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Email lists as multiple sites of identity construction: the case of the London 2004 European Social Forum

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Abstract

Known for its internal plurality, the 'movement for alternative globalization' has managed to unite actors from different ideological backgrounds and political traditions. The regular organization of events such as the World Social Forum aids in the building of solidarity among these diverse actors by serving as platforms of networking and cross-fertilization. Yet apart from physical meetings, 'alter-globalization' activists also come together in a variety of online spaces. This paper investigates the role of such spaces in the process of collective identity construction by examining three email lists devoted to the organizing of the London 2004 European Social Forum (ESF) – a European list, a national and a national-factional. Combining Melucci's concept of collective identity as process with Lefebvre's notion of social space, the paper has focused on the design of the selected lists, as well as the ways in which they were appropriated and used. The results show that depending on their purpose, composition and geographical scale, the email lists afforded different communicative practices, themes of exchange and degree of interaction. While, the factional list aided in the emergence of coherent collective identity for its members, the European list was fragmented and used mainly for the circulation of statements. These online spaces were further connected through overlapping memberships and flows of content in a way that mirrored the hierarchies of physical space. Ultimately, the ESF email lists constituted an infrastructure for the simultaneous development of multiple and intersecting identities within the movement.

The 'movement for alternative globalization' and the internet

Appearing in Seattle in late 1999, the 'movement for alternative globalization' is composed by a wide range of special interest groups and ideological orientations. In that respect, protesters in Seattle originated from four broad categories of resistance: (a) material interests, including organized labour, rural peasantry and urban poor, (b) social identities, including nationalist/ indigenous/ ethnic identities, religious/ spirituality and gender, (c) global ideals, including environment, peace, human rights, economic justice and anarchic ideals, and finally (d) mixed, a broad category consisting mainly of students (Lichbach and Almeida 2001: 26). The European part of the movement further encompasses organisations of the socialist or communist tradition that tend to be absent from its US branch (Andretta and Reiter 2007: 1).

The convergence of such disparate groups under the 'alter-globalization' banner partly stems from the global political environment. The process of globalization has highlighted the links between previously distinct campaigns and issue areas, while the triptych of neoliberalism, capitalism and world trade deregulation has become the main source of new grievances for diverse activists worldwide (Lichbach and Almeida 2001: 33). Thus, by allowing the condensation of distinct targets in the same protest campaign' (Tarrow 2002: 22), the global justice frame has been incredibly successful in attracting a wide array of groups and organizations.

What is more, the values of plurality and inclusiveness have acquired such a strong symbolic status that they have come to define the movement's identity (della Porta 2005a: 80). They also seem to be reflected by the activists' individual identities. As della Porta argues, 'the identity shift from single-movement identity to multiple, *tolerant identities* has helped the movement in dealing with its heterogeneous bases' (2005b: 186). She defines tolerant identities as 'characterized by inclusiveness and positive emphasis upon diversity and cross-fertilization, with limited identification' (ibid). In a similar vein, Bennett has introduced the idea of 'purposeful misunderstandings', 'a trend towards relaxing the ideological framing commitments for common participation in many transnational protest activities' (2005: 204). These multiple, flexible identities also refer to the geographical scale of activities that participants are involved in. As Tarrow notes, '[i]n most activists' consciousness, supranational or global identities sit comfortably alongside traditional national and local identities' (2005: 57).

Such activists are often described as 'rooted cosmopolitans', meaning 'people and groups who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in regular activities that require their involvement in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts' (Tarrow and della Porta 2005: 237).

The ability of the movement to hold together such diverse constituencies can be also attributed to the way it is structured and organized. The principles of horizontality, decentralization and direct participation facilitate actors to become involved in the movement since they ensure entry and participation without the need for commitment or serious compromise (della Porta 2005a: 80).

In addition, high profile meetings of international institutions are used 'as focal points […] for sharpening the awareness of interconnections among seemingly unrelated global problems, thereby fostering a global protest coalition among groups with different agendas' (Lichbach and Almeida 2001: 39). Activists increasingly employ the strategy of 'Global Days of Action' which 'encourages local activists to protest in their own community on a day identified in a "call to action", distributed through social movement networks and the media' (Wood 2004: 72).

Decentralized organizing, tolerant identities, global days of action and an emphasis on plurality help the movement to accommodate diverse actors. However, what makes this a transnational social movement and not a transnational coalition is 'the diffusion of new and similar ideas, values and frames' (Andretta 2003: 6) across nations and movement sectors. In that respect, international events such as the World Social Forum (WSF) were designed specifically for building solidarity on a global level by serving as platforms for networking and cross-fertilization. As the WSF Charter of Principles states:

> 'The World Social Forum is a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party
> context that, in a decentralized fashion, interrelates organizations and movements engaged in
> concrete action at levels from the local to the international to build another world' (2001: n.p.).

The success of the WSF, which was first held in Porto Allegre in 2001, has inspired a number of regional and local social forums. The first European Social Forum (ESF) took place in Florence in 2001 and was attended by 60,000 (Chesters 2004: 332) participants while subsequent ESFs were held in Paris (2003), in London (2004) and in Athens (2006).

The movement's capacity to effectively coordinate disparate actors can also be attributed to its use of new communication technologies. Allowing the establishment of inclusive digital networks, the internet helps to ease personal engagement with others and to relax demands on new partners to conform with a specific programme or ideology (Bennett 2004: 129). As Bennett notes,

'[t]he Internet happens to be a medium well suited for easily linking (and staying connected) with others in search for new collective actions that do not challenge individual identities. Hence global activist networks often become collectivities capable of directed action while respecting diverse identities' (2003: 28).

These loose connections or weak ties generate a larger capability for tolerance towards individuals from different political traditions and cultures (della Porta and Mosca 2005: 179), facilitating 'the construction of new, flexible *identities*' (ibid: 186, emphasis in original).

Thus far, empirical research on the collective identity of the movement, as well as on the relationship between the movement's diverse identity and its use of the internet has tended to focus on the individual's identification with the collective. For instance, research on the anti-G8 Genoa demonstration in 2001 and the Florence ESF has shown that 'the Internet has an influence in the identification process with a specific organisation [...], and an organisational sector [...], but not in the identification process with the movement in general' (ibid: 181). In other words, the internet tended to strengthen identification in 'conditions of ideal or ideological proximity' (ibid). The study also found that activists with multiple memberships tended to be heavier users of the internet (ibid).

Yet, by placing its emphasis on the individual, this approach pays less attention to the process through which a collective identity is constructed, as well as the ways in which new communication technologies are involved in this process. And while della Porta and Mosca do refer to the potential of email lists and websites for collective reflection and 'the emergence of common interpretive schemes among activists and organisations' (ibid: 178), more empirical research is needed in order to fully understand the role of internet applications. In that respect, physical meetings, email lists and websites constitute distinct but overlapping spaces of exchange and interaction that influence differently the process of identity construction. As I show in the following section, Melucci's conception of collective identity can constitute a solid

4

framework for understanding collective identity as a process. This can be combined with a conceptualization of internet applications as a social space which is produced through interaction, but which also structures the interaction that takes place within its boundaries.

Collective Identity as a Process

Collective identity has become an increasingly influential concept within social movement theory, marking a shift from rationalist to more cultural perspectives of social movements. However, as Polletta and Jasper argue, the concept of

'collective identity has been forced to do too much analytically. The term has been used to describe many different dimensions and dynamics of social protest: the social categories predominating among activists (say "women" or "animal rights activists"), public representations of social categories (what Johnston et al 1994 refer to as "public identities"), activists' shared definition of their situation, the expressive character of all action, the affective bonds that motivate participation, the experience of solidarity within movements, and others' (2001: 284-5).

Yet, according to Melucci, a common flaw in all these uses of the term is the tendency to perceive the collective as 'a unified empirical datum, which, supposedly, can be perceived and interpreted by observers' (quoted in Mueller 1994: 235). Thus, instead of assuming the existence of a collective, Melucci is more interested in exploring the interactive process through which a collective becomes a collective (1996: 84). He therefore defines collective identity as the process of:

'constructing an action system [...] Collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by a number of individuals (or groups at a more complex level) concerning the orientations of their action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which such action is to take place' (ibid: 70).

By 'interactive and shared', Melucci means that 'these elements are constructed and negotiated through a recurrent process of activation of the relations that bind actors together.' (ibid). This is why Melucci prefers to use the term '*identization*' which expresses more accurately the 'increasingly self-reflexive and constructed manner in which contemporary collective actors tend to define themselves' (ibid: 77). The term also conveys the dynamic

character of this process, viewing collective identity as a constantly changing and interactive formation.

This process consists of a cognitive and an emotional dimension, both framed through a network of active relationships between movement participants (ibid: 71). Cognitive definitions concern 'the ends, means, and the field of action' (ibid: 70). As Melucci argues, this 'level does not necessarily imply unified and coherent frameworks […]; rather, it is constructed through interaction and comprises different and sometimes contradictory definitions' (ibid: 71). Therefore, the focus lies on the ways in which different groups of the movement interpret its means and ends, resources and constraints, as well as relationship with the environment. Shared definitions are further objectified in rituals, practices and cultural artifacts (ibid: 70). The process of identization further involves a degree of emotional investment that 'enables individuals to feel themselves part of a common unity' (ibid: 71). In fact, it is exactly this emotional dimension that distinguishes the concept from that of ideology, as 'unlike ideology, collective identity carries with it positive feelings for other members of the group' (Jasper and Polletta 2001: 284).

These cognitive and emotional dimensions are framed by a network of active relationships between movement participants. This network is constituted by '[f]orms of organization and models of leadership, communicative channels and technologies of communication' (Melucci 1996: 71). This is the only point where Melucci makes explicit reference to the role of communication technologies in the process of identization. Yet, the ways in which the media structure interactions and frame the process of identity construction need to be conceptualized in more detail. As I argue in the next section, perceiving the media, and internet applications in particular, as spaces of interaction can constitute a step towards this direction.

Space and Collective Identity

Within social movement literature the notion of 'space' has often been linked with the analysis of movement identities, most prominently through the 'free space' concept. 'Free spaces' 'describe institutions removed from the physical and ideological control of those in power […] in which people can develop counterhegemonic ideas and oppositional identities'

(Jasper and Polletta 2001: 288). Such contexts are not necessarily physical, but can also comprise linguistic codes or, more to the interests of this article, cyberspace. Yet, in a comprehensive review of the concept, Polletta has concluded that 'it is the character of the ties that are established or reinforced in those settings, rather than the physical space itself, that the free space concept has sometimes successfully captured' (1999: 25). The parallels with Melucci's notion of 'a network of active relationships' are evident here. [1]

Putting the accent on social ties rather than physical location, Polletta's analysis of 'free space' corresponds with recent scholarship on the subject of social space. Inspired by the work of Lefebvre, this line of enquiry 'rests on an acknowledgement that space is an integral part of all social life, both affecting and affected by social action' (Martin and Miller 2003: 145). Instead of perceiving space as simply a physical setting for action, this approach suggests that space is produced by social relations and, in turn, enables and constraints the type of relations that are constituted through it. Lefebvre posits that our experience of space consists of three types of social space. *Perceived* space or spatial practice 'encompasses the material spaces of daily life where social production and reproduction occurs' (ibid: 146). *Conceived* space or representations of space indicate 'the socially constructed discourses, signs, and meanings of space' (ibid). This is the 'space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers' (Lefebvre 1991: 38). *Lived* space or space of representations refers to space 'as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of "inhabitants" and "users"' (ibid: 39, emphasis in original).

Transposing Lefebvre's triad to an analysis of cyberspace, Saco has suggested that Lefebvre's perceived space can be crudely associated with the hardware of the technology, conceived space with software and lived space with 'wetware' (2002). Rather than attempting a literal translation of the triad in cyberspace terms, Gotved's discussion of the spatiality of cyberspace has drawn inspiration from Lefebvre's insights. In this sense, Gotved's category of 'visibility' has parallels with Lefebvre's perceived space but places less emphasis on the physical aspects of the technology. For Gotved, visibility 'marks the shared space' of the interaction, the 'where in which communication takes place' (2006: 479). It can thus

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[1] 'Space' is also a dominant concept within the social forum idea. In this regard, the social forums are envisioned as 'open spaces' for reflection, debate and networking, a definition that emphasizes the role of the forums a 'public square' for movement participants (Whitaker 2004: 113).

encompass the threads of a newsgroup or the frame of the chat but refers less to purely physical cues such as the frame of the screen. Lefebvre's conceived space is reworked in the category of re/construction, referring to the 'conceived geography and perhaps the perceived possibility of moving through an extensive space' (ibid). This comprises the metaphors describing the application, the objects, keywords and graphics that make up its imagery, as well as the borders of the community. Alluding to Lefebvre's lived space, Gotved's category of 'practice' is 'about living; it is about the interactions that seek to imagine, change, and appropriate the available space' (ibid: 480). It includes three types of practice: a. social, referring to the 'exchanges and relations' within the space, b. social-spatial, consisting of 'the imaginations of the social context and its demarcations' and c. technological, comprising 'the reading from the screen and the actual use of the keyboard, as well as the programs employed' (ibid).

Therefore, the notion of cyberspace as a 'social space' combined with Melucci's theory of collective identity as a process can provide a sound theoretical framework for investigating internet applications as spaces of identity construction. In this paper, I will focus on the conceived and lived aspects of email lists as social space or, in Gotved's terms, on the dimensions of practice and re/construction. I will thus investigate the design of email lists as spaces of interaction, as well as the social and social-spatial practices characterizing their use. I will then connect this analysis with collective identity, examining the role of each email space in the process of 'identization'.

The empirical data derives from a content analysis of three of the main email lists used in the organizing process of the London 2004 ESF: the European-level email list (FSE-ESF), the British national list (esf-uk-info) and the email list of an important faction of the ESF process, the 'Horizontals' (democratisESF). Based on Melucci's 'identization' theory, the content analysis has explored whether and to what extent the email lists were used to discuss about the 'action system' of the movement. It also traced some of their more general characteristics such as their degree of interactivity and institutional communication which further determined their communicative affordances for the process of identity construction. The content analysis examined a 10% random sample of the selected lists in the time period starting from the 10th of November 2003 and ending on the 31st of October 2004, which was roughly the 'organizing year' of the London 2004 ESF.

This data is complemented by in-depth interviews with 24 activists who were involved in the organizing of the London ESF and subscribed to the aforementioned lists. Two thirds of my interviewees were based in the UK, while the remaining third came from different European countries. The sample included activists from diverse political backgrounds and ideological traditions, reflecting the internal plurality of the ESF process. Additional insights were afforded by my participant observation of all the major ESF organizing meetings and email lists.

Design, purpose and geographical scale of the examined email lists

The FSE-ESF email list was created on the 15th of March 2002 by the French web team of the Paris 2003 ESF organizing process (Jessover 2005). The list, which is still in operation, is open to subscription through the website of the ESF (http://www.fse-esf.org), but is not publicly archived.

The esf-uk-info list was set up in order to facilitate the mobilization of British activists for the Paris 2003 ESF. The date of its establishment, as well as the identity of the activists who created it, remain obscure. At first, activists could join the list through the website of the British mobilization for Paris. However, after Paris, when that website became defunct, it was rather unclear how someone could subscribe. The list was publicly archived at http://lists.south space.net. It is worth noting that after the London 2004 ESF the list ceased to exist and its archives disappeared from the server.

The democratisESF list was founded in November 2003 by Stuart Hodkinson, a writer for Red Pepper and member of the British mobilization network. According to my interview with Hodkinson, the list was created in order to spread information about the bid for London to host the next ESF and to alert as many activists as possible about the lack of transparency in the process. Its establishment was simple: Hodkinson selected a number of activists from his contact list whom he thought would be sympathetic to the cause and signed them up on the email list without their permission. He then sent the first email informing them about the purpose of the list, apologizing for the unorthodox way in which it was set up and providing members with the opportunity to unsubscribe if they so wished (Hodkinson, S., Personal Interview, 2004). Therefore, the democratisESF was a much more homogenous list than the

other two since its initial members were all Hodkinsons' contacts, pre-selected for their potential support to the cause of 'democratizing the ESF'. As I will show in this paper, the list played an instrumental role in the process of creating a cohesive identity for this faction. The group later named themselves 'Horizontals' in opposition to the 'Vertical' manner in which more traditional elements of the forum, such as the Socialist Workers' Party and the trade unions, were attempting to organize the ESF. The list was publicly archived at http://lists-riseup.net and is still in operation even though postings are currently very sparse. The number or identities of subscribers in each list were never made publicly available.

Therefore, the three examined email lists differed in their purpose and geographical scale. Operating on the European level, the FSE-ESF list was established in order to aid the organizing process of the ESF. The esf-uk-info list was initially created as a space aiding the mobilization of British activists for the ESF and, once it was decided that London was going to host the ESF in 2004, started to be used as a site of organizing. The democratisESF list had a much more specific goal – to help 'democratise' the ESF process. It referred mainly to the British level, since most of its contributors were activists based in the UK.

However, all of the examined lists were designed with the same underlying logic. Prefiguring the values of openness and inclusiveness characterizing the social forum idea, the lists were open to participation by any activist (or not) wishing to subscribe to them. They were also unmoderated, reflecting the participatory spirit of the forums where in principle everyone has an equal say in the decision-making process.

General Characteristics: Traffic, Authors and Languages

As Table 1 shows, the three lists garnered a significant number of messages during the sample period. The FSE-ESF comes first with 1591 messages, followed closely by the democratisESF with 1487, while the esf-uk-info list is third with 1068.[2]

< Table 1 about here >

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[2] In the results that follow, the total number of authors and the estimates of author overlap and message flows were calculated based on the total number of messages posted on each list. The remainder of the results refers to the 10% random sample.

Furthermore, all of the lists served as 'spaces of identization', since all of them encompassed a significant number of messages fulfilling a 'collective identity' function. Such messages represent 40.3% of the FSE-ESF sample, 61.7% of the esf-uk-info and 59.1% of the democratisESF.

< Table 2 about here >

In terms of authors, Table 3 demonstrates that the FSE-ESF list had by far the largest population, while the figures for the esf-uk-info and the democratisESF lists were comparable. However, authors on the FSE-ESF list tended on average to send fewer messages than those on the other lists. The number of messages per author is 5.24 for the esf-uk-info list, 7.74 for the democratisESF and only 4.08 for the FSE-ESF.

< Table 3 about here >

As for the type of authors and as Table 4 reveals, authors writing on their personal capacity were responsible for the highest per cent of 'identity' messages in all of the examined lists. This is particularly the case for the democratisESF, whereby 86.4% of its 'identity' messages were sent by individuals and 6.8% by individuals writing on behalf of a specific group or organization. The picture is different for the FSE-ESF list, where working groups or decision-making bodies of the ESF posted 14.1% of 'identity' messages, while other groups, organizations or political parties were responsible for 17.2%.

< Table 4 about here >

In terms of language diversity and as it was expected, the esf-uk-info and democratisESF lists were predominantly in English as 95% of the sampled messages from the esf-uk-info list and 96% from the democratisESF list were written in English. The picture is different for the FSE-ESF list, whereby 65% of messages were in English, 19% in French, 5% in Spanish, 1%

in Italian and 9% in other languages.[3] Yet, despite its wider diversity, English was still the dominant language in this list.

Hence, each of the examined lists differed in terms of traffic, type of authors and language diversity. The FSE-ESF list had the highest number of authors and constituted the most formal and institutional list as it garnered the highest per cent of messages posted by organizations, groups and bodies of the ESF. It was also a more fragmented list in terms of language, since more than 30% of its messages were written in languages other than English. The democratisESF list, on the other hand, was populated by authors writing on their individual capacity and sending more messages than authors on the other lists. It was also quite unified in terms of language. Thus, the characteristics of each list afforded different imaginings of its social context and boundaries. However, as I will explain in the following sections, the degree of interactivity, as well as the themes that prevailed in the exchanges between participants were also instrumental for providing a sense of social context.

Interactivity and Discussion

The degree of interactivity constitutes a fundamental aspect of the lists as sites of identity construction. In that respect, interactive messages denote a greater degree of discussion and debate concerning aspects of collective identity and, possibly, engagement and interaction between different views. Non-interactive messages point to a different process of collective identity, whereby positions are clarified but engagement between list participants is limited. According to Table 5, 'collective identity' messages tended to be mostly interactive. This is especially pronounced in the democratisESF list, where 80.7% of 'identity' messages were interactive. In the FSE-ESF list, the difference between interactive and non-interactive emails was quite small with the former representing only 53.1% of 'identity' messages. The esf-uk-info list is again located between the other two, but is impressively interactive, with 74.2% of 'identity' messages falling within this category.

< Table 5 about here >

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[3] For 1% of messages the language was not clear (this includes one empty message).

The picture becomes clearer once we examine 'identity' messages in relation to the type of message. According to Table 6, messages belonging to the non-interactive categories of 'statements or announcements' and 'circulation of documents' account for larger per cents of 'identity' messages on the FSE-ESF list than on the other two. As for 'discussion or debate', the democratisESF list contains by far the highest per cent of 'identity' messages of this type. This figure is 61.4% for the democratisESF, 47% for the esf-uk-info and only 34.4% for the FSE-ESF list. However, 'questions and requests for information' garner the lowest per cent on the democratisESF list and the highest on the esf-uk-info list. This is possibly explained by the more formal and institutionalized nature of the esf-uk-info and FSE-ESF lists, which made them more authoritative sources of official information on the ESF process. Finally, the esf-uk-info and democratisESF lists are used more extensively than the FSE-ESF to circulate or endorse petitions that also referred to issues of 'collective identity'.

< Table 6 about here >

The lower degree of interactivity and discussion on the FSE-ESF list was also reflected on my interviews with list participants. As one interviewee noted,

> 'there's nothing happening on there, it's [the FSE-ESF list] really dry, it's a really dry list… […] I don't know whether if it wasn't so dry I would feel more ready to engage because "oh other people are doing it, so ok I don't know them but they're doing so let's do this"' (Kotkowska, H., Personal Interview, 2004)

The FSE-ESF list also constituted a more intimidating space for starting a discussion since activists were often unsure whether their issues would be considered relevant to the concerns of a European audience. In fact, activists were often reprimanded for occupying a list with discussion of little importance to the rest of its members. In one such case, the webmaster of the FSE-ESF list wrote:

> 'Personal discussions should be kept personal ie be sent to people willing to discuss together. Everyone can understand that sometimes an off-topic discussion can start on this list, we are all human, but we ask people also to realize that it cannot last in this list.' (*ESF Mailinglist netiquette*, 29/04/2004).

However, what is considered to be a personal discussion is obviously a matter of interpretation. For instance, one of the activists to whom such criticism was directed replied: 'The topic is a relevant one at the moment […] And surely more 'real' than many found on our supposedly 'political' lists over here, which are usually limited to the 'jostlings' over small issues' (*Red Star case: Inapproriate use of this list*, 29/04/2004). Therefore, activists were understandably more reluctant to send emails to the larger lists, where their messages could be more easily considered irrelevant. As an interviewee from Britain put it, 'I try to be very, only send them when I think there's a need to send them to the bigger lists and very rarely get a response anyway' (Griffiths, H., Personal Interview, 2004).

The lower degree of discussion on the FSE-ESF list can be further explained as a mechanism for the prevention of conflict, which can erupt more easily in lists with a diverse composition. Instead, different perspectives and messages tended to exist side by side in this list, but not necessarily in a relationship with each other. This is concurrent with the notion of 'purposeful misunderstandings' (Bennett 2005: 204), as disparate beliefs and statements can more easily co-exist when list subscribers do not enter into a discussion in order to clarify or challenge these positions.

In terms of the type of author and interactivity, and as Table 7 reveals, individuals writing either on their personal capacity or on behalf of organizations tend to send more interactive 'identity' messages than non-interactive ones. On the other hand, groups, organizations and political parties or groups and decision-making bodies of the ESF process tend, almost unequivocally, to send non-interactive messages. This suggests that discrete types of authors are differently engaged in the process of collective identity formation. While individuals tend to participate more in discussion and debate, groups, organizations, and bodies of the ESF tend to express identity issues in a non-interactive format. The table below presents the per cents of interactive 'identity' messages for each type of author.

< Table 7 about here >

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Themes of Identity Messages

I have further calculated the number of messages discussing or referring to key aspects of collective identity, as identified by Melucci (1996). These features concern the 'action system' of the movement and comprise its means and ends of action, its resources and constraints, as well as its relationship with the environment. I have also measured the number of messages discussing the plurality or inclusiveness of the movement which is considered to be an integral component of its collective identity.

< Table 8 about here >

As it is obvious from Table 8, messages referring to or discussing means and ends of action garner much higher per cents of 'identity' messages than those regarding resources and constraints or the movement's relationship with its environment. Means and ends of action could refer particularly to the ESF organizing process, mentioning for instance that the process should be inclusive, democratic or efficient. They could also refer to the movement in general, alluding to the goals of specific campaigns emerging from the ESF or WSF process. As it is evident from Table 9, most of such messages on the democratisESF concerned specifically the ESF organizing process (95.5%). The FSE-ESF list comes second with 85.1%, while the esf-uk-info list is third with 74%. Therefore, again, the democratisESF list emerges as the list with a more explicit focus on the ESF process. It is worth noting that such messages on the democratisESF list were often related to the specific 'means and ends' of the 'Horizontals' and their efforts to 'democratise' the ESF process.

< Table 9 about here >

In terms of resources and constraints of action and as Table 10 shows, messages on the esf-uk-info list tended to concern the funds, logistics and resources of the ESF process. This figure is 85.7% for the esf-uk-info list, 70.8% for the democratisESF and only 53.3% for the FSE-ESF.

< Table 10 about here >

Discussion concerning the relationship of the movement with its environment relates to the process of setting and negotiating the boundaries of the movement, as well as figuring out its relationship with a variety of actors, both allies and enemies. Messages of this sort garner almost equal per cents of 'collective identity' messages in all of the analysed lists ranging from 22% for the democratisESF to 27% for the FSE-ESF, while the esf-uk-info list is a close second with 26%. According to Table 11, in the democratisESF list such messages focused on the Greater London Authority (GLA) who served as one of the main sponsors of the event and whose relationship with the ESF was a subject of controversy between the 'Horizontals' and the 'Verticals'.

< Table 11 about here >

Table 8 in the beginning of this section also reveals that plurality and inclusiveness constitute a central aspect of the movement's identity since all of the analysed lists contain numerous messages with references to these issues. In terms of messages concerning specifically the inclusiveness or accessibility of the ESF meetings and as it would be expected, the democratisESF list comes first, while this per cent is much lower for the esf-uk-info list and even smaller for the FSE-ESF list. Again this constitutes evidence of the more polemic character of the democratisESF list, where breaches to the open and inclusive character of the process and tended to be furiously discussed and lengthily documented.

< Table 12 about here >

Evidence from the content analysis further suggests that messages on the democratisESF list contained more references to attempts by certain groups (most often the Socialist Workers' Party or Globalise Resistance) to control the London ESF process. Table 13 reveals that opposition to such groups garnered 30.7% of 'identity' messages on the democratisESF list, 22.7% on the esf-uk-info and only 12.5% on the FSE-ESF.

16

< Table 13 about here >

However, it is worth noting here that, calculated as a per cent of the 'collective identity' messages, these figures tend to disguise the fact that overall the FSE-ESF list included a higher number of messages not referring to the ESF. As it is obvious from Table 14, messages not related to the ESF preparatory process represented 41.5% of the sampled messages on the FSE-ESF list, 18.7% of the esf-uk-info and only 10.1% of the democratisESF list. Therefore, the FSE-ESF list encompassed more messages concerning campaigns and actions organized separately by different groups and organizations with no reference to the ESF process.

< Table 14 about here >

On the contrary, the democratisESF list had a much more homogenous subscription base and a more focused purpose. Being a group founded on resistance and having a ready-made 'other' in place - those who insisted on organizing the ESF in an undemocratic way – provided the perfect conditions for the emergence of a coherent collective identity for the 'Horizontals'. In that respect, the democratisESF list aided in synthesizing and pinning down the identity of the group through the co-writing of proposals and documents. This process aided the group in arriving to a common understanding and in articulating their beliefs in a way that all of their members would be happy with. The main document written collaboratively on the list was the 'Call for Democracy in the ESF process'. Evidence from the interviews and the democratisESF list suggests that this was a long and difficult process. According to one of my interviewees who had a central role in the writing of this document, the main ideas for the call were initially thrashed out in a face-to-face meeting held by a core of the 'Horizontals' on the 7th of February 2004. My interviewee then took the responsibility of writing a first version of the document and posted the draft on the democratisESF list inviting comments and alterations (de Angelis, M., Personal Interview, 2004). However, as the consultation period for amendments was nearing its end, certain activists associated with the 'Horizontals' protested about the strong wording of parts of the proposal. The solution they came up with was to turn

the initial petition into a background document and to create a smaller version of the proposed points of action that everyone felt comfortable to sign.

The democratisESF list also helped the 'Horizontals' to crystallize their identity in another and possibly more crucial way: finding a suitable name for the group. More specifically, the name emerged spontaneously from the deliberations on the list after a story about the Argentinean Picatelas movement was posted on democratisESF by Stuart Hodkinson. According to his account:

'I sent an email to an email list called democratize_the_esf, which I'll talk about in a minute in which I related the story of the Argentina, Argentine Picatelas movement and how there were two forces within the Picatelas movement, there were the "Verticals" and the "Horizontals", the "Verticals" were those who came from the Trotskyist groups, they were not interested in the assemblies of the Picatelas movement, they were trying to dominate it and the more sort of anarcho-types within the Picatelas who were interested in spokescouncils and delegates and democracy and someone came on tour in Britain from the Picatelas and she said, you know, the problem in Argentina with the Picatelas is not a single movement […] and actually in-between there are massive fights and we came to realize for a long time that the "Horizontals" can't work with the "Verticals" and we don't try to work with them anymore and they don't try to work with us, so I sort of sent that email and all of a sudden [name omitted], the arch email sender and cyber-sort of-surfer and then [name omitted] fixed on this dichotomy and they said "Yes! We are the Horizontals"' (Personal Interview, 2004).

As another 'Horizontal' put it:

'Stuart reported, had a comment on one of his clashes and sent us this story he has read about the Argentinean movement […] and so this woman, this Argentinean woman said "well there's not much, there's no way for the 'Horizontals' and the 'Verticals', cannot meet" […] so Stuart reported this and when I read this on my computer screen I remember thinking "wow"' (de Angelis, M., Personal Interview, 2004).

References to those two terms soon became ubiquitous: they appeared in documents and on email lists and were uttered in face-to-face meetings. However, activists often felt the need to qualify their statements about belonging to either side by noting that this was partly a false polarization and that the distinction between 'Horizontals' and 'Verticals' did not entirely capture the ideas at stake.

Openness and Bonding

While the democratisESF list played a key role in the emergence of the 'Horizontal' identity, the links created on the list needed to be consolidated through face-to-face meetings. As Hodkinson noted:

> 'what happened was a very very dedicated […] eligible group of individuals just seemed to emerge within the democratize list and through their involvement in the European assembly we started to go from cyberspace to real place and we started to hold meetings before meetings and hold mid-week meetings, talk to people on the phone' (Personal Interview, 2004).

In other words, while the democratisESF list was important for initially bringing together activists who were unhappy with the London process, the core of the group deepened their bonds through face-to-face communication.

They also stopped using the democratisESF list to deliberate on their strategies, preferring to hold these discussions in a secret list that was not accessible to their opponents. Although necessary in practical terms, I would argue that the 'secret list' was also crucial for the development of the collective identity of the group. This is because open email lists, where anyone can subscribe and where no one has complete knowledge of the list's membership, may be a hostile habitat for fostering relationships of trust. For instance, talking about the FSE-ESF list, one interviewee noted:

> 'certainly on the European one who is reading that?, it's kind of and it is, it's like, you know, you touch on certain things and it's like where is it going? [...] are they going to pass it on to somebody else? And you suddenly realize, you know, you can't criticize somebody on there because they'll pass it to somebody and you suddenly realize that this is not a private conversation it's quite public, that can make you sort of slightly paranoid' (Kotkowska, H., Personal Interview, 2004).

In other words, the closedness of the space can lead to a greater closeness among its participants. This seems to be the case even for groups like the 'Horizontals' for whom the establishment of a 'secret list' directly contravened the values of openness and inclusiveness on which their collective identity was based.

Author and Content Overlaps

The three lists were not distinct from one another but had overlaps in terms of authors and content. Author overlaps reveal the degree to which the same voices were heard in all of the examined lists. According to Tables 15-17, the FSE-ESF had the highest per cent of authors posting solely on this list (78.7%), while the esf-uk-info list had the lowest (42.6%) and the highest author overlap with the other two lists. In that respect, 20.1% of the authors on the esf-uk-info list also posted on the FSE-ESF, 18.6% also posted on the democratisESF, while another 18.6% sent messages to both these lists. On the other hand, the author overlap between the FSE-ESF and democratisESF lists was minimal, as only four authors posted on both these two lists without also sending messages to the esf-uk-info. The author overlaps are also presented schematically in the Venn diagram below. [4]

< Table 15 about here >

< Table 16 about here >

< Table 17 about here >

< Figure 1 about here >

Thus, to an extent, the online space seemed to mirror the geographical distinctions of the offline, with the national mediating between the international and the specific space of the national faction. This assumption is strengthened when we examine the flow of messages between the three lists[5]. According to Table 18, the per cent of messages travelling from the FSE-ESF list to the other two is higher than the per cent of those with the reverse journey. In

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[4] It is worth noting here that the authors who sent messages to all three lists are not necessarily 'connectors', i.e. activists with multiple memberships that help the circulation of information between distinct networks. This is because activists with a limited knowledge of the email list technology and, more importantly, of the norms governing the posting on the lists tended to send messages indiscriminately to all of the lists they were subscribed to.

[5] I estimated the flow of messages based on the subject line of the message. If the subject line included an indication that this message was forwarded to/from another list or was a reply from a message to another list, then it was counted in the flow of messages. For instance, the subject line '[esf-uk-info] Fwd: [FSE-ESF] About the European Assembly' means that this message was initially forwarded to the FSE-ESF list and then sent to the esf-uk-info. Messages posted on two or three lists simultaneously were not counted as they did not move from one list to the other. However, if a subscriber, for instance, forwarded a message from one list to the next but altered the subject line, then obviously the subject line of the message would not indicate that this message was sent to both lists. Therefore, these figures may be actually underestimating the flow of messages between the three lists.

terms of the esf-uk-info and democratisESF lists, messages tended to flow from the esf-uk-info to the democratisESF list rather than vice versa. In other words, messages traveled from the European level down to the specific level of the national faction, while counter-flows were less significant. This indicates that information appearing on the European list was more valuable or relevant to the national or factional levels than vice versa.

It is also worth noting that the per cents of messages flowing to the FSE-ESF list from national lists other than the British were very low. The esf-uk-info list constituted an exception as it was the national list of the host-country of the ESF. It was also the national list experiencing fewer language barriers. Since most of the messages on the European list were written in English, information appearing there could be easily forwarded to the esf-uk-info list without the need for translation. Obviously, this is not the case for other European countries. For instance, one of my Greek interviewees noted that important documents posted on the FSE-ESF list had first to be translated in Greek in order to be circulated in the Greek national email list (Yulis, P., Personal Interview, 2004). However, a point to note here is that if we take into account the per cents of total messages, then these differences seem nearly negligible. Lacking any other similar research, there is some difficulty to interpret these figures with certainty and to evaluate their significance.

< Table 18 about here >

Conclusion

Combining insights from Melucci's notion of collective identity as process and Lefebvre's concept of social space, this paper examined three ESF email lists as sites of collective identity construction. The analysis focused on the design of the lists, as well as the social and socio-spatial practices of their users, attempting to shed some light on role of these online spaces in the process of identization.

In that respect, the design of the lists (or else, the space as it was *conceived* by its creators/webmasters) prefigured the values of inclusiveness, plurality and participatory democracy that are inherent in the social forum idea. Thus, the lists were open to subscription

and discussion was not moderated. However, the three lists varied in terms of purpose and geographical scale. In turn, this affected their composition, as well as the ways in which the space was appropriated and lived by its users: its language diversity, the types of authors that posted on it, its degree of interactivity, the themes of 'collective identity' messages and their specificity to the ESF process. Thus, each list constituted a different 'network of active relationships' giving rise to different imaginings of the social context or the 'we' that was referred to. In turn, this affected the affordances of the list for the process of identity construction.

Hence, the FSE-ESF list, the larger and most diverse of the sample, contained a higher number of messages and statements signed by groups or organizations than the other two where messages were mostly sent by individuals. It was also far less interactive, resembling more of a bulletin board than the other two lists. Thus, within this list different perspectives could exist side by side while conflicts and internal challenges were restricted since diverse opinions were expressed in statements and announcements rather than debate and discussion. However, this also curbed the potential of this list to foster unity, since this limited engagement between different opinions did not contribute towards the development of common positions.

On the other hand, the smaller, factional or more homogeneous lists seem to be better sites for the generation of a shared identity for their subscribers. The democratisESF list illustrates how an email list can be used for the circulation of stories that reinforced the identity of the group, for the co-writing of statements that pinned down and articulated its goals and objectives, as well as for discussions that allowed a better understanding between the members of the group. In this particular case, the list also constituted a site for the naming of the group which helped it to clearly identify itself in opposition to its adversaries.

However, these 'sites of identization' were not distinct from one another but connected through overlapping memberships and content. In that respect, and as it would be expected, messages tended to travel from the European scale to the national and then to the factional list, while the reverse journey was relatively limited. In addition, the national list mediated between the European and the factional one, as it had author overlaps with both of them, while the overlaps between the other two were minimal. In other words, these multiple 'sites of

identization' intersected in ways that were indicative of the hierarchy of concerns within the movement.

This indicates that in terms of individual identities, belonging to multiple email lists may increase the activists' flexibility to move between different 'sites of identization' and juggle their involvement in different '*We*s', constituted on varying geographical scales and focused on different concerns. In other words, involvement to a variety of email lists may be facilitating the development of 'multiple, tolerant identities' (della Porta 2005b: 186), as well as the emergence of a cadre of activists defined as 'rooted cosmopolitans' (Tarrow and della Porta 2005: 237).

Therefore, referring to different geographical scales and population of subscribers, email lists constitute diverse social spaces that frame differently the process of identity construction. They thus constitute an infrastructure for the simultaneous development of multiple and intersecting identities within the movement.

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Tables and Figures

List	Total Number of Messages	Number of Sampled Messages
FSE-ESF	1591	159
esf-uk-info	1068	107
democratisESF	1487	149
Total	4146	415

Table 1: Total number of messages and sample

List	Frequency	Per cent
FSE-ESF	64	40.3%
esf-uk-info	66	61.7%
democratisESF	88	59.1%

Table 2: Total number of 'identity' messages (% of sample from each list)

List	Total Number of Authors	Messages per Author
FSE-ESF	390	4.08
esf-uk-info	204	5.24
democratisESF	192	7.74

Table 3: Total number of authors and messages per author

	FSE-ESF	esf-uk-info	democratisESF
individual/personal capacity	46.9%	68.2%	86.4%
individual but as part of a specific group or organization	21.9%	24.2%	6.8%
working group/office/decision-making body of the ESF	14.1%	4.5%	1.1%
group/organization/political party	17.2%	3.0%	5.7%

Table 4: Type of authors of 'collective identity' messages (% of 'collective identity' messages)

	non-interactive		interactive	
	% of 'identity'	% of total	% of 'identity'	% of total
FSE-ESF	45.3%	18.2%	53.1%	21.4%
esf-uk-info	24.2%	15.0%	74.2%	45.8%
democratisESF	18.2%	10.7%	80.7%	47.7%

Table 5: 'Identity' messages and interactivity
(Messages that were neither interactive nor non-interactive were omitted from the table)

	FSE-ESF	esf-uk-info	democratisESF
Non-interactive			
Statements/Announcements	31.3%	21.2%	10.2%
Circulating documents	10.9%	3.0%	6.8%
Interactive			
Discussion/Debate	34.4%	47.0%	61.4%
Questions/Answers	7.9%	10.6%	4.5%
Petitions	3.1%	10.6%	11.3%
Comments to statements	4.7%	6.1%	3.4%
Other	7.7%	1.5%	2.4%

Table 6: Type of 'identity' messages (% of 'collective identity' messages from each list)

	FSE-ESF	esf-uk-info	democratisESF
Individual	76.7%	86.7%	82.9%
Individual as part of Organization	64.3%	62.5%	100.0%
Working Group/Office/Decision-making body of the ESF	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Organization/Group/Political Party	18.2%	0.0%	40.0%

Table 7: Interactive 'collective identity' messages and type of author (% of 'collective identity' messages)

	FSE-ESF		esf-uk-info		democratisESF	
means and ends	40	62.5%	23	34.8%	44	50.0%
resources and constraints	15	23.4%	7	10.6%	24	27.3%
Relationship with the environment	13	20.3%	12	18.2%	19	21.6%
inclusiveness/plurality	17	26.6%	17	25.8%	19	21.6%

Table 8: Referring to or discussing identity (% of 'collective identity' messages from each list)

Discussing Means/Ends Relevant to the ESF	
FSE-ESF	85.1%
esf-uk-info	74.0%
democratisESF	95.5%

Table 9: Messages discussing means/ends that are relevant to the ESF
(% of messages discussing means and ends of action)

Discussing Resources/Constraints Relevant to the ESF	
FSE-ESF	53.3%
esf-uk-info	85.7%
democratisESF	70.8%

Table 10: Messages referring to resources, funds and logistics of the ESF
(% of messages discussing resources and constraints of action)

Discussing the Relationship with the GLA	
FSE-ESF	53.8%
esf-uk-info	75.0%
democratisESF	84.2%

Table 11: Messages referring to the relationship of the ESF process with the GLA (% of messages discussing the relationship with the environment)

Discussing the Accessibility of ESF Meetings	
FSE-ESF	11.8%
esf-uk-info	29.4%
democratisESF	42.1%

Table 12: Messages referring to the inclusiveness or accessibility of the ESF meetings (% of messages discussing inclusiveness or plurality)

Discussing attempts to control the London ESF process	
FSE-ESF	12.5%
esf-uk-info	22.7%
democratisESF	30.7%

Table 13: Discussing attempts by certain groups to control the London ESF process (% of ''identity' messages from each list)

	FSE-ESF	esf-uk-info	democratisESF
% of messages not related to the ESF preparatory process	41.5%	18.7%	10.1%

Table14: Messages not related to the ESF preparatory process (% of sample from each list)

FSE-ESF	number	% of authors
Only FSE-ESF	307	78.7%
& democratisESF	4	1.0%
& esf-uk-info	41	10.5%
All 3 Lists	38	9.7%
Total	390	100.0%

Table 15: Author overlaps for the FSE-ESF list (% of total number of authors on the FSE-ESF list)

esf-uk-info	number	% of authors
Only esf-uk-info	87	42.6%
& democratisESF	38	18.6%
& FSE-ESF	41	20.1%
All 3 Lists	38	18.6%
Total	204	100.0%

Table 16: Author overlaps for the esf-uk-info list (% of total number of authors on the esf-uk-info list)

democratisESF	number	% of authors
Only democratisESF	112	58.3%
& esf-uk-info	38	19.8%
& FSE-ESF	4	2.1%
All 3 Lists	38	19.8%
Total	192	100.0%

Table 17: Author overlaps for the democratisESF list (% of total number of authors on the democratisESF list)
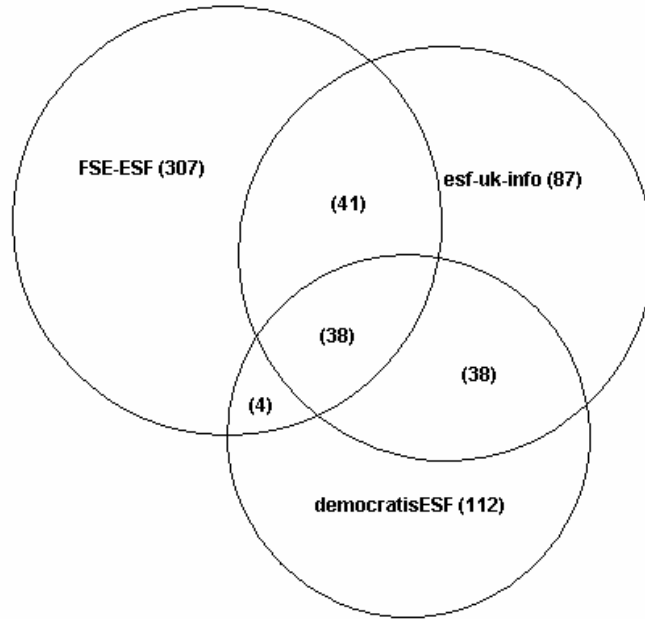
Figure 1: Author Overlaps (in parenthesis: number of authors)

	from FSE-ESF	from esf-uk-info	from democratisESF	Total
FSE-ESF				
Frequency	-	78	19	97
% of Overlapping	-	28.5%	6.9%	35.4%
% of Total	-	4.9%	1.2%	6.1%
esf-uk-info				
Frequency	57	-	40	97
% of Overlapping	35.2%	-	24.7%	59.9%
% of Total	5.3%	-	3.7%	9.0%
democratisESF				
Frequency	29	106	-	135
% of Overlapping	13.4%	49.1%	-	62.5%
% of Total	2.0%	7.1%	-	9.1%

Table 18: Flows of messages between the three lists