



The use of the new technologies of information for democratic organization: The case of the European Social Forum



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Abstract: The first part of this paper present a review on the debate of the impact of the Internet in politics and democratic organization, and a review of the empirical research on the Internet applied to political democratic organization. In the second part, the paper will be centred on analysing the use of the new technologies of information in the Global Justice Movement and in the concrete case of the European social forum. The European social forums is the main

networking meeting point of social movements at Europe, taking place every year or bi-annually since the 2002.

Keywords: New technologies of information uses for political purposes; democratic organization; participation; Global justice movement; European Social Forum.

Index

1. Introduction
2. The debate on the potential of the Internet for democracy and democratic organization
3. Global Justice Movement links with the new technologies of information
4. Typology of the uses of the new technologies of information by social movements organizations
5. The case of the European social forum uses of the New technologies of information for political purposes: The adoption of pro-participative technology
6. Bibliography

1. INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND OF THIS PAPER

The material presented at this paper is the result of my first year of doctoral research under the title: *Online creation communities: Styles of reaching cognitive democracy quality*.

In a context in which the institutionalization of democracy (Della Porta, 2005), but also the institutionalization of knowledge (Santos, 2004), are both in crisis, experiences based in the searching of democratic quality in knowledge-making are determinant.

One case of searching the Internet potential to develop democratic quality in knowledge-making, term *cognitive democracy*, is via the online creation communities. These are a new phenomenon which is growing in interest in the public debate and for social researchers since the

middle of the 1990s. An **Online Creation Community**¹ refers to *a collective action performed by a loosely integrated “network“ of people that, cooperate, communicate and interact, mainly via the Internet, with the common goal of knowledge-making, and engaged in alternative forms of knowledge management*² (Fuster, 2007). Online creation communities challenge society from many points of view.³

The online creation communities are an appropriate case to search the Internet potential for cognitive democratic quality because the online creation communities have a strong online dimension, constituting on some occasions, large, well known and very widely used experiences, as in the case of Wikipedia, and because they create strong interest in the public debate.

The explanatory model in the development of my phd research is based on the differences in the stress of the dimensions of cognitive democracy quality depending on size and time of appearance of the community and on knowledge and democracy conceptions. Concerning these explanatory aspects, the research design is based on a comparison first of a large-N and then of four case studies of online creation communities with regard to their variation in size and time of appearance, and conceptual aspects that could explain their differences in the dimensions of cognitive democracy quality. The four cases are: (i) Wikipedia - an open online encyclopedia, (ii) a Free software development community, (iii) the ESF Memory of the ESF, and, (iv) the BioTech Indymedia.

Contents of the paper

¹ In my research, I propose the concept of *online creation communities*, instead of using the broad concept of online communities because with the concept of *online creation communities*, I refer to a specific type of online community, i.e. the online community whose goal is knowledge-making.

² In this definition, the expression *alternative forms of knowledge management* refers to the absence of online or legal barriers to the circulation of information and knowledge (such as, Copyright restrictive licenses), and/or the promotion of less restrictive forms of information and knowledge management.

³ Some significant examples of these challenges are: As a new encounter space for public debate (Koopmans and Zimmermann, 2003); As a new form of knowledge production (Gibbons *et al.* 2002) and as a challenge to conventional forms of knowledge, such as the university or the industries based on immaterial goods (Santos, 2005); As resulting in new types of public goods (Di Corinto, 2007) and new “commons-based” model (Benkler,2006); As a new form based on a diverse relationship between knowledge and democracy (Bucchi and Neresini, 2006); As a challenge to the requirement of hierarchy and centralization in complex and large participated actions; As a new unconventional form of collective action and a new form of democratic conception.

The *first part* of the paper starts by presenting an initial review of the literature addressing the research on Internet's impact on politics and democratic organization from the view of social movement studies. The *second part* of the paper is dedicated to an initial analysis of the case of the European Social Forum (ESF). The ESF is the main bi-annual meeting of the global justice movement in Europe, and has taken place since 2002. In this second part of the paper, I present an introduction of the Global Justice Movement links with the new technologies of information; a typology of the uses of the new technologies of information by social movements organizations; and an initial analysis of the European social forum uses of the new technologies of information for political purposes, concerning the evolution in time in the adoption of participative mechanisms.

2 THE DEBATE ON THE POTENTIAL OF THE INTERNET FOR DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZATION

2.1 Polarization in the debate on the Internet and democracy: between potentiality and risk

The debate on the potential effect of the Internet on politics and democracy has from the beginning been dominated by the confrontation between skeptical and optimistic views (Della Porta and Mosca, 2006), utopias and dystopias (Silver, 2000), “technical determinists and social determinists, mobilisation theorists and reinforcement theorists (Norris, 2002)” (Koopmans and Zimmermann, 2003). But there are also views that proclaim no relevant effects on the impact of the Internet on politics and democracy. This is the case of the “normalization of cyberspace” thesis, which predicts that “online politics would be “politics as usual” and power relations would result unchallenged in the medium to long run” (Mosca, 2007).

2.2 General conceptions of democracy in the use of the Internet for political purposes

The application of the Internet and the new technologies of information in general has raised much interest and has created expectations, recognizing both a great potential and a source of

risk. But although the Internet is considered by some as the “answer” for politics and democracy, it is not clear what the question is. *What is it that we expect to be solved by the Internet? What ideal of democracy comes under the application of the Internet?*

Differentiation of ideals of democracy in the application of the Internet with political aims

Regarding the applications of the Internet with democratic aims, several typologies have been observed (Subirats, 2002; Della Porta, 2006). Barber differentiates thin or representative democracy from plebiscitary and strong democracy, and van Dijk differentiates between six models of democracy that shape the opportunities and risks that confront people in relation to the Internet - legalist, competitive, plebiscitary, pluralist, participatory and libertarian democracy (Koopmans and Zimmermann, 2003).

In this paper, I will differentiate between three great ideals:

- **The use of the Internet for the improvement of public administration and for making professional politics more accessible.** That is, the new technologies improve the quality of the services of the administration, starting off with the greater accessibility of information and running of managements online in a consumerist sense, along the lines of the proposals by the New Public Management of the 80's and 90's. The technologies are also used to bring the citizen closer to the elites of political representation; to facilitating the knowledge of and contact with parliamentarians and/or public actors.
- **The use of the new technologies to reinforce the role of civil society and make the space of the public debate more participative.** On this view, the Internet has been seen as a medium capable of fostering new public spheres since it disseminates alternative information and creates

alternative (semi)public spaces for discussion.

These two first ideals appear to be complementary to the political institutions in a liberal-representative democracy. The e-democracy studies have mainly dedicated their attention to these two first types (Trechsel et al, 2003).

The other face of these two first types of approaches is that, despite the increase in the participation of the citizens in the public debate and increased closeness of conventional politics, some are of the opinion that there are also some risks. In this sense, it is argued that if the first-generation media (radio, television) has made politics into something almost virtual, this virtuality will be enormously more pronounced in the second-generation media (interactive electronic networks), leading to a sort of apotheosis of sharply directorial political forms (Subirats, 2002). To complete this pessimistic scenario, it is predicted that information and communications technologies (NTIs) will allow exhaustive control of data and sophisticated political marketing, and will offer great possibilities for the manipulation of information, with little margin for generating change (Calenda and Lyon, 2007). Rather than strengthening the presence and participation of the citizens in collective affairs, the use of NTIs could end up by reinforcing the control and authority of institutional elites (Subirats, 2002).

- A third and final type of ideal of democracy in the application of the Internet is the search for a networked society. This search is inspired by direct democracy.

In the internal organizational cultural logic, this last type, direct democracy in a networked society, resembles the second, participative civil society, but from an autonomistic view, that is, without placing its action in relation to the political institutions in an ideal of liberal democracy. On the contrary, within the framework of the search for a direct democracy in a network society, there is a demand for institutions of a new type (inspired by those of the social movements). These new institutions are claimed to be on a base territory that is different to those of the nation-state, built in the joint space of the political and the social, and giving an idea of participation, belonging and citizenship of a new type (Networked Politics, 2007; Subirats, 2002).

However, in this third ideal type, also some criticisms have also been made. Even in the field of non-conventional new political actors, some authors have presented a pessimistic view on the participatory and deliberating potential of the Internet underlying a limited offer of interactive channels, but also a low use of these applications when offered (Della Porta and Mosca, 2006; Rucht, 2004). Another source of limitation is the actual governance of the Googlecracia that has limited the decentralization effect of the Internet.

Depending on which ideal of democracy we are thinking about, the Internet could be well-suited to enhancing democracy in differing ways; but with democracy as understood in another way, we may regard the same technological features as hostile to it (Koopmans and Zimmermann, 2003).

This typology initially presents the different conceptions of democracy in the application of the Internet for political purposes, but it also sheds light on how each ideal of democracy use the Internet in different terrains. The first type applies the Internet potential to the institutionalization politics; the second type applies the Internet potential to the space for public debate; and the third

applies the Internet potential to the internal organization of collective grouping and networking. Of course, within these different terrains of impact, the different stress in the different territorial dimension, such as global, regional or local, could also be differentiated.

Components of democratic efficiency

“But even if the underlying concept of democracy is clear, the impact of the Internet on such a complex concept as democracy – regardless of the preferred model – is irreducible to a singular, unequivocally positive or negative evaluation” (Koopmans and Zimmermann, 2003): that is, it will probably lead to a series of ambivalent pro and con effects.

Together with the different ideals of democracy underlined and the different terrains of politics to which the Internet has been applied, it is necessary to separate the term democracy into more observable dimensions in order to analyse the impact of the Internet on democratic organization.

Concerning the establishment of a synthesizing view on the different components and dimensions under the search for democracy, one may distinguish four components of an effective democracy: (1) information (knowledge and understanding), (2) debate, (3) participation, (4) representation and accountability (Della Porta and Mosca, 2006).

Most of the empirical studies are concentrated on one of these components of an effective democracy, although each aspect opens a diverse field of questions and approaches, and the components themselves are also interrelated (Koopmans and Zimmermann, 2003).

In this line, in the frame of this research, I start by building a holistic set of components and

indicators of an effective democracy, retaken from previous experiences (Vedres *et al*, 2005; Della Porta and Mosca, 2006), focusing and adapting them concerning the potential of the Internet to achieve democracy mainly in relation to the cognitive aspect and in relation to initiatives whose goal is knowledge production. A knowledge-making process following **cognitive democracy quality** is the one which 1) *provides well-organised and multi-lingual information required to participate (usability dimension)*; 2) *facilitates the accessibility to the technology that support the process*; 3) *is open to participation*; 4) *has a transparent organization structure and accountable financial aspects*; and, 5) *the knowledge management is clear on the authorship and on the conditions of use. These dimensions favour the conditions for generating a consensus between the people participating in the knowledge-making* (Fuster, 2007)⁴.

⁴ Extended presentation of the main dimensions that define the cognitive democracy quality:

1) INFORMATION USABILITY: This dimension refers to provision and the organization of the information in a way that facilitates its use. The concrete aspects that facilitate information usability are:

i) Provision of the information required to participate and the rules of the participation: Information dissemination is considered as a precondition of a deliberative process. All people involved in a discussion should have the same basic information in order to follow a collective action and to intervene in it;

ii) The presentation of the information in an easy and findable way;

iii) And, the provision of information required to participate translated in several languages: In an international environment, the translation in different languages of the basic information might facilitate participation

The usability dimension refers to the quality of the architecture or organization of the information and knowledge in a way that makes it more usable to the participants, not to the quality of the information and knowledge in itself. The usability dimension does not refer to the utility or excellence of the information and knowledge. Nor does it refer to the presence of the testing systems that the community could have in order to evaluate the quality of the information and knowledge or to check its functioning.

Furthermore, the usability dimension is not directly related to the level of formation or specialization of participants in discerning information and knowledge. In this sense, it is directly related to making easier the search and use of information rather than to the capability to develop it.

2) TECHNICAL ACCESSIBILITY: This dimension relates to the presence or absence of mechanisms facilitated by the community in order to reduce inequalities in the using the technologies required to participate. In principle, I am considering the technical accessibility once the user is already connected with the community. I am not considering the restrictions associated with the geopolitics of connectivity to the Internet. In social sciences, the term “digital divide” is often used to refer to such issues.

3) OPENNESS TO PARTICIPATION: This dimension is related to the presence of common spaces and the use of multi-interactivity application that allows participation in information gathering and knowledge building, in the general discussion and solution of disagreements, and in the explicit moments of decision making.

Previous studies suggest that the online creation communities are initially characterised by a hybrid of governing mechanisms, having formal mechanisms and also decentralised and spontaneous-open forms (Lanzara and Morner, 2003, 2006). The open mechanisms are the mechanisms that does not require or require very low profile permissions or a selection process in order to participate in them.

4) TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY: This dimension refers to the transparent functioning and the

2.3 The research on the debate concerning the Internet's potential for democratic organization

Initially and for many years, the discussion on the Internet's effect on democracy was mostly speculative and abstract, and strongly normative, lacking empirical evidence for the strong claims made (Koopmans and Zimmermann, 2003; Della Porta and Mosca, 2006). It claimed the attention first of hackers and activists, journalists and writers, and later of the public debate, and with an influx of academic scholars. Since the mid-1990s and especially the late 1990s, the discussion has been fuelled by an increasingly empirical input from an increasing number of studies attempting to demonstrate and to measure the changes that the Internet does or does not bring about. Today, the issue of the relations between the Internet and democracy is still an innovative research field in the social sciences (Koopmans and Zimmermann, 2003). And it is disseminated between different disciplines, and with little interaction between studies developed from the angle of anthropology and cyber-cultural studies, webstudies and media-studies, organizational studies and, lastly, political sociology and political science.

From political sociology and political science, studies can be distinguished between those analysing users and patterns of usages by Internet users as citizens and its consequences for political participation, and those analysing the use of the Internet by grouping political actors.

Explorations of Internet users and usages **on the side of users as citizens**: “have been based mostly on large-scale surveys, originally carried out by market-oriented firms, but

accountability of an organization. These functions can be measured by the provision of a series of information on the community itself (organizational structure, statute / manifesto or equivalent document, provision of information / contacts of the facilitator / coordinator and of other identified roles) and on its finances. Besides, the provision of information referring to the website itself is offered to the general users.

5) KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT: This dimension is related to the licences used or the forms of knowledge management adopted by the community. It referees to the conditions of use of the knowledge and the authorship.

increasingly undertaken by national governments, other political actors (e.g. EU, OECD), academics, and long-term enterprises such as the Pew Internet & American Life Project and the World Internet Project. These studies mostly concentrate on the number and socio-demographic attributes of users and non-users and on the different kinds of usage. Social scientists increasingly rely on such data to explore the societal consequences of Internet usage and non-usage, for example under the concept of the “digital divide” (Norris, 2001). Others authors, within this strain of research, address the question of the Internet’s impact on political participation (Norris, 2001) or on the formation of social capital” (Koopmans and Zimmermann, 2003).

Analyses on **the use of the Internet by grouping political actors** has only recently been carried out by empirical research.

First studies on the Internet and politics mainly concentrated on well-established and traditional actors such as **parliaments and the political parties** on the Internet and to their strategies of communication via the Internet during electoral campaigns (Trechsel *et al*, 2003: 23; Norris, 2002; Römmele, 2003). The main results of these studies point to the low interactivity of websites of political parties (Gibson and Ward 1998; Margolis, Resnick and Wolfe 1999; Cuhna, Martin, Newell and Ramiro 2003; Gibson, Nixon and Ward 2003) and institutions (Coleman, Taylor and Van de Donk 1999). “Websites seemed instruments of propaganda more than tools for communication or exchange of ideas. In this sense, the Internet seemed not to differ from other media technologies” (Della Porta and Mosca, 2006).

The **choice of the research object could in some way have biased** the results. As Bennett (2003a) claims, “much of the attention to the Internet has been directed at the places where the least significant change is likely to occur: the realm of conventional politics” (Della Porta

and Mosca, 2006).

This debate has recently been followed by a new interest for empirical research on the relationship between the Internet and interest groups, NGOs and **social movements** (van den Donk *et al*, 2004; Vedel, 2003).

Trends in empirical research on the use of the Internet by social movements

Several trends can be differentiated in research on the use of the Internet as a medium to make social movement organizations more democratic. The differential element of these trends is mainly based on the different applications that are being analysed (Such as, websites, hyperlinks, mailing-lists/forums, search-engines, blogs, etc.). But these trends are also differentiated by the methodology used as being more likely to be appropriate for analyzing those applications.

i) A meso-reticular approach

One of the trends is based on a social network reticular approach to analyze the web hyperlink structure of the social movement's networks. This trend has been largely carried out by Mario Diani (2002, 2004). Diani took the links between the social movement's websites, among other sets of indicators including online and offline ones, as a reticular indicator of the existence of **social movement networks**, in order to extract their form and the structural positions and influence occupied by each organization in the network. The results have showed that, social movement networks are a variable combination of organizations with very heterogeneous profiles in terms of preferred action repertoires, organizational formal traits and institutional orientations.

Accordingly, Diani argues that SMOs should be identified primarily by their network position, rather than by their traits as organizations.

Also from a meso-level approach, Ruud Koopmans and Ann Zimmermann examined the hyperlinks in order to extract the **visibility of an organization** through the role of search engines and the communication networks that emerged on the Internet. In this sense, the website of the organization is more “hyperlinked” resulted more visible and websites are submitted to the “Googlecrazia” governance.

Concerning this reticular network analysis, the analysis is focus on inter-organizational aspects such as the study of the links between social movement organizations and their relative positions, but less on my main focus, intra-organizational aspects, than on the internal organizational aspects.

And lastly, this trend does not directly address the Internet as a subject of their studies. Instead this research utilizes Internet uses as indicators of something else (like the hyperlinks as indicators of connections between organizations), and the online dimension of the social movements is not their major goal.

ii) Research on the degree to which democratic Internet potentials are fulfilled in SMOs' websites and e-lists

Another of the trends in the empirical research on social movement uses of the Internet is the statistical analysis of the characteristics of the social movement organizations' websites and e-list.

In *Searching the net: the Democratic qualities of the Internet*, Della Porta and Mosca address the issue of the degree to which Internet potentials are fulfilled in SMOs' websites on such dimensions as the provision of information, identity building, external accountability, participation and reduction of users' inequalities (digital divide). Della Porta and Mosca statistically analysed social movement websites, extracting several styles of the maximization of the Internet potential for democratic quality. The different website styles reflect the different models of democracy (and of democratic communication) present in social movement organizations (Della Porta and Mosca, 2006). Similar findings and research have been carried out in European East NGO's (Vedres, Bruszt and Stark, 2005). These experiences are a source of inspiration for my research.

The important point is that not all the dimensions are correlated between them: this confirms that the organizations choose the maximization of some, but that not all the potential dimensions of the democracy on the net. In this sense, they are "guided" to choose between several technologies depending on their political agency, instead of being "guided by the technology" (Vedres, Bruszt and Stark, 2005).

These last studies point out how different forms of political organization, from political parties to social movement's organizations of different kinds, adapt technology to their styles and organizational strategies (Vedres, Bruszt e Stark 2005). In this sense, conceptions of democracy are linked to the type of use of the Internet carried out by diverse organizations (Hoff, Horrocks and Tops 2000; Pickerill 2004).

Other similar studies following this line have been carried out, concentrating their analyses in one of the dimensions of democratic quality. In a study of a sample of websites of protest networks and pressure groups, Sudulich analysed their websites focusing on two dimensions: their capacity for web connectivity and the potential for bilateral/multilateral communication which they

offer to users, compared with information provision. Sudulich concluded that one-way communication has been developed to a greater extent and with more sophistication than two-way communication. The level of two-way communication (participatory instruments) was indeed rather poor. Sudulich also concluded that SMOs do not differ radically from more traditional mobilizing agents, such as political parties. Moreover, no evidence emerged of statistically significant differences between big and small organizations regarding these issues. However, bigger movements have a better online visibility (number of links) than smaller ones (Sdulich, 2006).

Other studies on the democratic role of the e-list in social movement organizations have also been developed. In the case of the preparation of the European Social Forum (ESF), Kavada combined an analysis of the e-mail exchange and the e-list, with participative observations at the European Preparatory Meetings and in-depth interviews with activists. She concluded, among other things, that e-lists played a major role in the preparation of the decisions, but that decisions were made keep offline and informal space. In this sense, Kavada's experiences underline the importance of combining offline and online dimensions of analysis in this type of political actor (Kavada, 2006). The content analysis of e-lists related to the G8 contra summit in Genoa in July 2001 carried out by Andrea Calderaro in the frame of the Osservatorio Consumi ed Prodotti culturali led to similar findings to those by Kavada.

The conclusions drawn by this research show that the use of e-lists by the SMO is frequent and the use of the e-lists as a space for democratic internal organization is rich.

What appears to be more limited from the empirical findings is the low use of the web-based multi-lateral interactive system by social movement's organizations. Only ten per cent of social movement websites have interactive mechanisms (Della Porta and Mosca, 2006). Putting

this data into context, it appears to be more problematic if we consider that outside the global movement border, there is an explosion of experiences based on Web-multilateralism or Web 2.0, such as You Tube, My space and Flirch.⁵

Concluding the review on the empirical research on the Internet's potential on politics, my first main reflection is that, although in some ways the research subject was expanded from conventional to unconventional types of political actors, again the **choice of the research object could in some ways have biased the results on the use of the Internet by political actors**. In my view, the empirical research until now has mainly considered politics as necessarily having a mainly offline pre-existence, but that new types of collective action with a main online base are emerging, such as the online creation communities.

SECOND PART

3. GLOBAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT LINKS WITH NEW TECHNOLOGIES OF INFORMATION

In the encounter between the NTI and the Global Justice Movement I would highlight three elements: NTI as a *field of struggle*; as *organizational metaphor* and as a *mean*. But I will develop just the last one, that more directly contextualizes this paper.

Information and communication technologies as *field of struggle*

With the growing of importance of the NTI in society, embryonic mobilizations are emerging around the access to NTI, known as *communication rights*. The communications rights are present

⁵ **You Tube**: "Broadcast yourself" A website to archive, share and commend home-made videos. <http://www.youtube.com/>. **My space**: A website for social networking. Each person have its own page to present him or herself and interact with the others at My space <http://www.myspace.com> **Flirch**: A website to archive, share and comment photos. <http://www.flickr.com>

in the agenda of global social movements, such as the World Social Forum (WSF), which dedicated to communication rights one of the 10 main thematic spaces during the IV WSF – Porto Alegre, and a process of mobilization for the communications rights emerged with the celebration of specific contra-summits (Example: during the World Summit of Information society (Geneva 2004; Tunisia 2006) and Conferences (Example: Kaos Computer Club, celebrated at Berlin since more than two decades ago).⁶

Information and communication technologies as *organizational methaphor* for movements and transnationalization

The image of the net as a organizational metaphor begun to be present in the movements imaginary since the sixties, but Internet, the network of the networks, gained an absolute centrality in the discourse of the actual global justice social movements, with an imaginary of building an organizational model based on a ***network logic***, which would consist in :*“the distribution of horizontal and flexible autonomous nodes that receive, recombine and circulate freely the information in a growly faster speed in order to act coordinated and when needed taking decision by direct democracy”* (Fuster, Bergel, Duran i Juris, 2005). Following this metaphoric language, encounters like the Forum would become “hubs” - nodes connector, as the name given to one of its spaces during the ESF at Florence. Also the ***free software development model*** appears frequently as organizational metaphor, as a model based on free cooperation, the collaborative and collective building and the open access to the codes, that allows further developments. The same self-definition of the World Social Forum as an “open space” shows such a debt.

Information and communication technologies as *mean*

Successively, I will present a proposal for distinguishing in a elastic and approximate three

⁶ A rich case of transnational social network on communications rights is the *The Association for Progressive Communications* (www.apc.org).

stages in the building of an infrastructure of communication and coordination among social movements by using New technologies of Information.

One first stage of *gestation* in which predominated the creation of transnational connections around specific thematics by individual social movements organizations or/and people with internationalist sensitivity, but in a lack of a common - global framework. It supposed a high concentration and limited diffusion of contacts and knowledge on realities of other regions. In this stage, the use of Internet by social movements starts to gain importance, but it's limited and still there would be a stronger dependence on the "physical trip".

The second stage would follow with the "breaking new" of the global movement. This second stage would be characterized by a strong logic of global confluence, in which thanks to and fruit of the NTI, is constructed an *on line infrastructure of communication and of international coordination*. Some of the reasons for the building of this infrastructure are the high cost of the physical encounter; the need of fast channels of information circulation and the willing of giving continuity to the confluence process from one event to the other. By on line infrastructure is understood the creation of *Indymedia*, the creation of e-lists (tie to international events or no), the intensification of email exchange and the creation of information portals. This structure of communication resulted extremely innovative for that moment. Combined with the mass global confluences, it allowed the creation of a stable, multi-centered and diffuse connective environment among the transnational movements. It also became an inspiration source: *Indymedia* experience spreads all around the world and becomes a classic on open editing and media contents generated collaboratively.

During this stage, and after Genoa highly violent crash (Anti-G8 Mobilization - 2001), the 11 of September attack and the emerging of the Social Forums, there is also an evolution in the

transnational social movement's discourse from a more oppositional to a more centered on alternatives one.

In the process of transnationalization of social movements the NTI would have been used as a *mean* for "internal" communication (Example: means for circulation of calls for actions, organization of events or contra summits, spread of articles of reflection etc.) and coordination of common actions, and for "external" communication, though alternative media and mainstream media.

A third stage, where the global justice movements are at the moment, in which this created infrastructure would persist but it is going to be ***updated by more recent technological developments***. This infrastructure lowered the relevance of the "physical trip" in order to spread information and establish coordination. In this stage, there would be a replacement ***of the massive and physical global confluence***, although the bond keeps through the communication infrastructure.

Another element that would emerge is the growing **of a sensitivity to systematize and to democratize the access to the knowledge that the confluence process creates and the growing of sensitivity towards the analysis and the reflection on the experience**. As an expression of this we would find a rich variety of experiences on investigation of the transnational social movements, either in the form of support of academic researchers or in the form of impulsing initiatives of action research internal to the movements. The NTI would be also used as a means for systematize and democratizes the access to the information and knowledge that the confluence process generate.

4. TYPOLOGY OF USES OF THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES BY TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

In order to try to facilitate an holistic view of the uses of the information and

communications technologies by the social movements, here it is presented a schematic typology.

- **Facilitation of swarming:** Referring to the episodes of “spontaneous” self-organised mobilization and/or the mobilization in a context of non-formal or previous structures. For example, the concentrations at Filipinas against the President Estrada in 2001 called by a sms text, or more recently at Madrid and the rest of the Spanish State after the bombing the 11 of March 2004, called by chains of sms. An other example also recurrent since January 2006 is the convocation of citizenships assemblies as part of the Movimiento por una vivienda digna – a movement for the housing rights, at Barcelona, Madrid and other cities, called through e-mails running on personal networks and the through the use of blogs.
- **Internal communication and coordination of the movements:** Referring to the use of e-mails, e-lists, websites, wikis, mainly, by social movements organizations or groups of organization. For example: the use of european e-lists and website for coordinating the Euromayday mobilization (european network of collective working on precarity issues).
- **Portals of independent media:** Online spaces directly dedicated to alternative media or to intervene in the media. The more illustrative example is *Indymedia*.
- **New technologies applied to intervene at the traditional political systems and the public debate:** For example, the “Campaign of the NO in France”, where indications in the official press were that the YES were winning but websites communications were pointing to a victory for the NO.
- **Building of an autonomous communication channels:** Referring to the organizations which main objective is the promotion the use of NTI by social movements and the development of alternative channels. For example: the movement's servers, like riseup.net, or the Intra and Inter net Wireless Communities.
- **Online creation communities.** Referring to website that are the channel and container of a

knowledge produced decentralised and openly. For example the community of developers of free software like Debian or Wikipedia.

5. EVOLUTION OF THE USE OF THE NEW TECHNOLOGIES OF INFORMATION IN THE CASE OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUM

Concerning the analysis of the dimension of participation in the online mechanisms used by political actors, there is a transversal key of lecture. That is, if they are based on expositive-static logic or if they adopt participative-dynamisms. In other terms it could be referred if they are based on one way direction mechanism or if they allow the two ways or multi ways direction. At the context of technical development, it had being a huge and creative effort to build technologies that would allow multi ways directions. This tendency, more recent, is freezed in the concept of Web 2.0.

Web 2.0, proposed initially by O'Reilly Media⁷ in 2004, refers to a second generation of Internet-based services — such as social networking sites, wikis, communication tools, and folksonomies — that emphasize online collaboration and sharing among “users” to build the site. It also differs from early Web development (retrospectively labelled *Web 1.0*) in that it moves away from static web-sites, the use of search engines, and surfing from one website to the next, towards a more dynamic and interactive World Wide Web.

In this section it will be analyzed the use of Information and communication technologies by a concrete Global Justice Movement case, the European Social Forum (ESF) and it will be analyzed in which dimension and in which moment pro-participative technologies and NTI for the collective creation are adopted.

⁷ **O'Reilly Media** (formerly **O'Reilly & Associates**) is an American media company established by Tim O'Reilly that publishes books and web sites and produces conferences on computer technology topics.

In the ESF, two organizational levels could be differentiated. The local Organizer committee, referring to the level of the organization by the city and country that host the event, and the European Preparatory Assembly (EPA), that agglutinates the European forces. In the following section, I will present **the on line mechanisms used to organize the event at the European level**. Just in the case of the London ESF, due to the English language known by Europeans, the strong confrontation between the English organizers that required a high monitoring by the Europeans and the conflict on the access to the fse-esf.org website, there was less differentiate European-local organizational levels.

In a first table I will present the **on line mechanism by each ESF**. The ESFs have been four: first at Florence in 2002, second at Paris in 2003, third at London in 2004 and four and last, at Athens in 2006.

| TABLE OF ON LINE MECHANISM USED BY EACH FORUM |
|---|
| <p>ESF Florence 2002</p> <p>On line mechanisms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official website (Some parts now available here: http://www.florence2002.fse-esf.org/) • E-list fse-esf • Website project Scriva: This website collected the reports of the activities during the ESF. |
| <p>ESF Paris 2003</p> <p>On line mechanisms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official website (Some of the material available now at: http://www.2003.fse-esf.org/ and http://www.2003.fse-esf.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=1) • E-list fse-esf • Website memory of the ESF Paris: collection of the reports of the activities during the ESF. (Generally, not always, it is available here: http://www.rinoceros.org/fse/) |
| <p>ESF London 2004</p> <p>On line mechanisms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Official website (Available now at: http://www.ukesf.net/) • E-list fse-esf and e-lists for the working groups around the ESF • Wiki of the “Horizontal” attend to democratizes the ESF: (Used to be at www.esf2004.net) <p>A conflict on the management by the English ESF office of the official website, make to arise a working groups part of the European Preparatory Assembly entitled “Systematize and archive</p> |

TABLE OF ON LINE MECHANISM USED BY EACH FORUM

the information, communication and knowledge generated by the ESF process”⁸.

ESF Athens 2006

Due to the conflict around the English management of the official website, after London it was decided to sharp two dimensions of the on line mechanisms: a *process dimension* under the responsibility of the European Preparatory Assembly and a *event dimension* under the responsibility of the local Organizer committee.

From London to Athens also it had emerged a rich variety of experiences of **building the memory of the ESF**, which in the practice are known as **techno-political tools**. This experiences are in an experimental stage and their use is limited.

On line mechanism:

1. **Process website:** www.fse-esf.org
2. **Event website:** athens.fse-esf.org
3. **E-list fse-esf and e-list for the working groups around the ESF:** This e-list were published at the process website, they were no published before, but any one who ask for subscription is subscribed.

New pages under a memory framework:

4. **Process working space website:** workspace.fse-esf.org (It is based on Phone, a Contents Management System)
5. **Directory of organizations participating at the ESF - Website:**
<http://www.euromovements.info/directory/> Database of collective and organizations registered at the ESFs (more than 5000 entries). There are also other two smaller directories (on **European networks** and **On action research**).
6. **E-yearbook on social movements at Europe 2006 - Forumpedia:** A collective narration of the Social Forums <http://www.euromovements.info/yearbook>
7. **ALIS website:** <http://www.babels.org/alis> Contains audio recording of the ESF activities and it is a system that allows “home-made” simultaneous translation machines, lowing the cost of translations at the Forums.
8. **Archive of photos on the Forums:** <http://www.altermundo.info>
9. **E-library on social transformation at Europe:** Space for file sharing (mainly text) on contents related to the ESF <http://www.openelibrary.info>

There are also being developed instruments of visualization the data generated by the ESF in order to facilitate holistic and synthetic view of the data generated by the ESF process.

⁸ European group “Systematize and archive the information, communication and knowledge generated by the ESF process”: http://www.fse-esf.org/article.php3?id_article=86

After presenting in the previous table the on line mechanisms by each ESF. The following matrix will cross each ESF with a gradual list of characteristics that enable the two or multi communication. Each online mechanism will be situated according to the two-multi communications that allows⁹.

**MATRIX OF ON LINE MECHANISMS DISTRIBUTED BY THEIR
TWO/MULTI WAY CHARACTERISTICS according to each ESF**

| | | | | |
|---|-------------|---|-----------------|---|
| Web open editing or with registration without permission | | | Horizontal wiki | Directorie(s) E-yearbook E-library |
| Web editing after registration without required permission (low editable) | | | | Workspace.fse Web event Web audio |
| Web with info for subscription to a Newsletter/e-list | | | Web oficial | Web process Web event Workspace E-yearbook E-library Web audio |
| Web with contact e-mail | Web oficial | Web oficial Web memoria rinoceros.org/fse | Web oficial | Web process Web event Workspace Directorie(s) E-yearbook |

⁹ The **two or multi communication characteristics considered** (in a gradual way from less to more) are:

- **E-list without active filter to register** : The e-lists allows to exchange e-mail between the people subscribed. Without active filter to register means that everybody who ask to be subscribed is subscribed. (Although they could exist, the access to them depend if they are also published the place where to register).
- **Web with contact e-mail**: It means that a web had a contact e-mail where you could write if you want to get in contact with the ESF.
- **Web with info for subscription to a Newsletter/e-list** It means that at the website there is the option to subscribe to a e-list, where you could exchange e-mails with the organisers of the ESF; or receive regular information e-mails on the ESF.
- **Web editing after registration without required permission (low editable)**: It means that after registering to the web (the permission is done automatically, without selection), you could edit some pages, in the sense that you could add and delete the information that the page contain. It could be just one page editable or some pages editable.
- **Web open editing or with registration without permission**: It is a web which most of its pages are editable. You could edit them without registration (open editing) or with an automatic registration.

| | | | | |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|--|
| Web open editing or with registration without permission | | | Horizontal wiki | Directorie(s) E-yearbook E-library |
| | | | | E-library Photos Archive Web audio |
| e-list without active filter to register | E-list oficial fse-esf | E-list oficial fse-esf | E-list oficial fse-esf | E-list oficial fse-esf |
| Participation mechanism/Time& event | FLORENCE 2002 | PARIS 2003 | LONDON 2004 | ATHENS 2006 |

Those dates would invite to conclude that from the first ESF to the last, on the one hand, there has been a growing number of online mechanisms built for the ESF; and, on the other hand, there has been a tendency of adopting on line mechanisms with more “Web 2.0 characteristics” (in the sense of allowing participation - two or multi communication - and allowing collective creation or possibility to store information).

But the growth of adopted pro-participative technologies and collective creation technologies does not per se mean that they have been used or they have achieved more participation. We would need to do an analysis on the actual use of those on line technologies. For example, an oportune analysis would be about which has been the evolution on posting e-mails at the fse-esf e-list or on the editing of the workspace website. And possibly, due to its new character and its experimental stage, it would require to wait a bit of time to evaluate them.

Neither the conclusions on the uses of those on line mechanisms would allows to say that the organization of the ESF has tended to be more participative, in number and or in diversity. This would require also an analysis of the combination of off line and on line elements.

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