Interest organizations in social movements: An empirical exploration

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Executive Summary   Since the 1960s, sociologists and political scientists interested in social movements and protest have recurrently debated the nature of organizations promoting collective action. A substantial consensus has now emerged that social movements may take various organizational forms, ranging from the fairly hierarchical to the highly decentralized. However, it is argued here that social movement politics cannot (without significant analytical losses) be reduced to the performance of specific acts of pressure, conducted by individual organizations as independent actors that in principle might be indifferent to, if not in competition with, other actors focusing on the same issues. It is, in contrast, a form of political action that implies sustained coordination between multiple actors identifying, with variable levels of commitment, with the same broad cause. This article explores the traits of the organizations that get involved in those processes. Do all instances of social movement mobilization display the same heterogeneity of organizations? Or does the profile of social movements change in different settings? In order to address these questions the article draws upon data, collected in two British cities, Glasgow and Bristol, that differ in both their social and political profile. The study focused on participatory organizations promoting advocacy and interest representation on environmental, ethnic and migration, community and social exclusion issues. The analysis looked for distinctive traits in the organizations involved in social movement forms of collective action in the two cities. It compared two definitions of social movements: one, formulated by Charles Tilly, viewing movements as sustained interactions between challengers and powerholders in the context of protest events (the *protest model* of social movement), the other, proposed by the author, viewing movements as a particular structural position within broader civil society networks (the *network model* of social movements). Empirical evidence largely supports skeptics claims about the distinctiveness of organizations active in social movements, regardless of how movements are defined. No consistent profile of the organizations involved emerges from the data. However, we should be cautious about drawing inferences on the nature of movements by looking at the distribution of the properties of organizations interested in a certain cause.

As the overall profiles of organizational populations in the two cities were very similar, this might have prompted the plausible conclusion that a movement sector existed in both cities, characterized by broadly similar levels of organizational informality, predisposition to protest repertoires, interest in new issues such as globalization and the environment, proximity to dissenting groups. As it happens, this is not the case. The most consistent result by far did not have to do with differences between social movement actors and other organizations, but between cities. For all their social and political distinctiveness, Glasgow and Bristol did not differ because of the properties of their civic organizations, taken as aggregates. The difference between the two cases lay in how the same elements combined to shape network patterns, or to differentiate the set of organizations highly involved in protest events. All the above draws attention to the importance of taking local peculiarities into consideration, not only when analyzing the behavior of individual actors or ecological data on protest diffusion, but also when exploring the structure of collective processes such as those reflected in the protest or the network model.

Interest Groups, Social Movement Organizations, or Interest Organizations?

Since the 1960s, academic interest in social movements, collective action, and protest has grown exponentially, encouraging inter-disciplinary conversations, in particular between sociologists and political scientists. One recurring theme of debate has been the nature of the organizations promoting collective action. Between the 1970s and the 1980s, 'new social movement' (NSM) theorists explicitly argued for the distinctiveness of social movements, and associated the expression 'social movement organization' (SMO) with diagnostic features, ranging from informal, decentralized, participatory structures (Kriesi, 1996; Melucci, 1996) to confrontational protest repertoires (Rucht, 1995), to explicitly anti-institutional stances and orientations, either in political (Kriesi, 1996) or cultural terms (Melucci, 1996). Although less eager than their European counterparts to stress the peculiar organizational profile of social movement actors, by introducing the acronym SMO to identify 'social movement organizations', organization analysts such as Mayer Zald and his associates (Zald and Ash, 1966; McCarthy and Zald, 1977) also pointed at the distinctiveness of social movements in organizational terms.

Over the years, political scientists and political sociologists external to the social movement studies community have often challenged the supposed

special characteristics of SMOs that distinguish them from interest groups. The most explicit critic has been Burstein (1998; see also, for variations on the theme, Walker, 1991; Berry, 1993; Jordan and Maloney, 1997). Burstein claimed that no consistent differences could be found between organizations conventionally identified as SMOs, and organizations defined as 'interest groups', on criteria such as the quest for change, the aspiration to represent unvested interests, or the availability to do so by non-institutional means (1998, pp. 40–45). He then proposed the replacing of both terms with a broader and more encompassing label 'interest organizations' (1998, p. 45). Despite sticking to the SMO acronym, even social movement analysts seem now largely share the view that social movements may take 'various organizational forms, … including hierarchy, decentralized networks, and a spontaneous, leaderless form without much organization at all' (Campbell, 2005, p. 67; see also Zald and Ash, 1966; Lofland, 1996: Chapter 6; Edwards and McCarthy, 2004).

In general, one cannot help but agree with Burstein that there is little to distinguish 'interest groups' (at least, those mobilizing for public or collective goods) from 'SMOs'. The adoption of one or the other concept depends most of the time on the academic affiliation of labeler rather than the phenomenon being labeled. At the same time, if reducing SMOs to a distinct type of loosely structured, protest-prone, anti-institutional grassroots organization was far too restrictive, viewing social movements as simply rebranded interest groups may have some problematic implications. In particular, it may lead analysts to view collective action as taking place exclusively within the boundaries of specific organizations or, at best, within *ad hoc* coalitions assembled on specific issues. But this means reducing social movements to aggregations of individual organizations and/or events, ignoring their nature as nested episodes of collective action which stretch over time and space (Tilly, 1978, 1994; Diani, 1992).

In other words, an exclusive focus on specific organizations, their traits and procedures, may lead to overlooking the difference between routine pressure politics and the collective action dynamics that take place within social movements. In the latter, sustained interactions between organizations and individuals taking part in movement campaigns and coalitions generate regular patterns of resource coordination between several groups and organizations that maintain their independence, yet are involved into a sustained joint collective effort. It makes indeed quite a difference if an organization pursues its agenda relying mostly on the resources it directly commands, trying to secure single ownership of a specific issue; or whether it engages instead in sustained cooperation with other actors in order to expand its domain of influence and more effectively pursue its goals. Accordingly, social movement politics cannot (without significant loss of important detail) be reduced to the performance of specific acts of pressure, conducted by individual organizations as independent

actors that in principle might be indifferent to, if not in competition with, other actors focusing on the same issues. It is, in contrast, a form of political action that implies sustained coordination between multiple actors identifying, with variable levels of commitment, with the same broad cause.

These elements are shared by different versions of the concept of social movement. The most popular definition of social movements stresses their nature as 'sustained interactions between challengers and powerholders' (Tilly, 1994), pointing at the temporal dimension of the process, as well as at the fact that social movements imply a continuity which goes beyond the boundaries of *ad hoc* campaigning and instrumental, short-term pressure. Another definition views social movements as informal networks between a multiplicity of actors, sharing some collective identity (Diani, 1992). The two conceptions differ in some important ways: most notably, Tilly treats networks as preconditions of social movement activity (see, for example, Tilly and Tarrow, 2007, p. 114), while Diani (see also 2012) regards networks as constitutive of movements that he treats as a particular form of network organization. At the same time, they are largely compatible in their treatment of movements as complex phenomena that cannot be brought down to specific organizational actors (Diani, 1992). They also share a view of movements as processes in which organizations play a major role, not just as pools of like-minded individuals (as in earlier versions of resource mobilization theory: McCarthy and Zald, 1977).

In both the definitions introduced above, a social movement dynamic is not reducible to the coalitional activity that is also a recurrent feature of interest groups politics at large. Although it is impossible to think of social movements in the absence of coalitions (see, for example, van Dyke and McCammon, 2010), the opposite does not necessarily apply (Tarrow, 2005, p. 164): coalitions may indeed take a purely instrumental, contingent nature without implying deeper connections and solidarities (Diani, 1992). Recognizing the distinctiveness of social movements has some important implications for the present discussion. In particular, while it may be accepted that there not be a single model of SMO that stands out in relation to 'interest groups', it still makes sense to ask whether there are actually differences in the traits of the interest groups (and more broadly, organizations) that get involved in social movement dynamics. In other words:

(a) Do social movements always attract highly heterogeneous organizations? Or instead is there variation across the organizational populations engaged in movement processes in different settings, but not necessarily within each setting?

(b) Do classic theories of social movements still help to differentiate between the organizations that mobilize within social movements, and other interest groups?

(c) Do the same theories help to identify possible explanations for variation?

This article addresses these questions by looking at both versions of movements just introduced. Most specifically, it explores four main hypotheses, inspired by mainstream social movement theories, about the characteristics of the organizational actors/interest groups involved in social movements. The first is shared by political process and NSM theorists. Consistent with views of social movements as representatives of excluded interests (Tilly, 1978), new cultural models (Lofland, 1996; Melucci, 1996), or excluded groups (Piven and Cloward, 1977), it suggests that

Hypothesis 1: Organizations acting on behalf of excluded and/or poorly represented groups and interests will be particularly likely to engage with social movements.

The other three hypotheses may be mainly derived from NSM theory or related lines of research. First of all, loose organizational forms have long been identified as functional to protect radical movements from repression (Gerlach, 1971); to provide the setting for experimenting with new cultural codes and lifestyles (Melucci, 1996); to satisfy movement activists' quests for grass roots, participatory, direct democracy (McDonald, 2002). Accordingly,

Hypothesis 2: Loosely structured organizations will be particularly likely to get involved in social movements.

Social movement analysts have also frequently stressed the propensity of SMOs to adopt contentious, disruptive repertoires to pursue their agendas (Rucht, 1995). Organizations with the willingness and the know how to engage in protest repertoires might be encouraged to work together, either because of the convenience to share the burden of demanding and possibly dangerous forms of activism, or because of the reluctance of other organizations to collaborate with actors perceived as radical. Accordingly,

Hypothesis 3: Organizations prepared to adopt contentious repertoires of action will be particularly likely to become involved in social movements.

Finally, NSMs have often been characterized as anti-systemic political or symbolic challenges (Melucci, 1996); their activists and sympathizers have often been found to be holders of critical political beliefs (Dalton, 1996). From this, the hypothesis follows that

Hypothesis 4: Organizations subscribing to anti-institutional orientations will be particularly likely to get involved in social movements.

The Case Studies

The hypotheses just introduced are tested with data collected in the context of a broader project on networking by citizens' organizations in local settings in Britain (Diani and Bison, 2004; Diani *et al*, 2010). The main, if not the only, reason to focus on Glasgow and Bristol were the differences in their social and political profile, which enabled the consideration of the impact of the political context on civic network configurations. Although Bristol and Glasgow have both moved from an industrial to a service-based economy since the 1960s, and share the growing professionalization of the voluntary sector and its involvement in policy design and implementation, differences outweigh similarities by far. Bristol is more middle class, more affluent and ethnically more diverse than Glasgow. The two cities also display different political cultures. In Glasgow, working class and left-wing labor politics still have a significant presence in the city, in a context of Labor domination, only challenged by the rise of SNP (Scottish Nationalist Party) in the late 2000s (Keating, 1988; Diani *et al*, 2010). In Bristol, there is a history of swings between Labor and Conservatives in the context of an overall moderate political culture. Left-wing political groupings critical of the Labour Party have never achieved organizational strength in Bristol despite a small, very active community of radical activists. In Bristol political culture, radical polarization along major class divides comes second to the concerted attempts to mediate between multiple interests (Bull and Jones, 2006). Even the impact of the NSMs in Bristol has mostly been at the cultural level, with an active milieu of youth subcultures and alternative lifestyles (Purdue *et al*, 1997).

The study focused on participatory organizations promoting advocacy and interest representation on a broad range of public issues. Organizations focusing primarily on service delivery were included as long as they claimed to be prepared to engage in some type of political pressure. Although a full coverage of local civic organizational fields would have been preferable, resource limitations and the need to conduct costly face-to-face interviews, given the complexity of data collection on networks, forced concentration on organizations active on a smaller set of issues. Altogether, data were collected for 124 organizations in Glasgow and 134 in Bristol, whose main focus was on the environment (16 and 27 per cent of the total, respectively), ethnic and migration issues (28 and 19 per cent), community issues (23 and 28 per cent) and social exclusion (33 and 25 per cent). All the organizations that according to informants played a significant role at least at the city-level were included. As for community organizations, rather than taking a small sample from across the city, efforts were concentrated on two areas, both relatively deprived. These were the Southside in Glasgow, an area with large historical presence of working class, including neighborhoods such as Govan, Govanhill, Gorbals

and Pollokshields, and the area including the neighborhoods of Easton, Knowles, Withywood and Hartcliffe in Bristol, featuring a strong presence of ethnic minorities. If during the interviews other organizations, not included in the original list, were named as important allies by respondents, they were noted, and interviewed after at least three references had been made.[1]

Data were collected between 2001 and 2002 through face-to-face interviews with organization representatives. Table 1 provides an overview of the independent variables used in the analysis. In order to operationalize Tilly's conception of social movements, consistent with his emphasis on interactions, interest groups in the two cities were considered to be part of the social movement sector when they had engaged more than occasionally in protest events in the previous two decades. For each city, a list was generated of protest events that informants identified as relevant (18 in Glasgow, 9 in Bristol). In both cities, about 50 per cent of organizations were found to be involved in no major protest events in the previous years; in Glasgow, 38 organizations – 31 per cent of the total – claimed to have been involved in more than one quarter of the locally relevant events; in Bristol, this only applied to 18 organizations (13 per cent). Those organizations were considered the core of the social movement sectors in the two cities.

Tilly's conception of movements emphasizes the continuity in the interactions that link challengers to power-holders (and therefore also challengers to each other, through the sustained involvement in the same protest events and campaigns). Henceforth, this will be referred to as the *protest model* of social movements. In contrast, Diani's conceptualization focuses on the inter-organizational/network ties that actors perceive as strongest. In this interpretation organizations active in social movements are, accordingly, those that occupy a distinctive structural position within broader civil society networks. Drawing upon the same data used here, Diani and Bison (2004) identified for both Glasgow and Bristol three structurally equivalent positions in the alliance network, consisting of the (perceived as) most important exchanges of resources between organizations in pursuit of shared goals. They also contrasted the density of those positions with the density of another network, consisting of social bonds generated through strong co-memberships. Following Simmel (1955), they took those ties as a proxy for identity bonds. They associated social movements with a structural position combining dense alliance networks with dense identity networks. Forty-one organizations in Glasgow and 25 in Bristol were found to occupy such position (Diani and Bison, 2004, p. 301). Henceforth, this will be referred to as the *network model* of social movements.

Differences in the composition of that subfield are more pronounced in Bristol than in Glasgow. In Bristol, only five organizations are engaged in social movement activity according to both models, out of a total of 38 that

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the independent variables included in the analysis

	Range	Glasgow		Bristol	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Claim to represent					
Dispossessed groups	0–1	0.48	0.50	0.42	0.50
Dissenting groups	0–1	0.12	0.33	0.12	0.33
Minorities/migrants*	0–1	0.52	0.50	0.34	0.48
Interested in[a]					
Social exclusion*	1–100	50.32	35.66	39.85	32.54
Environment	1–100	28.08	30.23	31.00	33.73
Minority citizenship*	1–100	41.36	34.02	25.37	29.56
Globalization	1–100	23.23	32.10	21.64	35.29
Housing*	1–100	46.94	39.84	25.67	32.03
Organizational traits					
Years in existence (by 2002)	1–126	17.77	21.16	16.98	19.66
Use professionals	0–1	0.57	0.49	0.56	0.49
Formalization[b]	0–9	4.98	2.06	5.44	2.25
Depend on public funds*	0–1	0.49	0.50	0.63	0.48
Action repertoires[c]					
Protest	1–100	32.49	28.94	25.80	29.44
Pressure	1–100	76.21	27.99	69.50	32.54
Consumerist	1–100	38.71	45.01	43.28	44.97
Support election candidates	1–100	9.27	28.77	11.57	31.21
Relations to institutions					
Percentage of local government units with which they work	0–100	39	28	41	27
Percentage of positive ties to local government out of total	0–100	49	38	57	40
Find public–private partnerships useless	0–1	0.19	0.40	0.15	0.36
Approve of third sector professionalization	0–1	0.45	0.28	0.48	27.26

[a]See Diani (2005, pp. 53–54)for details on scale construction.
[b]Additive index based on nine indicators of formalization (presence of: chairperson, board of directors, executive and/or special committee, secretary, treasurer, written constitution, general assembly, charity status).
[c]See Diani (Forthcoming: Chapter 3) for details on scale construction.
*Differences between cities significant with $P < 0.05$.

meet one or the other criteria; activity in social movements measured as non-occasional involvement in protest events does not correlate at all with being involved in a social movement network as defined by Diani and Bison (2004). In Glasgow, to the contrary, there is a strongly significant correlation between

the two models of social movement activity, as 24 organizations out of 55 are involved in movements by both criteria, while only 31 are so according to one criterion but not the other.

The traits of the groups fitting either social movement model are explored by reference to four batteries of items. It is important to underscore the substantial homogeneity of the civic sector in the two cities. Of 20 variables listed, only five display statistically significant differences across cities. The first set of variables measures how civic organizations defined their constituency and their issue priorities. Glasgow organizations were significantly more interested than their Bristol counterparts in issues directly linked to inequality and deprivation (social exclusion, ethnic and minority citizenship, and housing), and significantly keener on viewing themselves as acting on behalf of ethnic minorities and migrants.

Two sets of items follow, focusing on organizational traits (length of existence, use of professional staff, degree of formalization, dependence on public funding) and on repertoires of action (based on protest, pressure, consumerist tactics and candidate support). With the exception of the reliance on public funding, higher in Bristol, the two cities did not differ on any of these variables.

Finally, four items assess organization' integration with local institutions: (1) the percentage of local units with which they had ties, (2) the percentage of positive collaborations out of the total, (3) the satisfaction with local public private partnernships,[2] and (4) the approval of trends toward the professionalization of the voluntary sector.

What Accounts for Interest Organizations' Involvement in Social Movements?

This section contrasts the traits of organizations involved in social movements with the traits of other interest groups in the two cities. This enables testing of the four hypotheses derived from social movement theories to ascertain to what extent they account for certain organizations' sustained involvement in protest events (the 'protest model') or for their occupancy of certain structural positions within civic networks (the 'network model').

As Table 2 shows, organizations with high involvement in protest activities do not differ from other groups in their claims to represent specific constituencies, barring Bristol protest organizations' attention to ethnic minorities and migrant communities (cf. Hypothesis 1). Differences between social movement actors and other organizations were deeper in the case of the 'network' model (Table 3). Social movement actors in both cities claimed more frequently than other actors to represent dissenting groups and critical

Table 2: Social groups represented by interest organizations with different involvement in social movements (protest model)

Claim to represent	Glasgow			Bristol		
	Non-active	*Active*	*Total*	*Non-active*	*Active*	*Total*
Dispossessed groups (%)	51	40	48	42	39	41
Dissenting groups (%)	10	16	12	12	11	12
Minorities/migrants (%)	54	48	52	32*	50*	34*
N	86	38	124	116	18	134

*$P<0.10$ (differences between interest organizations within each city).

Table 3: Social groups represented by interest organizations with different involvement in social movements (network model)

Claim to represent	Glasgow			Bristol		
	Non-active	*Active*	*Total*	*Non-active*	*Active*	*Total*
Dispossessed groups (%)	54**	34**	48**	42	40	41
Dissenting groups (%)	8*	20*	12*	8***	28***	12***
Minorities/migrants (%)	58**	39**	52**	36	28	34
N	83	41	124	109	25	134

*$P<0.10$; **$P<0.05$; ***$P<0.01$ (differences between interest organizations within each city).

countercultures. In Glasgow, fewer movement actors would claim to represent dispossessed social groups (that is, people with income, health, age and/or disability problems) and ethnic minorities and migrants, suggesting a deeper gap than in Bristol between charitable and contentious collective action.

Social movements are also frequently associated with mobilization on behalf of issues that lack adequate representation (for example, Tilly, 1978; cf. Hypothesis 1). The analysis of issue priorities in the two cities identified five major sets of issues, 'Globalization', 'Environment', 'Social exclusion', 'Minority citizenship' and 'Housing' (Diani, 2005, p. 53). Groups active in the 'protest' model of social movements differed comprehensively from other interest groups in Glasgow, as they expressed interest in a broader range of themes on each macro issue, while they did not differ at all in Bristol (Table 4). This suggests the prevalence, in the Scottish city, of a model of representation whereby high involvement in protest is the preserve of organizations with broader and less differentiated agendas, whereas organizations with a narrower

Table 4: Issue interests among interest organizations with different involvement in social movements ('protest model'; 1–100 scales)

	Glasgow			Bristol		
	Non–active	Active	Total	Non–active	Active	Total
Social exclusion	45**	63**	50**	40	41	40
Environment	23**	40**	28**	31	33	31
Minority citizenship	35**	55**	41**	25	28	25
Globalization	16***	40***	23***	21	26	22
Housing	40**	62**	47**	27	16	26
N	86	38	124	116	18	134

**P<0.01; ***P<0.001 (differences between interest organizations within each city).

Table 5: Issue interests among interest organizations with different involvement in social movements ('network model'; 1–100 scales)

	Glasgow			Bristol		
	Non–active	Active	Total	Non–active	Active	Total
Social exclusion	53	45	50	40	40	40
Environment	25	35	28	25***	56***	31***
Minority citizenship	40	44	41	25	25	25
Globalization	13***	44***	23***	18**	38**	22**
Housing	48	44	47	27	19	26
N	83	41	124	109	25	134

**P<0.01; ***P<0.001 (differences between interest organizations within each city).

and more focused agenda would be less involved in protest. In Bristol, by contrast, such a distinction did not seem to hold.

The picture is radically different if we look at the 'network model' of social movement. In that case, the two cities displayed quite a similar profile. Only globalization issues attracted significantly more attention from social movement than from other actors in both cities, whereas the longest established issues such as social exclusion, housing or minority citizenship did not differentiate between them at all. In Bristol, an area well known for the presence of critical consumers interested in environmental lifestyles (Purdue *et al*, 1997), environmental issues also attracted disproportionate attention from social movement actors (Table 5).

Looking at the distribution of strictly organizational properties (cf. Hypothesis 2), one might have expected social movement actors to have been

Table 6: Organizational properties of interest organizations with different involvement in social movements (protest model)

	Glasgow			Bristol		
	Non-active	Active	Total	Non-active	Active	Total
Years in existence in 2002	18	18	18	17	14	17
Formalization	5.1	4.6	5	5.3*	6.3*	5.4*
Use professionals (%)	62*	47*	57*	53*	72*	56*
Depend on public funds (%)	57***	32***	49***	62	72	63
N	86	38	124	116	18	134

*$P<0.10$; ***$P<0.01$ (differences between interest organizations within each city).

more recently established, given their supposed role as advocates of new, emerging issues. This proved not be the case: irrespective of the social movement model takes as reference, organizations' average length of existence in the two cities turned out to be were similar, around 17–18 years at the time of our survey. On other variables, however, differences emerged, even though they provided an ultimately coherent picture. Although most differences were marginally significant, the 'protest' model of social movement suggested a stark difference between Glasgow and Bristol (Table 6): in the former, involvement in protest was higher among organizations which were little professionalized and did not depend on public funds (consistent with theory); in the latter, however, in contrast with expectations, it was the more formalized and more professionalized organizations that were significantly more involved in protest activity.

In terms of the 'network' model (Table 7), but the overall indications that emerged from the data were quite consistent with the picture emerging from the 'protest' model. In Bristol, social movement actors were similarly formalized, similarly reliant on (some) professional staff, and on public funds as their main source of income, as other organizations. In Glasgow, in contrast, differences in all these variables turned out to be significant, and in the expected direction, with social movement actors less formalized, less reliant on professionals, and less dependent on public money.

Both models of social movement also challenged the stereotypical view of social movement actors as exclusively adopting protest repertoires (cf. Hypothesis 3; Tables 8 and 9). On this particular ground the two models yielded exactly the same findings, as the two cities differed deeply in the salience of action repertoires and their distribution between different structural positions within civic networks. In Glasgow, organizations active in social

Table 7: Organizational properties of interest organizations with different involvement in social movements (network model)

	Glasgow			Bristol		
	Non-active	*Active*	*Total*	*Non-active*	*Active*	*Total*
Years in existence in 2002	19	16	18	17	16	17
Formalization	5.2*	4.4*	5*	5.4	5.6	5.4
Use professionals (%)	69***	34***	57***	55	60	56
Depend on public funds (%)	61***	24***	49***	65	56	63
N	83	41	124	109	25	134

*$P<0.05$; ***$P<0.001$ (differences between interest organizations within each city).

Table 8: Action repertoires among interest organizations with different involvement in social movements ('protest model': 1–100 scales)

	Glasgow			Bristol		
	Non-active	*Active*	*Total*	*Non-active*	*Active*	*Total*
Protest	21***	56***	32***	27	22	26
Pressure	70***	91***	76***	71	61	70
Consumerist	29***	60***	39***	44	42	43
Support election candidates	4**	20**	9**	13	6	11
N	86	38	124	116	18	134

**$P<0.01$; ***$P<0.001$ (differences between interest organizations within each city).

Table 9: Action repertoires among interest organizations with different involvement in social movements ('network model': 1–100 scales)

	Glasgow			Bristol		
	Non-active	*Active*	*Total*	*Non-active*	*Active*	*Total*
Protest	22***	54***	32***	25	31	26
Pressure	69***	91***	76***	69	72	70
Consumerist	28***	60***	39***	41	54	43
Support election candidates	4***	21***	9***	12	8	11
N	83	41	124	109	25	134

***$P<0.001$ (differences between interest organizations within each city).

movements were, as expected, much keener than other organizations on adopting protest tactics as well as a consumerist repertoire, involving boycotts of multinationals or fair trade consumer behavior. But they were also keener than other groups on engaging in conventional political pressure, or supporting candidates in elections. Rather than between pressure and protest, differences in the Glasgow civic sector seemed to run between political representation, conducted with whatever means, and service delivery. Bristol displayed a totally different profile, with no significant differences between the repertoires adopted by social movement actors and those adopted by other interest organizations. Both findings converge to support well-established arguments on the continuity between 'conventional' and 'unconventional' forms of participation. Usually formulated at the individual level (Dalton, 1996), they seem to find here a confirmation at the level of organizational repertoires of action.

Finally, evidence also comprehensively rejected the idea that social movement actors were, if not overtly hostile, at least reluctant to engage with institutions (cf. Hypothesis 4). According to the 'protest' model (Table 10), movement organizations did not differ at all from others in Bristol; in Glasgow, they were actually engaged in collaborative ties with a higher proportion of council units than other organizations (see the variable 'Local government units with which they collaborate' in Table 10), but they were overall less satisfied by the quality of these collaborations (see the variable 'Positive ties to local government out of total ties', again in Table 10). As for the 'network' model (Table 11), interest groups with different involvement in social movements were similarly engaged with local council departments

Table 10: Orientations to authorities among interest organizations with different involvement in social movements (protest model)

	Glasgow			Bristol		
	Non-active	Active	Total	Non-active	Active	Total
Local government units with which they collaborate (%)	36**	48**	39**	41	42	41
Positive ties to local government out of total ties (%)	52*	40*	49*	59	44	57
Find public–private partnerships useless (%)	—	—	17%	—	—	15%
Approve of third sector professionalization (%)	47	39	45	47	54	48
N	86	38	124	116	18	134

*$P < 0.10$; **$P < 0.05$ (differences between interest organizations within each city).

Table 11: Orientations to authorities among interest organizations with different involvement in social movements (network model)

	Glasgow			Bristol		
	Non-active	Active	Total	Non-active	Active	Total
Local government units with which they collaborate (%)	41	36	39	39	49	41
Positive ties to local government out of total ties (%)	46	55	49	59	52	57
Find public–private partnerships useless (%)	16	18	17	14	16	15
Approve of third sector professionalization (%)	49***	36***	45***	49	47	48
N	83	41	124	109	25	134

***$P<0.001$ (differences between interest organizations within each city).

(reflected in the proportion of units with which they were collaborating); they were similarly happy (or unhappy) with such collaborations (about over half of them were regarded positively); and expressed the same (largely positive) attitude toward their involvement in public–private partnerships, that only a small minority considered useless. The only significant difference was Glasgow social movement actors' lower approval of the growing professionalization of citizens' organizations.

In summary, Tables 12 and 13 report the instances in which theoretically relevant variables turned out to differentiate significantly between the actors involved in social movements (defined according to the 'protest' and the 'network' model, respectively), and other interest organizations. They also report (in bold fonts) which variables significantly differentiated between organizational populations in the two cities. Data suggest the following:

(a) only Hypothesis 1 was actually supported in both cities, but limited to the 'network model'. Organizations involved in social movement networks proved significantly more likely to engage with issues that had emerged more recently in the political arena, in particular, issues linked to globalization, and to portray themselves as representatives of dissenting communities. The 'protest' model, however, suggested a different picture, with organizations involved in protest not differing from the others in their issue priorities in Bristol, while showing a consistently higher interest in Glasgow;

(b) there was hardly any link between social movement activity and anti-institutional orientations, as Hypothesis 4 found very little support:

Table 12: Summary of significant ($P<0.1$) differences between interest organizations active and non-active in social movements ('protest model'; bolded variables also differ significantly across cities; signs reflect differences between social movement actors and others)

	Glasgow	Bristol
Claim to represent		
Dispossessed groups	—	—
Dissenting groups	—	—
Minorities/migrants	—	+
Interested in		
Environment	+	—
Globalization	+	—
Social exclusion	+	—
Housing	+	—
Minority citizenship	+	—
Organizational traits		
Use professionals	—	+
Formalization	–	+
Depend on public funds	–	—
Action repertoires		
Protest	+	—
Pressure	+	—
Consumerism	+	—
Support electoral candidates	+	—
Relations to institutions		
Amount of ties to council units	+	—
Share of satisfactory ties to council units	–	—
Approve of third sector professionalization	—	—

organizations active in movement networks in Glasgow were more critical of the professionalization of the third sector (Table 13), but there was no consistent indication that organizations involved in social movement activity, however, defined, were more critical of local institutions – and of institutionalization in general – than other organizations; they were actually as likely to engage with local institutions as other organizations, and with overall comparable levels of satisfaction;

(c) the hypothesis that organizations involved in social movement processes displayed loose, decentralized organizational structures (Hypothesis 2) found mixed support. Both models suggested organizations active in movements in Glasgow to be less formalized than others, and less dependent on public funds. In Bristol, to the contrary, 'movement organizations' did not show

Table 13: Summary of significant ($P<0.1$) differences between interest organizations active and non-active in social movements ('network model'; bolded variables also differ significantly across cities; signs reflect differences between social movement actors and others)

	Glasgow	Bristol
Claim to represent		
Dispossessed groups	−	—
Dissenting groups	—	+
Minorities/migrants	−	—
Interested in		
Environment	—	+
Globalization	+	+
Social exclusion	—	—
Housing	—	—
Minority citizenship	—	—
Organizational traits		
Use professionals	−	—
Formalization	−	—
Depend on public funds	−	—
Action repertoires		
Protest	+	—
Pressure	+	—
Consumerism	+	—
Support electoral candidates	+	—
Relations to institutions		
Amount of ties to council units	—	—
Share of satisfactory ties to council units	—	—
Approve of third sector professionalization	−	—

significant differences from other interest groups in the 'network' model and when they did – in the 'protest' model – such differences were against the theory, as the most formalized and professionalized organizations actually turned out to be the most involved in local protest events;

(d) the expectation that social movement actors would be more inclined toward protest repertoires (Hypothesis 3) also found mixed support. No differences at all could be detected in Bristol, while in Glasgow differences, although strongly significant, also included highly 'conventional' repertoires such as lobbying or even support to electoral candidates, or involvement in hardly contentious 'civic' events as well as protest ones. Interestingly, this was the only ground on which the 'protest' and the 'network' model of social movement yielded exactly the same results.

Discussion and Conclusions

The evidence presented in the previous section largely supports skeptics claims about the distinctiveness of organizations active in social movements. Regardless of how defined – either focusing on sustained protest activity (as in Tilly, 1994) or on distinctive network structures (as in Diani and Bison, 2004), no consistent profile of the organizations involved in them emerges from the data. By this token, it might indeed make sense to treat 'social movement organizations' and 'interest groups' under the more general category of 'interest organizations', as suggested by Burstein (1998, p. 45). However, we should be cautious about taking this approach too far, to the point of assuming that the properties of social movements as collective processes involving a multiplicity of actors be simply derived from the property of organizations treated as independent cases. If social movements are just interest organizations, we might be tempted to draw inferences on the nature of movements by looking at the distribution of the properties of organizations interested in a certain cause. For example, claims about the nature of the environmental movement could be made by looking at the means and proportions of the properties of organizations interested in environmental issues and willing to adopt protest repertoires (see, for example, Andrews and Edwards, 2005). However, the comparison between Bristol and Glasgow illustrates the risks of such a strategy. As the overall profiles of organizational populations in the two cities were very similar (see Table 1), this might have prompted the plausible conclusion that a movement sector existed in both cities, characterized by broadly similar levels of organizational informality, predisposition to protest repertoires, interest in new issues such as globalization and the environment, proximity to dissenting groups.

The picture is different, however, when looking at the processes that are specific of social movements. Regardless of the definition of social movements adopted, the comparison between local settings suggests a different profile of social movement actors across localities than the one we would get if we focused only on the aggregate properties of organizational populations. There is no denying the persisting value of studies of organizational populations, looking at how variables distribute across sets of independent cases (for example, Dalton, 1994; Andrews and Edwards, 2005). However, alternative perspectives, recognizing the distinctiveness of social movements as specific collective action dynamics between plurality of actors, show the properties of the organizations, involved in social movement activity in the two cities, to be quite different. These findings point to the need of strengthening the applications of social movement theory from sets of organizations treated as individual cases to organizational fields (see also Minkoff and McCarthy, 2005; Diani, 2012).

It seems indeed safe to claim that the most consistent result by far did not have to do with differences between social movement actors and other organizations, but between cities. This held for both models of social movement. In Bristol, only a few items turned out to be salient, that is, capable of shaping the profile of the actors involved in social movements. In Glasgow, to the contrary, organizations involved in movement activity (either through protest or networking) differed from other interest organizations on a high number of variables. Interestingly, for all their social and political distinctiveness, Glasgow and Bristol did not differ because of the properties of their civic organizations, taken as aggregates. The difference between the two cases was how the same elements combined to shape network patterns, or to differentiate the set of organizations highly involved in protest events.

All the above draws our attention to the importance of taking local peculiarities into consideration not only when analyzing the behavior of individual actors or ecological data on protest diffusion, as in the literature inspired by the political process approach (Tarrow, 1998), but also when exploring the structure of collective processes such as those reflected in the protest or the network model (see, for example, Baldassarri and Diani, 2007; Eggert, 2011).

There are at least two related concepts in political process theory, which may be conveniently brought in, if tentatively, to account for cross-city variation. The first one has to do with the salience of the class cleavage (Kriesi *et al*, 1995), which according to observers has been consistently higher in Glasgow than in Bristol (Keating, 1988; Bull and Jones, 2006). Another factor worth considering, strongly related to the former, is a local political culture far more geared toward protest and grassroots activism in Glasgow than in Bristol (although the gap between established political parties of the left and citizens' organizations may be deeper in the latter: Bull and Jones, 2006).

Given these differences, it is plausible to assume that the divide between organizations willing to adopt more contentious strategies on behalf of what they perceive to be excluded interests and organizations willing to play 'by the rules of the game', possibly on behalf of the very same interests, be deeper in Glasgow than in a less contentious environment like Bristol. Likewise, it is not surprising that it also affect patterns of networking, as the radical sectors are more easily connected directly to the tradition of the left in Glasgow than in Bristol, where unions are largely extraneous to grassroots organizing and protest politics. While radical direct action in Bristol exists, it is based almost entirely on small groups of activists that do relate very little to any sort of organization, no matter how loose, and operate in very irregular and discontinuous ways, thus ending up in marginal locations within civic networks. This may also help to account for the overall greater similarities

between organizations involved in social movements, and other interest organizations.

If the need to pay attention to local peculiarities represent the strongest message of this argument, an ancillary conclusion refers to the explanatory role of social movement theories in the light of our data. Here focus will be primarily on Glasgow, where organizations active in social movements actually differed from other interest organizations on several traits. Were those traits consistent with the expectations of social movement theories, as spelled out in Hypotheses 1–4? To a large extent yes, but once again with some important qualifications. First, both the 'protest' and the 'network' model showed that organizations active in movements did not differ so much from others for their inclination to protest, but rather to adopt different types of political repertoires, including the most institutionalized and conventional forms of pressure. This prompts for further exploration of why this should be the case. It might suggest that the deepest divide lie between organizations with a primary interest in advocacy and political representation, likely to include participation in social movements among their options, and organizations primarily focusing on service delivery, with a lower inclination to do so. At the very minimum, this might mean that organizations involved in social movements be inclined to adopt broader action repertoires than organizations acting mostly on their own distinct agendas.

Leaving aside the issue of action repertoires, on other variables the 'network' model seems to differentiate between movement and non-movement actors better than the 'protest' model – 'better' meaning, here, more consistent with theoretical expectations originating from social movement theory. In Glasgow, data applied to the 'network' model support the profile of movement actors as representatives of new issues relying upon loosely structured organizational forms; even in Bristol, movement actors also stand out for their aspiration to represent new issues such as environment and globalization, and to speak on behalf of dissenting, politically marginal communities. All this is consistent with the traits identified as crucial by 'NSMs' and 'new politics' theorists (Dalton, 1996; Melucci, 1996).

That a network model seems to generate more fine-grained predictions than a protest model may simply represent further evidence of the increasingly ubiquitous nature of protest as a tool for representing collective demands: the more protest becomes a recognized feature of the protest repertoire for a much broader set of organizations than the 'usual suspects', the less satisfactory it may become taking involvement in protest events as a proxy for social movement activity. In this respect, the 'network' model has the advantage of focusing on concrete ties linking organizations to each other, implying some degree of ideological and emotional proximity, rather than on the sheer amount of protest events attended (an activity which may more easily reflect pure tactical considerations).

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 There are strong reasons to believe that, with the exception of one ethnic organization in Bristol, all the most central organizations in the two cities were contacted: while many other organizations were mentioned by respondents (over 500 in both cities), none received more than three nominations. For more information on data collection see Baldassarri and Diani (2007, pp. 745–750).
2 Partnerships are collaborations involving organizations from the public, private and voluntary sector, aiming at overcoming the public/private distinction and including a broader range of actors in service delivery.

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