rather serious, bureaucratic meeting culture among Spanish radicals and the more joyous, experimental culture of their allies from the UK.

Interestingly, the degree of organization of a meeting arena is also a matter of style: as indicated above, it is not possible to decide for everything aspect of the meeting whether it should be decided or not. What is decided and what remains undecided is hence largely a matter of style. Glass' account (2010: 207), for example, indicates that the allocation of functional roles at the meetings were *not* traditioned but they "were either decided ad hoc or on a rotating schedule where everyone had a turn." In other words, it was routine to *decide* on these roles (either ad hoc or in advance), while the seating order was not subject to decision ("*always* a circle"). But just as the logic of decided order encounters its limits, the logic of institutional order does too.

How to integrate difference? The inherent limits of institution

Challenges to the institutional logic are posed by apparent difference. As long as a community is "imagined", the mental image of unity among its members can be retained, despite all differences that exist 'on the ground'. The unity is taken for granted and reaffirmed through rituals and symbols. But when community members meet face-to-face, their imagined institution is almost inevitably challenged by the apparent differences, such as deviant behaviour, someone breaking the unwritten codes of conduct in the meeting.

These challenges may be met with patience and confidence that 'this is only a misunderstanding' and that things can be sorted out eventually on the basis of a common norm that unifies all. The institutional logic assumes that people can eventually 'get themselves together' and comply with what is considered right, that they will eventually become 'believers'. But if this does not occur 'naturally', then the deviator must be brought to terms by the community to restore order. And this is where the limitations of the institutional logic become evident: in order to deal with persistent deviancy that can no longer be denied, the collectivity needs to resort either to making a formal decision regarding sanctions or withdrawal of membership (exclusion) or to either personal ties – the deviator is asked to comply in order to do someone a favour or because that person will break the friendship, i.e. social control. In other words, just like the organizational logic has to resort to other logics lest it risks infinite regress, the institutional logic has to resort to network ties or elements of organization, in order to avoid an infinite repress (in the sense that differences have to be continuously denied).

Network: meetings as hubs

From the network perspective, finally, the meeting appears as an event where personal ties are created and fostered, similar to a hub in computer technology where 'hub' refers to a technical device used to connect various computers into a network, i.e. "a non-space, an empty centre that facilitates 'plugging in'" (Nunes 2005: 300). The purpose of a meeting in this logic is to enhance communication among the different parts of the network and to facilitate the free association of the participants.

A network meeting allows participants to engage with multiple friends[6] at the same time (rather than communicating individually with each of them) and it provides an opportunity to get to know the friends of friends and their friends in turn. There is no need for common norms or for a common goal or plan as participants are mobilized through their friends and by their individual goals.

Not sameness, but difference is the resource of the meeting, because difference provides opportunities for learning and sharing a variety of experiences. Yet, this diversity is not arbitrary like in an anonymous crowd; in a network meeting the participants do belong to the same network through which they have been recruited, which means there is a sense of trust, even with regard to participants one does not know, because one knows that they are second or third order friends. But it remains unclear what exactly this vague sense of trust towards friends of friends is really based on. This is why the introduction of a friend's friend often includes a brief mention of *how* they know each other, i.e. what kind of friends they are. Meetings, in short, are transparency devices in networks because they allow the network to observe itself. It allows individuals in the network to 'see' much further than they can on the basis of dyadic communication with individual friends.

The meeting, in this logic, is not the place for making collective decisions but to generate trust, for example by making overlapping interests and experiences apparent. The aim is not necessarily to identify one smallest common denominator among all meeting participants but clusters of overlapping interests among the participants (affinities). These more like minded sets of participants may then converge in a different meeting where they may get organized or institutionalized as a group (e.g. an affinity group).

Unlike working group meetings with a specific task, these smaller meetings are not defined or decided upon by not so much by the bigger 'hub-meeting' from which they resulted. There is no

[6] For reasons of simplicity, I use the term 'friend' to designate the nodes of the network. What the friendship tie is meant to stand in for here is a relationship of trust more broadly and may hence include certain kinship ties, patron-client ties or any other tie based on previous experience of reciprocity.

hierarchical relationship between the hub-meeting and the affiliated affinity groups. Yet they do not exist in a social vacuum. They are defined in relation to the other meetings and nodes of the network (which in turn may be offsprings of other hub-meetings). In other words, the meetings themselves take a network relation to each other; they are not defined in terms of super- and subordination but in terms of a horizontal division of labour in an emergent network process.

Network meetings are often described as creative, inspiring, or even as a transformative experience for individual participants. They are sites of mutual learning and storytelling and, as such, ends in themselves. A prominent example of meetings within the network logic are the meetings of the consciousness raising groups of the feminist movement in the late 1960s (Gordon 2002). Young (2002: 73) characterizes these as "local public[s]" in which participants "identify one another, and identify the basis of their affinity."

Yet, the network logic of meetings is not only positive, at least from the perspective of participatory democracy in social movements. It often happens that the network of trust that existed before the meeting overshadows the meeting as a public space: those who know and trust each other often seem to be talking among themselves, interventions from less connected participants are ignored. This phenomenon of 'net-talk' is often associated with a hidden agenda of those involved, but it can also an unintended consequence of friendship. Net-talk can easily lead to a hegemony of informal leaders or other dominance structures in network meetings (on the role of friendship in participatory democracy see also Polletta 2002: 207-208). Making these networks visible is another aspect of the transparency function of meetings in networks.

So what are the inherent limits of the network order?

How to act collectively? The inherent Limits of the network

To be friends with someone who in turn is friends with others is a trivial fact of social life: infinite networks exist happily without 'doing' much more that connecting individual actors through 'hubs'. But when these networks become a mobilizing structure for a social movements (Kitts 2000), they suddenly face the problem of becoming a collective actor.

This is when the logic of their meetings gets transformed. For a collective actor to emerge from a network of interpersonal relations, a sense of collective identity is necessary. But the creation of such an identity requires that the actors in the network not only know and trust their respective neighbours, but all or most other actors in the network too. Trust needs to be generalized within the collectivity.

Meetings are obviously a good occasion for such identities to emerge, but this institutionalization of a collective identity runs counter the network logic, which welcomed any friends to join the meeting, regardless of their identity. With a collective actor emerging, those friends who don't share the actors' collective identity will not feel comfortable at these 'network' meetings any longer. While they may be trusted by some as their friends, they are eyed suspiciously when they don't 'fit in'. Differently said: at a network meeting, I might find out that I don't want to be friends with my friends' friends.

But forming a collective identity is not the only way for a network to become a collective actor. Alternatively, the diversity of individual (networked) actors can be integrated around an organizational goal – an organization is formed, and the members of this organization neither need to know and trust the other members nor do they need to share institutionalized norms. It suffices that they contribute to the goal of the organization by respecting the organizational decisions regarding membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring, and sanctions.

Some conclusions

In this section, I have discussed organization, institution, and network as three idealtypical principles of ordering social relations in meetings. I have sometimes hinted at the fact that this these logics can also be applied to map the relationships between meetings, but the dominant perspective of the discussion regarded the meeting arena as the context in which the ordering takes place (or in which existing orders manifest themselves). To conclude, let us now briefly turn this perspective around and take organization, institution, and network as larger social orders which constitute the context in which a meeting takes place and how the meeting alters

each respective social order. Differently put: what is the relationship between the three principles of social order and the meeting as a form of social interaction? In a nutshell, these relationships can be described as indifference (organization), dependence (institution), and complementation (network) respectively. Organization is indifferent towards meetings in the sense that what counts for the social order are decisions but not where and how they are made or how they are communicated. Institution, in contrast depends on public spaces like meetings in order to convey to others what norms and rules are to be taken for granted. And the network is complemented by meetings in the sense that the private (dyadic) structure of network interaction is entirely different from the public (triadic) structure of meeting interaction, and yet, there is an attraction between the two because meetings are ideal opportunities to create and enhance networks as well as for their self-observation.

Implications

The potential consequences of these arguments are numerous and not limited to social movement studies, but I will focus here on three corollaries for this field: the *heuristic* potential of the meetings approach for studying inter-organizational processes (the types of questions we ask), the *methodological* implications for the actual practice of empirical social movement research (how we collect our data and how we interpret them), and the *theoretical* implications (what answers we give).

Heuristic: what questions we ask

Using meetings as units of analysis implies new perspectives on issues such as leadership, hierarchy, control, democracy, change, and inter-organizational collaboration.

Leadership

Leadership in social movements is often difficult to grasp, firstly because it tends to be informal, secondly because it is often diffuse or distributed, and thirdly because it is not supposed to exist according to the egalitarian norms of many activists, and therefore often denied. Focusing in the

publicly visible 'heads' of the movement is not a solution and has led to an emphasis on charismatic leadership while ignoring the backstage leaders who often play a much more crucial role in the mobilization. Their work can be observed in activist meetings where they interact with both rank and file activists and other leaders. Studying these interactions gives raise to questions that are not usually discussed with relation to leadership in social movements: how do leaders handle emotional dynamics of meetings? What social skills are necessary to be accepted as a leader? How far does a particular leader's authority reach? Or is it entirely situational – making the right move at the right moment? How do different styles of leadership in meetings affect the process and outcome of the meeting? And essentially: what makes a good leader (or facilitator)? As Polletta (2002: 198–199) noted: "the challenge for contemporary activists may be one with which 1960s activists only began to wrestle: to forge new bases of legitimate authority rather than to renounce authority altogether."

In my study of meetings in the global justice movements (Haug 2010a: 220–225), I asked what gives power to leaders in meetings and found seven distinct types of leadership each of which is based on a different source of authority: organizers (and their meeting arena), facilitators (and their responsibility for progress), veterans (and their experience), brokers (and their ties), experts (and their knowledge), representatives (and their constituency), and mobilizers (and their mobilizing capacity). Notably, the first four of these are closely connected to the meeting infrastructure of a movement: Organizers are those who convene and prepare meetings in a particular meeting arena. They are powerful because they have the authority to make various decisions regarding the meeting and their preparatory work often endows them with certain privileges, since it is 'their' meeting. Facilitators are powerful because they have accepted the responsibility to help the meeting participants to navigate through or around difficult stages throughout the meeting and thereby ensure progress with regard to the purpose of the meeting. Veterans (or regulars) are powerful because they have long participated in the meetings of a particular arena and thereby have acquired knowledge about institutionalized practices and assumptions in that arena. Their seniority empowers them to define the history and hence the

identity of the arena in 'keynotes' when they feel that the discussion is digressing from the usual kind of discussion or the 'original' intention of the meeting series. Brokers are powerful because they have been to meetings in many different arenas from which they can report. In doing so, they interpret and define not only the meaning of the other meetings, but also the meaning of the present meeting in relation to these.

Hierarchy and Control

Consequently, questions of hierarchy and control within social movements can (at least partly) be converted to questions of hierarchy and control within meetings. A myriad of handbooks exists about 'How to have better meetings' where 'better' means 'more efficient' in terms of producing decisions. But that kind of efficiency may not be the main point of meetings in social movements – and even in work organizations – where sense-making processes and the sharing of experiences through storytelling are crucial. Meetings are then ways of channelling and possibly controlling these sense-making processes. But what kind of control is at work here? Conformism? Authoritarianism? And how is the meeting style of an arena actualized, i.e. what signals convey the do's and don'ts of the meeting and who emits them? What skills are necessary to resist control and challenge dominant positions in meetings? More generally then, meeting arenas not only appear as the locus where *power* struggles are fought, but also as a resource in these struggles. Authority and prestige can be gained by whoever is in the position to define the result of a particular meeting: either by reporting to others what was discussed or by summarizing the discussion at the end.

Democracy

Considering the democratic aspirations of many social movements the obvious question is then: what does a democratic meeting polity look like and how can it be achieved? For a long time, social movement researchers, especially in North America, have limited the movement-democracy nexus to the question of how movements contribute to the democratization of states (Tilly 2003) while treating the internal structure of the movement as a mainly strategic question of how to best achieve specific goals. In this view, internal democracy not only

becomes a matter of ideology (or perhaps a means to maximize participation that is abandoned if it fails), it is also often reduced to mean 'liberal democracy'. Polletta (2002: 52-52, 225-226) has questioned the dichotomy that equates democracy with ideology and effectiveness with instrumental thinking:

> "Activists are likely to choose options that are familiar to rather than ones that are instrumentally effective or ideologically consistent when what is instrumental is by no means clear, and when the strategic entailments of ideological commitments are not clear either" (Polletta 2002: 226).

If, then, democratic practices are (also) a matter of habit and tradition, observing them as they occur is the best way to find the questions that we need to ask in relation to internal democracy. The argument of this paper suggests that a substantial part of a movement's internal infrastructure consists of meeting arenas and the organized, institutionalized, and networked practices that they host. But how do we assess this infrastructure in terms of democracy when established models of democracy are designed for formal organizations such as states and, well - organizations? If we take the metaphor of social movements as 'laboratories of democracy' seriously, we cannot assume that we already know the answer.

An international research project coordinated by Donatella della Porta, DEMOS, recently made some important steps towards a better understanding of "democracy in social movements" (Della Porta 2009b). But with its focus on formal SMOs and informal groups and *their* internal structures, it was not able to adequately grasp precisely that inter-organizational dimension of the social movement infrastructure, even when it observed "heterogenous groups", many of which were actually mesomobilization meetings (Della porta and Rucht in press). I would argue that this was due to the lack of a conceptual framework like the one presented here.

Change

Another heuristic implication arises from the fact that meetings as *events* always constitute a rupture in the ongoing flow of everyday activity and they therefore have a propensity induce

reflective thinking and to question daily routines and thereby instigate change (Hendry and Seidl 2003: 183). To prevent change is an active achievement. If participants 'fail' to reproduce dominant social structures inside the meeting, chances are that it becomes what McAdam and Sewell (2001: 102) call a "transformative event" – perhaps not one that transforms society, but one that changes the structure of a particular organization, mobilizing process or social movement sector. "The analytical fascination of the event is that in events very brief, spatially concentrated, and relatively chaotic sequences of action can have durable, spatially extended, and profoundly structural effects" (McAdam and Sewell 2001: 102). Yet, despite the eventfulness of mobilizations, we still know little about how series of meeting events influence the history of a movement or mobilization. What is the role of collective effervescence that sometimes occurs in meetings? How does it come about? Can a temporary upsurge in activism, a moral outcry in public, be channelled into a more durable social movement by organizing a meeting? Or are such organizing attempts counterproductive?

Inter-organizational collaboration

A final point regarding heuristics is that conceptualizing meeting arenas as a social movement infrastructure raises the question how this particular infrastructure relates to other inter-organizational infrastructures; or, if one sees meeting arenas as a resource, how these relate to other resources. If we look at a movement's internal communication, for example, what is the role of face-to-face meetings and assemblies as compared to mediated communication via email or social media such as Twitter or Facebook or via social movement media. For example, Thörn's (2006: 122, 196-200) study of the transnational anti-apartheid movement suggests that the availability of new communication technologies such as the fax machine did not make face-to-face contacts redundant but that personal contact was crucial for sustained solidarity at a distance; Kavada (2010) finds that email lists provide opportunities for divergence and diversity, whereas face-to-face contacts facilitates convergence and unity; and Juris (2012: 267) observes that although Occupy Wallstreet activists were mobilized as more or less isolated individuals through social media, the many meetings and assemblies they subsequently held in

the occupied squares served the purpose of building a “collective subjectivity” and – I would argue – a sense of trust among previously individualized subjects.

Staying within the domain of face-to-face encounters, another dimension for comparison could be the number of participants. Based on Strydom’s concept of “triple contingency” (1999), I have distinguished the triadic communication in meetings from the dyadic communication in networks (Haug 2010b). This can be further differentiated by investigating the gradual differences between meetings and assemblies. How big can participatory meetings be? Is creativity confined to small meetings while assemblies produce conformity or can assemblies be creative? In my fieldwork at transnational meetings, I observed a tendency of ‘northern Europeans’ (Germans, Scandinavians) to break even medium sized meetings into smaller working groups while ‘southern Europeans’ often preferred to stay together in larger plenary sessions. Why is this so and what effect do these different meeting cultures have on mobilizations? The question of meeting styles more generally has become increasingly salient with the transnationalization of activism (Flesher Fominaya in press) as well as the increased collaboration across movement sectors, especially between the old (labour unions, Trotskyte groups) and the new left (Dowling 2005).

Method: how we answer questions

Whether one asks new questions or confronts old, evergreen ones, introducing the category of the meeting into the analysis of social movements also has some implications on how we gather data and how we interpret them. Using the meeting as unit of analysis implies looking at what people actually do and analyse this activity as situated in time and space.

What people do

Looking at what activists actually do when they strategize, quarrel, negotiate, create masterframes, devise campaigns, or make decisions collectively is an important source of knowledge to make sense of social movements. It may be easier to have interviewees make sense of these processes for us, but, as ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts have

pointed out, using 'naturally' occurring data allows us to go notice relevant details that interviewees may not be aware of or that they consider irrelevant. For example, observing meetings allows us to study how the sequence of events in meetings conditions the outcomes – path dependency in action, as it were. The idea of participant observation is, of course, anything but new. My point here is that recognizing meeting arenas as a social movement infrastructure can help to conduct (and report) such research more systematically. Rather than lumping all the field work into one massive narrative, the participant observer (or activist researcher) can focus on specific events and map them onto the broader infrastructure in which they took place and thereby contextualize them in a more refined manner.

But although meetings lend themselves to participant observation, they can also be useful units of analysis in interview research, especially when it comes to mapping the meeting infrastructure of the field to be studied. Rather than asking (only) for 'key players' in the field, asking for 'key meeting arenas' can produce a much better overview of how the field under study actually works and perhaps tell us *why* key players are key or in what way. Understanding who meets with who on what occasions and which meetings have what impact is useful not only in social movements but equally so in other inter-organizational domains, such as in various forms of network governance and informal policy networks. Especially senior scholars, who often have less time to spare for extensive fieldwork, can use meetings to identify interviewees or for a flying visit to get a sense for what is happening 'on the ground', rather than relying on interviews and media reports alone.

Temporality and spatiality

Another point is that the category of the meeting almost inevitably introduces temporality and spatiality into the analysis, two dimensions that have been somewhat neglected in the study of social movements (McAdam and Sewell 2001; Sewell 2001). Every meeting is an event that takes place at a particular time and at a particular place and these coordinates have various consequences, not the least who will participate. Activists often spend significant time negotiating the time and place of meetings and to avoid collisions with other important events.

In doing so, they construct the geography of the movement as well as a social movement calendar that constitutes the internal temporality of the movement by synchronizing the itineraries of multiple activists and organizations. The category of the meeting can therefore help in reconstructing this temporal and spatial unfolding of a mobilization. Meetings as units of analysis lend themselves to methodologies like process tracing, both with a single meeting and across series of meetings. If it is possible to identify patterns in the meeting infrastructures of different movements, this could also open up new forms of comparison. To what degree and in what way does the structure of the network of meeting arenas determine success (however defined)?

Theory: What answers we give

Finally, the meetings perspective might also have some theoretical implications because of its potential to bridge the micro-macro divide as well as different research traditions within social movement studies and between organization theory, communication and media studies, and social movement studies.

Micro versus macro?

This is not the place to enter into the manifold discussions around the micro-macro distinction. Suffice it to say that attending to meetings can prevent us from equating 'micro' with 'agency' and 'macro' with 'structure'. Meeting arenas are micro-structures that enable and constrain the interactions of the participants. At the same time, meeting events often make a difference far beyond the face-to-face interactions of its participants and therefore can be seen as having macro (or collective) agency, for example when delegates from previously disconnected sectors manage to create a new collective identity or master frame that allows these sectors to work together. But perhaps most of all, meetings are the site for (potential) contention where dominant actors in the field are (or can be) subjected to a form of public scrutiny and lose or reinforce their authority. Using the terminology recently introduced by Fligstein and McAdam (2011), meeting arenas can thus be understood as "governance units" of a wider strategic action field which they oversee. This reminds us that meeting arenas are rarely neutral platforms

deliberation: Most “governance units bear the imprint of the influence of the most powerful incumbents in the field and the logics that are used to justify that dominance. (…) Ordinarily, then, governance units can be expected to serve as defenders of the status quo and are a generally conservative force during periods of conflict within the [strategic action field]” (Fligstein and McAdam 2011: 6).

When Fligstein and McAdam speak of internal governance units, they have formal organizations in mind which “are charged with overseeing compliance with field rules”, such as the trade association of a particular industry (Fligstein and McAdam 2011: 6). The conceptualization of meeting arenas as partial organizations allows us to apply their innovative theory of meso-level social orders to social movements without assuming that movements have fully fledged organizations as internal governance units. It will suffice to identify the most influential meeting arena (or perhaps several competing ones) as mentioned above. This may help address a long lamented gap in the social movement literature: Already in the late eighties Klandermans (1989: 215) noted that “there is an extensive literature on democracy in movement organizations, but studies of actual decisions making are rare.” In 1997, he repeated this diagnosis (Klandermans 1997: 133), and another eight years later Minkoff and McCarthy (2005: 289) came to the similar conclusion that processes of decision-making in social movements are “typically treated as ‘black box’ processes”. These shortcomings have led to a “desire to reinvigorate studies of SMOs” (Schaefer Caniglia and Carmin 2005: 201) and calls to study SMOs “in their own right” (Clemens and Minkoff 2004: 156). The message is: to understand decision-making and other internal process of social movements, we need to study SMOs and we need to do so without repeating the mistakes of resource mobilization theory which “discarded symbolic interactionism along with assumptions of the irrationality and spontaneity of mobilization” (Clemens and Minkoff 2004: 156).

There is, of course, nothing wrong with focusing on SMOs and placing them “center stage as arenas of interaction” (Clemens and Minkoff 2004: 157), but the argument of this article

suggests that social movement decision-making takes place *between* rather than *within* SMOs so that focussing on SMOs runs the risk of either missing the mesomobilization level or identifying particular SMOs with the broader movement. At times, this risk is being met by stretching the concept of SMO to an extent that it can include anything from a 'classic' organization to an informal group of activists, to a network organization with indistinct boundaries. If the aim of such sloppy use of the concept of organization is to make space for more interactionist or process oriented studies of social movement decision-making (or sense-making, framing, etc), then the concept of meeting arena as a partial organization may have more to offer. While Clemens and Minkoff (2004) rightly criticize the assumption that SMOs are hierarchical, the concept of partial organization takes this criticism several steps further by calling into question all five elements of complete organizations and making them subject to decision. Decision-making in social movements is, hence, not just a matter of decision-making within given organizational structures, but it is also to a large degree the (decision-)making of the social movement infrastructure itself. This constant need to (re-)decide its meeting infrastructure is perhaps the key difference between organizations and social movements .

Given that communication is a key activity in meetings, studying meeting arenas also invites us to pay more theoretical attention to the role of communicative processes in the constitution of social movements. Of course, communication has been crucial, especially in culture and identity oriented approaches, but these relate mostly to the mobilizing dimension of social movements (e.g. collective action frames) and less to their organizing activity. Furthermore, there seems to be a bias towards the cognitive dimension of communication and less attention is paid to the interactional one. The Montreal School of organizational communication is addressing precisely these issues when it affirms that communication is constitutive of organization (Putnam and Nicotera 2009; Clark et al. 2011) and it is only logical that these researchers were able to produce a whole volume about a single meeting (Cooren 2007). Similar studies in the social movement field could contribute to a better understanding of how face-to-face interaction contributes to broader patterns and dynamics, for example through decision-making.

Culture versus structure?

Such a trajectory would also feed well into a debate that has vitalized social movement studies since the late 1990s: that between culturalist approaches and structuralist or rationalist approaches (see Goodwin and Jasper 2004; Minkoff 2001). Minkoff (2001: 283) claims that the integration of "organizational and cultural processes in the study of social movement dynamics" is "a central problem for future social movement theory". The communication between these different strands of research is often difficult, not just because of different vocabularies and background assumptions but because of different units of analysis. Although scholars from both sides agree on the need to open up the black box of internal social movement processes (Minkoff and McCarthy 2005: 289, 304; Polletta 1999: 2) they seem to have somewhat different boxes in mind and expect to find different 'things' once they open them. On the one side, we have individual entrepreneurs and their formal SMOs as the black boxes and on the other there are "free spaces" and the interactions *between* individuals that they help to sustain. Typically, those who want to open the former type of black box expect to reveal leadership- and decision-making processes, while in the latter case the hidden treasure is cultural practices and narratives.

So considering that meetings are the site for all of these: leadership, decision-making, culture in interaction, and storytelling, why not award meetings the official status of a theoretically relevant category rather than condemning them to a Cinderella existence, unworthy of entering the high spheres of the theoretical ball house? The strengths and weaknesses of the competing approaches could be much easier assessed with meetings as a common point of reference. If scholars would attend to and describe key meetings in whatever internal process they are studying, these events can be used as hinges for comparison and fruitful dialogue.

Organizing versus mobilizing

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the recognition of meeting arenas as the organizing spaces that constitute a social movement infrastructure also suggests an analytical distinction

that has received little explicit attention in the study of social movements: the distinction between mobilizing and organizing. If we define mobilizing as *the activation of actors for a cause*, and organizing as *developing a decided order among actors*, then social movement theory is not only about how mobilization for change comes about, but also how change is organized. In fact, mobilizing and organizing can then be studied as two analytically distinct ways of bringing about social change.

> “Mobilization not only exerts power on leaders, but also serves to inspire and rededicate those who need social change. Through large demonstrations, pageantry, publicity, and sometimes by threatening disruption, mobilizations can force concessions from the powerful. (…) Leaders mobilize people to bring them together, to get them to vote for a candidate or a union, to fire them up, to let them experience solidarity viscerally” (Gordon 2002: 104–105) .

Mobilization is therefore inherently instrumental and if mobilizers use organization to mobilize, they are likely to do so in an instrumental manner. This has lead social movement theorists to confound the two, sometimes to a degree where organization practically becomes synonymous with (resource) mobilization. The idea of meetings as organizing spaces makes the organizing dimension of a social movement more tangible as a dimension in its own right. As argued above, meetings are (partially) organized spaces which themselves may serve an organizing or mobilizing purpose. Putting some flesh on the bones of the basic definition above, organizing can be seen as different from mobilizing,

> “not just [as] a different tactic but actually a different vision of what freedom and democracy can mean. An organizer aims to self-destruct as a leader—that is, to make people need her less, to build leadership in others. Organizing works through developmental politics, in which the immediate objective may matter less than bringing people to see themselves as having the right and the capacity to have a say in the community or polity”(Gordon 2002: 105).

Organizing, therefore, is not purely instrumental in the sense that it prescribes a fixed goal but it is rather aimed at consciously creating the conditions for self-empowerment. This may be achieved by creating adequate meeting arenas or other spaces or activities that serve this vision. Understanding the organizing dimension of social movements is critical for understanding the #Occupy movement which has been criticized for not formulating any demands (around which people would then be mobilized to exert pressure on leaders). One activist succinctly explained the importance of the organizing dimension of the #Occupy movement (OWS) like this:

> "we all sat around and talked both about how amazing the march was but then we also asked the inevitable question of 'What's next?' And as this question was being asked, I realized that it was the wrong question for OWS. It is the wrong question for a few reasons: because when we are reproducing everyday life we don't need to ask 'What's next?' because this question is already answered. But it is also the wrong question because in a movement without leaders and without demands, the question isn't 'What's next?' but rather: 'What do I want to do next?'" (McCleave Maharawal 2011).

If the reproduction of 'everyday live' is a key element of organizing, then the gender dimension of the division of labour in social movements becomes evident and also reveals the gender bias in social movement theory when it focusses on mobilizing rather than organizing:

> "The mobilizing/organizing distinction has everything to do with gender. One could say that organizing operates out of a female-style discourse and manner of relating. By female style I do not mean something that women necessarily have and men do not. (Most of my women friends do not and neither do I.) But in many different cultures, women develop skills at listening, connecting, nurturing, and, of course, doing without the limelight" (Gordon 2002: 106–107) .

I have suggested the distinction between organizing and mobilizing as an *analytic* distinction between two forms of activism that are particularly visible in meetings and I then illustrated

this distinction with various empirical accounts that seem to suggest that organizing and mobilizing are clearly distinguishable *empirical* phenomena. This is the price for concise illustrations, but it should be clear that, in practice, organizing a meeting requires that participants are mobilized to attend, and mobilizing people will always involve some organizing. But keeping the two social movement activities theoretically distinct could spawn new ways of theorizing social movements. Take for instance Tarrow (1998: 137) when he concludes his discussion of mobilizing structures:

> "The dilemma of hierarchical movement organizations is that, when they permanently internalize their base, they lose their capacity for disruption, but when they move in the opposite direction, they lack the infrastructure to maintain a sustained interaction with allies, authorities, and supporters. This suggests a delicate balance between formal organization and autonomy – one that can only be bridged by strong, informal, and non-hierarchical connective structures."

Plausible as this observation might be, it does not tell us what this balance might look like, where we might find it, or how it can be organized. The flexible and yet sufficiently stable infrastructure that Tarrow is looking for is the amorphous nebula of meeting arenas that a cycle of contention brings about. Once these arenas become defunct, a cycle of contention – and possibly the movement – has come to an end. The balance that a movement has to strike between different ways of structuring itself is in how it organizes its (mesomobilization) meetings and hence in how it organizes it's organizing and mobilizing processes.

Don't get me wrong: Tarrow is not to blame. The problem is the lack of conceptual tools to study the organizational dimension of social movements that are not biased towards a particular organizational model, i.e. that of hierarchical organization. This lack is also apparent in Melucci's chapter on "The organization of movements" (1996: 313–331). Throughout the chapter, he uses the term 'organization' in two senses without making the difference clear: in one sense he refers to the "organization of the movement" and in the other to organization as in social movement

organization. While the latter meaning is clear, the former conveys little more than the common place that the movement is organized without giving any indication as to *how* it is organized, *who* organizes it, or even what the organizational structures are. Melucci seems to avoid looking more into the organizational structures of the movement because that would inevitably mean to equate a movement with an organization.

But recent developments in organization theory defy this narrow concept of organization. As I have tried to show here, the concept of partial organization (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011) is one such development that can help to conceptualize the organizational dimension. It can be fruitfully combined with another approach that is currently gaining momentum: the communication-as-constitutive of organization (CCO) approach (Cooren et al. 2011). It fundamentally alters the widespread view according to which communication takes place within and between organizations. It contends that organization does not precede communication but is a result of communication. Now, given the prime importance that social movement scholars have ascribed to communication and given that meetings are the type of communicative events that CCO scholars have laid much emphasis on, it seems only logical that the CCO approach to organizational communication provides an excellent theoretical repertoire for studying the communication constitution of social movements in meetings.

In order to go beyond the analysis of single meetings, Blaschke et al. (2012) have shown that it is possible to study "organizations as networks of communication episodes". Their idea of "turning the network perspective inside out" by conceptualizing the network nodes as communication and the links between them as individuals rather than the other way around is precisely what has been suggested above as "figurations of meeting arenas" and the relational constitution of these arenas. Meetings are the nodes of the social movement infrastructure and individuals link these nodes by participating in different meetings.

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	Broader phenomenon in social movement research	Commonly discussed dimension	Neglected dimension
A	social movement	collective actor	collective space
B	protest	frontstage	backstage
C	social change	macro/ political system	meso/ cultural
D	communication	mediated	face-to-face
E	social movement infrastructure	personal networks and SMOs	meeting arenas
F	mobilization	micromobilization	mesomobilization
G	framing	cognition	social interaction
H	face-to-face interaction	group	meeting
I	meeting	event	arena
J	organization	hierarchy	decision
K	leadership	charismatic	organizer
L	'anchors' in fieldwork	individuals and organizations	meetings
M	activism	mobilizing	organizing

Table 1: (Relatively) neglected dimensions in the study of social movements

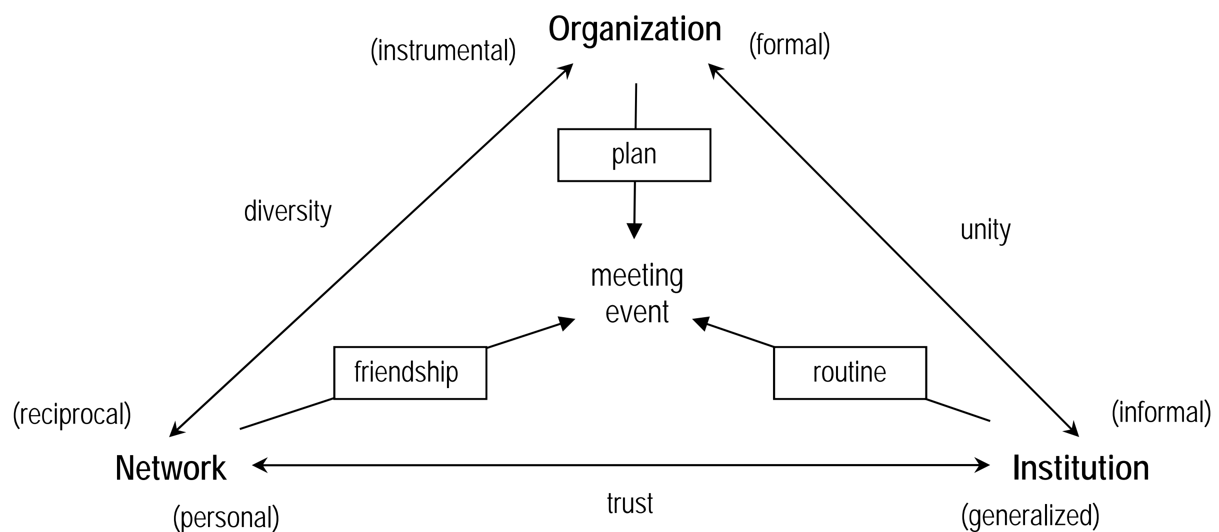

Figure 1: The meeting arena as a hybrid of organisation, network, and institution