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ICTs in national and transnational mobilizations

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Abstract: *This article deals with the use of ICTs in national and transnational mobilizations. The case study under investigation is the Euro Mayday Parade (EMP) against precarity, which occurred at both the national and transnational level. The article focuses on three aspects of social movement activities. First, organizational processes in which ICTs are used at both the national and transnational level of the EMP in combination with face-to-face interactions, which play an important role in sustaining protest planning. Second, identification processes in which ICTs have a more important impact at the transnational level than at the national level of the EMP. Third, ICTs are not only seen as opportunities but also as challenges that activist groups involved in the EMP had to deal with in the preparation of the EMP. In presenting these results, the article suggests that a comparison between the national and transnational level of the same protest campaign could highlight new aspects in the use of ICTs, which deserve further investigation.*

Keywords: ICTs, transnational movements, precarity, media practices

This article deals with the employment of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by activist groups in the Euro Mayday Parade (EMP), a grassroots protest campaign that culminated with a parade occurring on May 1. The intended outcome of the campaign was the creation and diffusion of an alternative system of meaning related to labour flexibility in Italy, where the EMP occurred for the first time in 2001, as well as in other European countries. The EMP could be considered a protest campaign in the sense that it is "a thematically, socially, and temporally interconnected series of interactions that, from the viewpoint of the carriers of the campaign, are geared to a specific goal" (della Porta and Rucht 2002, 3).[1] Since the use of ICTs proved

to be crucial in the EMP, it could be considered a particular kind of protest campaign, namely a web campaign. This term refers to an emerging empirical phenomenon that offers new options for both institutional and non-institutional political actors to manage, develop, spread their own political campaigns and establish connections to their offline campaign activities (Baringhorst 2008). As observed with the EMP, the development of the protest campaign on the Internet does not mean that institutional and non-institutional political actors tend to abandon other, more traditional, communication tools. On the contrary, the parallel use of both online

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[1] Throughout the article, the acronym "EMP" refers to the protest campaign in its entirety, the term "parade" refers to the very parade on May 1, and the expression "EMP social movement network" or simply "social movement network" refers to the network of activist groups and individuals that organize and sustain the protest campaign.

and offline means of communication establishes these protest campaigns as a hub through which disparate publics interconnect. These interconnections occur across a broad range of mediated and non-mediated interactions between social actors (Kneip and Niesyto, 2007, p. 18-19). From this starting point, this article compares the use of face-to-face interaction (FTF) with the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) by activist groups involved in the EMP. This research will apply different analytical categories to explore the meanings acquired through the linkages between FTF and CMC in grassroots protest campaigns.[2]

The article will begin by discussing the analytical categories used to investigate the data and will also present the case study and the methods accordingly. The primary results of the empirical analysis will be presented with a focus on both the national and transnational stages of the EMP. This will take into account the use of ICTs at the protest organization level as well as at the level of collective identity construction. Finally, in the conclusion, the principal findings of the empirical investigation will be presented and a set of refined hypotheses will be proposed for future investigation.

1. Analytical categories

At the EMP it is possible to observe numerous combinations of "media practices," understood here as social practices that people perform towards the media (Couldry, 2004, p. 392), including the use of ICTs, which played a relevant role at different levels of the protest campaign. This is in line with what literature about social movements and ICTs, which flourished in the last decade, broadly assesses: ICTs are extremely powerful and crucial resources for

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[2] Grassroots protest campaigns are those protest campaigns that are initiated and sustained by a coalition of activist groups that are not supported by institutional political actors such as political parties, traditional trade unions, NGOs and national or transnational associations. Grassroots protest campaigns, instead, are initiated and sustained by a coalition of activist groups, such as political collectives, social centers, and radical trade unions, that have loose organization structures, are deeply rooted at the local level, and lack material resources.

contemporary social movements (e.g. Van de Donk, 2004; Bennett, 2003; Castells, 2001). To unpack this statement, the paragraph will single out three dimensions that are particularly relevant when studying social movements' use of ICTs. The three dimensions will be used, in turn, to propose three pairs of analytical dimensions, which will then be applied to the case.

1.1.   Instrumental and symbolic level

In the literature, the significance of ICTs for social movements is gauged by examining the achievement of movement goals through ICT use. In other words, ICTs are considered tools of social movements, which are used in order to perform many of their protest activities. Following from this assumption, Garrett (2006, p. 203) singles out three main thematic areas for investigation: mobilizing structures, political opportunities, framing processes. This article will concentrate on a traditional area of research in social movements studies: mobilizing structures. Of particular interest are those activities managed by social movements before and beyond presenting themselves to broader publics at their protest events. Specific attention will be devoted to organizational processes and identification processes, which run parallel to two relevant goals of protest activity.

Organizational processes are linked to goals broadly seen as instrumental to the movement itself, including tasks such as the concrete organization of protest events or the actual coordination of protest campaigns. At this level, the impact of ICTs on protest organization is widely recognized by social movement scholars, who consider them a crucial resource that sustains and transforms grassroots political participation and collective action (Freschi, 2003). The network infrastructure behind the Internet, in particular, provides a peculiar organizational pattern to social movements (Castells, 2001, p. 135-136) in which various nodes, such as individuals, activist groups and even other social movement networks, can be connected in a non-hierarchical and fluid way. Due to the relatively low costs of ICTs, those social movement networks, lacking material resources, gain a powerful tool to coordinate

their offline collective actions. Among ICTs, the rise of the Internet in particular has founded a unique environment, cyberspace, where activists can perform new kinds of collective action that fall under the labels "cyber-protests" and "hacktivism" (see Jordan, 2002; Jordan and Taylor, 2004).

Identification processes are linked largely to symbolic goals, such as tasks like collective identity formation and the construction of a system of meaning. At the symbolic level, the role of ICTs is still debated among social movement scholars. The existence of a shared collective identity is essential for the construction and maintenance of social movement networks and mobilizations (della Porta and Diani, 2006; Melucci, 1996). When considering the relevance of ICTs at the symbolic level, many authors ask whether or not ICTs positively contribute to the development of shared collective identities, and if so, how and to what extent. While some suggest that the online environment can forge collective identities, they still assert that it is no substitute for FTF interactions among activists (Diani, 2000, p. 397). Other scholars speculate that the online environment "fosters pluralist, open identities" (della Porta and Mosca, 2005, p. 180) among activists, which then experience more fluid, temporary collective identities when associating themselves with different activist groups and protest campaigns. The analytical categories, instrumental and symbolic, will be used to investigate the data of use of ICTs as mobilizing structures in social movement processes.

1.1.1. National and transnational level

The importance of ICTs for social movements, in relation to mobilizing structures, could be investigated with respect to the geographical and territorial level where protest activity is rooted. The transnational level of mobilization, in particular, has been extensively studied by considering the relationship between ICTs and processes of transnationalization in contemporary social movements. While, at the end of the 1990s, the question had been whether ICTs and the Internet, in particular, could promote the diffusion of protests across countries (Tarrow,

1998; Ayres, 1999), in recent years, many scholars actually underlined the relevant role of ICTs in the development of transnational social movements (Bennett, 2003; Castells, 2001). In a similar vein, some authors suggest that ICTs plays an important role specifically in transnational, issue-focused protest campaigns (Van de Donk et al., 2004, p. 18). The interest in ICTs and transnational social movements does, however, overshadow the role that ICTs may have in campaigns managed by national social movement networks. Even such nationally managed initiatives play an important role at the transnational level. Literature on social movements lack comparisons between the national and transnational level of mobilizations with regards to the use of ICTs. Therefore, the second dimension considered is the geographical, territorial level of protest activity and the two analytical categories to be used to investigate the data are the transnational and national level of mobilization.

1.1.2. National and transnational level

In relation to mobilizing structures and the geographical scales of collective action, the importance of ICTs for social movements could be further discussed by focusing more generally on the role played by ICTs in protest activity. While most literature assesses the positive role of ICTs, determining the negative impact of ICTs on social movements is largely missing from many investigations (Garrett, 2006). Only a few authors openly address this issue (see for instance Pickerill, 2003), which deserves further theoretical assessment. A fruitful approach along these lines is adopted by Mosca (2007), who speaks about the Internet as providing opportunities and challenges for social movements and provides a tentative categorization with regards to external and internal social movement communication. The identification of the challenges and opportunities linked to ICT based mobilization processes by employing this perspective from Mosca (2007).

1.1.3. Research question

The analytical categories proposed are just abstract tools for investigation and, as such, condense much more complex empirical phenomena that raise composite research questions:

- Do activist groups combine FTF and CMC in different ways according to the goal, mobilization structures (instrumental/symbolic) or the territorial scale (national/transnational)?
- Also, do challenges and opportunities arising from the use of ICTs change according to the goal for which mobilization structures are used (instrumental/symbolic) and according to the territorial level where protest campaigns occur (national/transnational)?

These are, in short, the research questions used to investigate the empirical occurrence of a protest campaign, which is in this case the EMP.

2. Case study and methods

The EMP case study is particularly relevant as it offers the opportunity to compare two stages of the same protest campaign: the local/national one, from 2001 to 2003, and the national/transnational one, from 2004 to 2006. This comparison is possible because the shift in geographical scale (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007; p. 95) that transformed the protest event from a national protest campaign to a transnational one. Originally, the parade was a local protest event in Italy. It occurred for the first time in Milan on May 1, 2001 and its name was Mayday Parade (MP). In the following years, the demonstration grew exponentially: according to the organizers, protest participants in Milan, which were about 5,000 in 2001, became about 100,000 six years later in 2006. In 2004, the parade changed its name into EMP and Spanish activist groups organized it in Barcelona, while smaller protest events occurred also in Dublin, Helsinki and Palermo. Furthermore, in November 2004 many activist groups that struggled against work insecurity in different countries joined the EMP network, after a

transnational meeting, proposed and organized by Italian activist groups that took place in London at the 'Beyond ESF' forum.[3]

From that very year onwards, a fluid transnational network of activist groups sustained the protest campaign, which occurred in many European cities.[4] This fluid transnational network also extended itself to include other activist groups based in non-European countries, for example in Tokyo, Japan in 2008. In brief, mechanisms of brokerage and coordinated action connected a number of activist groups rooted in different European countries to mobilize on the same issue in a coordinated way (cf. Tilly and Tarrow, 2007, p. 31). The diffusion of the campaign was also fostered through a shift within the identification process, wherein an Italian campaign shifted towards a transnational and European level. The repertoire of protest and campaign activities, namely the parade, and the issue addressed by activists, namely precarity, underwent a process of symbolic diffusion.[5] At the meso-level interactions among activist groups, this also implied the need of a political translation of the alternative system of meaning about lack of work security (Doerr and Mattoni, 2007). In fact, to create and sustain the EMP at the transnational level required the formation of a shared collective identity in which activists could recognize themselves and people could decide to participate in the parade.

The EMP currently still takes place in various European cities, upon which this article focuses. Therefore, the social movement network, which supports the protest campaign, and organizes the parade, still exists nowadays. That said, the time span chosen to analyze the protest campaign goes from 2001 to 2003, when the protest campaign focused mostly at the Italian

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[3] The Wombles organized this forum at the Middlesex University during the European Social Forum in London.

[4] In 2005, the EMP occurred in nineteen European cities extending to twenty-two in 2006.

[5] The meaning of the expression "precarity" will be explained below in the paragraph devoted to identification processes at the national level. Here, it is sufficient to say that this term refers to job insecurity and is central in the alternative system of meaning that activist created about labor market flexibility.

national level, and from 2004 to 2006, when the protest campaign became transnational. Less systematic observations and data gathering, which have been integrated into this research, were conducted for the EMP in 2007 and 2008. The empirical investigation is based on a 'data triangulation' approach (Denzin, 1975) and has focused on three different data sets.

The online environment of the Internet has been a crucial resource to collect the first two data sets, which consist of documents generated by social movements. More precisely, the first data set comprises documents such as messages posted in mailing lists or on websites directly managed by social movements.[6] The second data set is made up by media texts that social movements produced with regards to the protest campaign.[7] The living experience of activists has also, however, been a valuable means to collect perceptions, considerations and narratives about media practices in the context of the EMP.

The interviewees were not social movements' spokespersons, a definition that is highly contested among activists involved in the EMP. Rather, they were or had been very active in the organization of the MP in Milan and many of them, though not all, were also involved in the transnational level of the EMP. The process of activists selection followed a 'snowball sampling' strategy, according to which an initial small group of activists was selected that responded to the criteria singled out above, and then suggested other potential interviewees (Weiss, 1994). Twenty-three interviewees, fifteen males and eight females, comprise the resulting sample.[8] The third data

set, therefore, includes transcripts of semi-structured interviews that focused on various kinds of media practices that activists developed and performed in the context of the EMP. All three data sets have been analyzed using the computer-assisted qualitative analysis software *Atlas.ti*. Overall, the investigation has followed the analytical categories scheme proposed in the paragraph above.

3. Analysis: the (Euro) Mayday Parade and ICTs

3.1. Organizational processes at the national level

The data analysis shows that at the very beginning of the protest campaign, a small number of activists, who recognized themselves as amongst a narrow range of activist groups, managed the organization of the protest campaign through FTF interactions in the form of small scale preparatory meetings in Milan. As a consequence, the planning and execution of the parade went on in a non-hierarchical way among few activists, whose collective decisions about the form and content of the parade sprung from small informal assemblies. These activist groups were then tacitly accepted by other activist groups that decided to join the MP on May 1. They were three: a group of auto-organized casual workers, the Chainworkers Crew (CW),[9] activists belonging to the social centre

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[6] The resulting data set contains email messages that activists posted in two mailing lists, namely "Precog" (from 2003 to 2006) and "Euromayday" (from 2004 to 2006) and webpages of ad hoc activists' websites, namely the EMP (from 2004 to 2006) and the Chainworkers Crew (from 2001 to 2006).

[7] The resulting data set contains online articles and media texts, which activists posted on three independent informational websites, namely Indymedia Italy (from 2001 to 2006), Global Project (from 2003 to 2006) and NGVision (from 2003 to 2006).

[8] In detail, two interviewees were older than fifty years, three older than forty and younger than fifty, seven older than thirty and younger than forty, eight older than twenty and younger than thirty, three younger than twenty.

Among them, there were fourteen people employed with a fixed-term contract, four people employed with an open-ended contract, one unemployed, two university students and two high school students. Among those employed through a fixed-term contract, three people worked in the knowledge sector (research, teaching), six in the information and communication sector, two in the service sector (shops, restaurants) and three in the cultural-political sector. Those employed through an open-ended contract were all older than 40 years: three of them worked in the political sector, precisely trade unions, and the remaining one in the communication and information sector.

[9] The CW, born in 1999, immediately created its own webzine in order to promote "… media and mall activism for awareness-building and unionization of precarious workers" (Chainworkers Crew, n.d.). For a more detailed history of the CW and its approach to political struggles against economic precarity see Chainworkers Crew (2001).

named the Bulk[10] and the local section of the *Confederazione Unitaria di Base* (CUB),[11] a radical trade union, initiated the MP (Mayday Parade) in 2001. These activists thought about a parade, rather than a traditional demonstration, to be joined by every other activist group that was interested in the contentious issue of work insecurity. During this stage, previous linkages between activists in Milan and activists from other Italian cities were very important in order to bolster participation. For instance, activists of the Strike social centre, based in Rome, went to the MP in 2003 because they were acquainted with some of the MP organizers who lived in Milan. These personal ties had been previously constructed and then reinforced through FTF interactions during other contexts of protest, such as transnational mobilizations against the G8 and WTO summits in Europe. Though not openly stressed by the interviewees, informal contacts among various activist groups were mainly possible through direct FTF interactions during informal and small-scale meetings in movements' settings, as well as indirect mediated interactions occurring through private phone calls and email messages. These channels of communication sustained the fluid and underground network of activists that organized the MP.

The data analysis also shows, however, that CMC acquired greater importance as the protest campaign evolved and increased the number of activist groups who took part in its organization. Indeed, as the years went by, more and more activist groups decided to participate in the organization of the MP and the underground network of activists gained diffuse visibility in the milieu of social movements. During a national assembly concerning the existence and resistance of Italian social centers, in November 2003, the MP began to be sustained by a national social movement network. The related national mailing list, named Precog, was also established[12]. The existence of an informal network of activist groups contributed to enlarging the decision-making process related to MP organization, as Mirko[13] explained:

"The idea was that the Mayday actually became a national date and, hence, that involved different realities not only in the 'street moment', but also in the preparatory, elaboration, and launch moment. This worked; it was able to do two or three national assemblies in one year that defined the most catching keywords of the year."

Therefore, the MP organizational stage developed in a more public way at the level of direct, FTF interactions. National preparatory meetings were the moment in which to write down a common call for actions, to define the aspects of precarity to be emphasized during the parade and to decide the float order for the Milan parade. Many among the interviewees also pointed out that the Precog mailing list was a crucial space for the organization of the MP, since through the mailing list many activists from all over Italy were collectively discussing suggestions, ideas and proposal about the parade. The opportunity to use CMC was also very important at the level of local activist groups, which organized their participation to the parade through their own, smaller mailing lists that supported collective writing of documents, as Mara[14] remembered:

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[10] The Deposito Bulk was a social center born in Milan from 1997 to 2006. Social center, *centri sociali* in Italian, are abandoned buildings, frequently owned by the State, that are occupied by groups of people in order to have a space to promote underground cultures and offer auto-organized services to the neighborhood where they are located. In some cases, social centers are also spaces in which activists live.

[11] A large group of workers who did not recognize themselves in traditional trade unions founded the CUB in 1992. Radical trade unions in Italy "… emerged during the 1990s from a series of labor mobilizations. In their forms of action, organizational formulas and discourses, they differed from the three traditional, confederate trade unions – the leftwing CGIL, the Catholic CISL and the UIL – not only in their critique of neo-liberal reforms, but also in their emphasis on direct action, participative democracy and 'class identity'" (della Porta and Mosca, 2007, p. 6).

[12] Precog is the combination of the terms *precari*, that is precarious people, and *cognitari*, that stands for cognitive workers. However, it also evokes the precog characters in the movie Minority Report, who were able to transform their mental visions into concrete images.

[13] Mirko was an activist involved in the CW and also a temporary worker employed in the cultural and education sector. The interview took place in his flat in Milan on December 21, 2006. As here, all quotations have been translated by the author and the interviewees' names are fictional.

[14] Mara was an activist involved in the Deposito Bulk and also a temporary worker employed in the education

"I wrote a draft, then I posted it into the [mailing] list and there it was: read, corrected and revised. Everyone could work on it, so actually the production [of leaflets] was quite collective, by starting from a draft, and official declarations were produced collectively as well."

Another important resource in the organization of the parade was the independent informational website Indymedia Italy, which was the national node of the worldwide network of Independent Media Centres born in Seattle immediately before the anti-WTO demonstrations in 1999 (Morris, 2004) and was established in Italy in 2001. Activist groups used Indymedia Italy to publish leaflets, official declarations and call for actions in order to launch the parade and to spread basic information about how to join the parade through special trains from all over Italy. Accordingly, the number of articles on Indymedia Italy increased when the social movement network that sustained the MP enlarged. The number was specifically higher in 2003 and 2004, when the organizers more openly conceived the MP as a national protest campaign where participation was open to all Italian activist groups struggling against precarity.[15] Many activists thought that this form of communication was also a form of organization, in the sense that the availability of particular information, such as the place where and the time at which a special train to join the MP could be caught, might lead an activist groups or even non-organized precarious workers to participate in the parade. This is clear in the account given by Mara of the MP launch:

"The MP launch always took place, to a larger extent, first of all on Indymedia. Then we did press conferences, we did all that is expected to be done, but the big launch was on Indymedia, that reached a mass of people in Italy, absolutely impressive. […] And then there was the opportunity, through the mechanism according to which everybody may write on Indymedia, for each micro-

group, from the really autonomous micro-group to the more organized collectives, to post on Indymedia and to communicate what they would have done. So, sometimes, they wrote on Indymedia 'yes, we will organize a truck as well' and you did not even know who they were."

In many ways, the organization of the MP was partially decentralized and left to the initiative of local activist groups. Other than some simple guidelines set out for participating in the parade such as the construction of trucks possibly equipped with a sound system, activist groups who were more involved in the MP organization did not require a continuous presence at preparatory assemblies or discussions in mailing lists. This decentralized and fluid form of organization was well supported by Indymedia Italy, which was based on an open publishing platform, granted anonymity, was free from censorship, and allowed the use of movements' mailing lists. The decision to use Indymedia Italy was also connected to the overlapping presence, among the social movement network sustaining the MP, of activists who also belonged to the group of people who managed Indymedia Italy.

In sum, both FTF and CMC sustained the preparatory stages of the parade and, hence, gave a twofold space of interaction where the offline and online realm fruitfully intertwined (see Hamm, 2006). The organizational level of the parade, therefore, was enriched by online media practices, such as activists signaling their participation in the MP via the Indymedia website. This result complements previous analysis that focused on two transnational protest events based in Italy, the Genoa anti-G8 demonstrations in 2001 and the Florence European Social Forum in 2002. Based on data collected through websites, mailing lists and questionnaires, this empirical investigation outlines that the repertoire of contention is enriched by online protests to which activists participate while continuing to demonstrate, picket and boycott offline (della Porta and Mosca, 2005, p. 26).

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sector. The interview took place in Milan on 27 December 2006.

[15] Number of articles related to the MP posted on Indymedia Italy, time frame from April 1 to May 31: 2 in 2001; 10 in 2002; 19 in 2003; 72 in 2004.

3.2.   Organizational processes at the transnational level

At the transnational level of the EMP, activist groups maintained an online and offline decentralized organizational structure similar to that of the MP. Transnational meetings, in which FTF interactions between activists of different European countries took place mainly in English, were the moment in which important decisions were taken collectively. The first transnational meeting, which took place in 2004 in London at the aforementioned "Beyond-ESF" forum, is exemplary of this process. In this context, activists collectively wrote down the so-called Middlesex Declaration, which was a call for action in order to construct a transnational network of activist groups that were involved in struggles against precarity. The common presence in the same physical place gave the opportunity to Italian activist groups, which organized the MP at the national level, to propose and discuss the idea of the precarity social problem to a broader audience of activist groups belonging to different countries and political traditions. In the next months, two transnational preparatory meetings took place in Paris and Berlin in order to organize the EMP in 2005 and two transnational preparatory meetings took place in Hamburg and Milan in order to organize the EMP in 2006.

Though FTF interactions during these assemblies were important and fruitful according to activists, they also considered the use of ICTs, and CMC in particular, extremely relevant as it sustained the continuity of discussion among dispersed activist groups during the time span between one preparatory meeting and another. Indeed, immediately after the first transnational meeting in London, Italian activist groups established a common mailing list and website, both named Euromayday. In particular, activists used Euromayday mailing lists all year long, though the messages peaked in the months immediately before and in the weeks immediately after the parade:[16]

March, April and May. Mara suggested one of the reasons why activists considered the Euromayday mailing list so important:

"First of all, EuroMayday is, from the very beginning, a European [mailing] list that continues to work. Obviously, you cannot afford a monthly meeting at the European level, because it became a far too substantial waste of energy. The [mailing] list is active and continues to work and there all the cues that are developed during the year are published, for instance information about everything that happens. These are the opportunity for information exchange."

Without any or few institutional political actors involved in it, the EMP was clearly sustained by a transnational social movement network based on the participation of activist groups. Individuals and collectives across this network contributed to the common knowledge and experience from previous protest activities within their local and national territorial levels. In other words, the EMP relied on 'participatory resources' (Diani, 2000, p. 392) and lacked the necessary material resources to organize regular preparatory meetings at the transnational level, as had happened within more structured and institutionalized social movement events, like international meetings of the European Social Forum (Doerr forthcoming) or the European Clean Clothes Campaign (Niesyto, 2008). Furthermore, the Euromayday mailing list was complementary to the transnational preparatory meeting offered an arena within which activist groups discussed the organization of preparatory meetings. Such processes are clearly illustrated in the following email extract related to the transnational preparatory meeting to be held in Hamburg on October 22-23, 2005:

"So what do you want to discuss at the meeting? There have been two or three suggestions on this list, and we have taken note of them. Are there any additional proposals regarding workshops, themes,

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[16] For instance, in 2006, the messages were distributed as following: fifteen in January; sixty-eight in February; ninety-eight in March; 155 in April, seventy-one in May, twenty-eight in June; six in July; forty-two in August; thirty-three in September; twenty-one in October; twenty-one in November; and eight in December. In the other years, the messages distribution followed a similar pattern, with an intensification of mailing list traffic in March, April and May.

debates, and the overall structure of the meeting?"[17]

Many activists posted informal accounts of transnational preparatory meetings to the Euromayday mailing list. Finally, activist groups often collectively discussed calls for actions, posters and other common declarations of the EMP in the Euromayday mailing list. These discussions were used as a real political working space, where collective action frames slowly emerged or shifted. Activists, therefore, used CMC to foster the exchange of information and, at the same time, to reinforce mutual trust among activist groups. Groups were also able to confirm their interest in struggles against precarity by organizing local, national protest events related to this social problem and, then, publicly and visibly rendering their initiatives within the Euromayday mailing list. Here it is worth noting that particularly in 2007, the Euromayday mailing list functioned as a substitute for transnational preparatory meetings, which did not take place in the months before the parade. On this occasion, activist groups from different European countries used the Euromayday mailing list to signal whether or not they were organizing the parade, to jointly discuss the common call for action and to coordinate the protest campaign. This is the only example in which CMC temporary substituted direct FTF interactions during preparatory stages.

The Euromayday website played a very different role. Activists intended it to be a place in which to publish the relevant materials to launch the parade, from the call for action to high quality resolution posters, and to bring together all the national websites related to the EMP. This allowed each activist group to use the same media texts to promote the parade and, thus, to have a relatively homogeneous protest aesthetic for the simultaneous protest events in a number of countries. In a sense, the EMP website easily supported and, at the same time, reflected a model of organization based on coordinated

autonomy at the transnational level. Franco[18] explained how this worked, he begins with the example of his own activist group:

"With regards to the Euro Mayday there were coordination meetings, there were [mailing] lists for common discussion, no more than this … but, since there was the dynamics of a multitude, new technologies were not used in the sense of 'let's organize the Euro Mayday', but 'let's organize the many pieces that then participate to the Euro Mayday'. And, thus, each single collective, I'm sure, had its own mailing list, they saw each other's websites, they exchanged each other's images, they listened to the audio accounts about what happened in other cities and, maybe, they also downloaded each other's documents."

In short, the use of ICTs contributed to sustaining a balance between the high degree of autonomy, which nationally based activist groups maintained in the organization of their own EMP, and the construction of a common image able to underscore the existence of a transnational social movement network struggling against precarity at the European level.

3.3. Identification processes at the national level

At the symbolic level, the MP played a central role in the construction of a national social movement network struggling against precarity. Data analysis illustrates, however, that ICTs were not the primary tool that activist groups used in order to achieve this goal. Before discussing this finding, it is worth examining why the construction of a collective identity was considered so important and why activist groups dedicated a considerable amount of attention and effort to the identification processes behind it.

In Italy, the MP intertwined with the broader context of struggles against work insecurity in Italy. Besides their differences, all these protest events wanted to make the same social problem visible in a country where the 'flexibility political mantra' (Beck, 2000, p. 3)

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[17] Email posted to the Euromayday mailing list on 19 September 2005.

[18] Franco was an activist of the Casa Loca social center. The interview took place on 24 January 2007 in Milan.

was pushed by the primary institutional political and economic actors, both left wing and right wing. In such a context, many activist groups from all over Italy began to link deregulated labor flexibility, also supported by major legislative changes, with the emerging high degree of work insecurity.[19] They considered it a social problem that they framed as 'precarity', which contributed highly to the emergence of relatively new kinds of workers, that they framed as 'precarious workers' or simply 'precarious'. Therefore, from this point of view the MP wanted to give a collective name, and thus a collective identity, to the various social and political subjects already struggling against precarity.

Activists intended the MP to be a contentious political action able to render visible their alternative system of meaning with regards labor flexibility. In line with this, they wanted to overcome differences among precarious workers, often isolated from each other due to the existence and application of a number of fixed-term contracts, sometimes even within the same workplace. They, therefore, attempted to construct a pluralistic social subject, able to represent itself at the public level without any political mediation at the institutional level. From 2002, activists used the expression *precariato sociale*.[20] It focused on the general living and working conditions experienced by a wide range of people who did not see the fulfillment of their (new) social rights due to precarity (Chainworkers Crew, 2002). Already that year, activists openly linked the *precariato sociale* to the global justice movement, as the call for action stated: "The global movement of Seattle and Porto Alegre, Genoa and Florence, which nowadays is opposed to the Iraqi war, contributed to the emergence and diffusion in Europe of a new political subject [...]. This new political subject is the social

precariat. [...] The precariat is to postfordism as the proletariat was to fordism: precarious people are the social group produced by the neoliberal transformation of economy" (Mayday Network, 2003).

In such a process of identification, ICTs seems to play a less important role than in the organization of the MP. Activists used mailing lists to exchange social movement's documents that contributed to the construction of precarious workers' collective identity, such as call for actions. It seemed that among those activist groups more involved in the organization of the MP, however, the process of identification was linked more substantially to other kinds of media practices. The most relevant example in this direction was the development of a particular kind of radical media that activists named the *media sociali*. The most famous among them was *San Precario*,[21] the protector saint of all precarious workers. It is a small holy picture invented in 2004 by activists involved in the CW and quite immediately spread within and beyond the national social movement network that organized the parade.

Figure 1: The San Precario small holy picture (http://www.sanprecario.info)[22]

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[19] According to Gallino (2007, p. 63-71) four main legislative measures were responsible for increasing work insecurity in Italy. The intergovernmental agreement in 1993, the Law 24 June 1997, No. 197, commonly named the 'Treu Packet', the Legislative Decree 6 September 2001, No. 368 and the Law 14 February 2003, No. 23. Nowadays, the Italian labor market is one of the main flexible markets in Europe with about 40 different kinds of fixed-term contracts (Fumagalli, 2007, p. 28).

[20] The expression could be translated as 'social precariat'.

[21] Other examples of *media sociali* are the false Anglo-Nippon fashion stylist, *Serpica Naro*, and the 19 sticker cards representing super-heroic precarious workers, the *Imbattibili*, both invented in 2005. To know more about the media sociali see (Tarì and Vanni, 2005; Vanni, 2007; Mattoni, 2007)

[22] All the images reproduced in this article are licensed under a Creative Commons License. Its terms are available at http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/1.0/

Through a sophisticated subversion of the Italian Catholic tradition, *San Precario* contributed to the construction of a common imagery among precarious workers (Tarì and Vanni, 2005, p. 27). Many activist groups that participated to the MP used it, at times readapted, in other contentious political action against precarity in Italy (Mattoni, 2008) and also in other European countries (Doerr and Mattoni, 2007, p. 21-24). The moment to distribute *media sociali* was crucial in activating the identification process, as Miriam[23] explained:

"Everyone to whom I gave the small holy picture had not only an amused look, but also recognition in his or her eyes. It happens to have the same reaction of an out-and-out marxist-leninist militant as well as persons outside any kind of political logic."

In short, though the *media sociali* like *San Precario* were distributed and partially constructed through ICTs, they seemed endowed with more potential in FTF interactions, when activists distributed them among other activists, protesters and even ordinary people who simply watched at a protest event.

3.4. The identification process at the transnational level

Similar to national level, at the transnational level the construction of a collective protest and campaign identity was crucial. In contrast to the national level however, data analysis shows that the use of ICTs played a more significant role in identification processes at the transnational level. That said, at the very beginning of this stage of the protest campaign, FTF interactions contributed to the construction of a collective identity. In 2004, activists involved in the EMP redefined the *precariato sociale* as European: they added the prefix Euro to the name of the parade, which thus became EMP, and they framed precarity as a social problem affecting millions of people all over Europe. The posters of the parade exemplified this shift: they were written using a mix of languages – French, Italian,

Spanish and English – and claimed "European social rights" (Euromayday Network 2004).

Figure 2: the EMP poster in 2004 (http://www.chainworkers.org/MAYDAY/index. html)

As previously mentioned, the forum "Beyond ESF" was the arena within which Italian activists launched the proposal to work on a transnational social movement network that would be able to mobilize people against precarity at the European level. They supported this attempt through the diffusion of a radical fanzine at the same meeting. It was the *ad hoc* issue of the *Greenpepper Magazine*, prepared in advance thanks to the contribution of Italian activists, who wrote about the meaning of precarity. Linkages, therefore, among Italian activist groups were constructed through the development of the national social movement network. This network sustained the reinforcing process of the MP organization and the collaboration with a traditional radical media, Greenpepper magazine, which provided reflections about precarity in the Italian context of struggle. As a second step, Italian activist groups diffused the articles, whose aim was to explain the meanings of precarity and its potential to mobilize people in other European countries and at the transnational level through FTF interactions with other activist groups gathered at a movement meeting. This mechanism of diffusion was the first step in the construction of the transnational social

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[23] Miriam was an activist participating to the CW and she was also a precarious worker at the time of her interview. The interview took place in Milan on 25 January 2007.

movement network, which organized the EMP in many European countries in the following years.

The shared collective identity was, however, a process not exclusively developed by the organization of the EMP alone. On the contrary, activists developed many media practices to further develop and maintain a common understanding of the EMP. These media practices highly relied on ICTs. From this point of view, the official website of the parade was more than an organizational tool to distribute the same campaign material to all activist groups that would like to organize the EMP in their own country. Rather, the existence of a virtual space, which gathered websites of the activist groups involved in the parade organization, reinforced the idea of the common belonging to the same transnational social movement network, as they shared the same physical space only during preparatory meetings. This tendency developed more and more over the next years and in 2008 the EMP was supported by a website on which there was also an interactive space devoted to the so-called "mega-blog." Here, each activist group involved in the protest campaign could post its own article about precarity in general and the EMP in particular. The result was a virtual space that contained written texts, videos and other materials in different languages posted by a number of activists' groups connected to the transnational social movement network that organized the protest campaign.

Moreover, in both 2004 and 2005, the EMP took place also within cyberspace: the official website of the parade hosted a net-parade joined by thousands and thousands of people that constructed their personalized avatar and claimed their own personal slogans against precarity. Molleindustria, a website specialized in political videogames, invented it to reinforce the idea of a shared collective identity both at the national and transnational level, as Guido[24] pointed out:

"To some extent, there was the need to give visibility to this identity, to this new class

that is not a class, and the virtual demonstration had to be a collective representation, a multicolored mosaic that would be able to give an aesthetic visibility as well. It was a collective representation."

Activists stressed more the European dimension in 2005, when virtual floats of the net-parade were also links to websites of activist groups involved in the transnational social movement network that sustained the EMP. The net-parade highlighted one of the main features of the EMP. Unlike demonstrations against the anti-WTO, EU, G8 summits and even the ESF, were activist groups and individuals from a number of countries met and temporary participated to the same contentious political action in the same physical space, the EMP culminated in a common day of struggle, May 1, in a number of cities all over Europe. While the time and the kind of action were more or less the same, the physical space was different. Activist groups involved in the EMP seem to partially overcome the lack of a common space for contentious political action through the use of ICTs.

Besides the net-parade, activists used the Euromayday mailing list not only as an organizational tool: after the EMP had occurred, activists posted a number of accounts, related to the parade in various countries, made up by written texts and pictures. In this way, each activist group might see what happened in the other EMPs and reinforce their idea of belonging to the same transnational social movement network and participating to the same protest campaign. A similar version of this media practice also occurred during the preparatory meeting in Hamburg, where activist groups devoted the first session of the assembly to mutual explanations related to what happened before and during the previous EMP. In doing so, some activist groups were also supported by their own media texts, frequently videos, to impart a more lively representation of the EMP. In these cases, digital cameras and basic knowledge about how to cut or rearrange the recorded material were important resources in order to create documents that could integrate FTF interactions between activist groups.

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[24] Guido was an activist involved in the Molleindustria website. He was a temporary worker employed in the information and communication sector. The interview took place in Milan on 18 December 2006.

Probably, the most sophisticated attempt in this direction was the creation of the EMP live radio broadcasting that an Italian activist group, namely the Global Project, organized in 2004 and 2005. From Milan, the city in which the biggest Italian EMP occurred, activists connected to the other European cities in which the EMP was taking place, interviewed them about what was going on and immediately retransmitted these accounts to a variety of audiences. In 2004, when the most important parades took place in Milan and Barcelona, activists established a direct connection between the two cities during the live radio broadcasting, as Paolo[25] remembered:

"We had a radio studio connected to the parade through an ISDN connection and so a live broadcast in the strictest sense. While conducting [the radio program], we alternated with those in Spain, in Barcelona. We had a series of correspondents within the parade and hence a series of mobile phones to call. You did the correspondence, you listened to the correspondent, he or she talked [about the parade] or did interviews [from within the parade] and then you talked [about the parade], framed what arrived within the parade and proposed some songs that were coherent with the parade."

The sharing of narratives related to the EMP in various European cities was a powerful tool in order to create a feeling of belonging to a common European space of struggle against precarity within the transnational social movement network behind the EMP. Though temporary, since it was linked to the occurrence of a specific protest campaign, activist groups intended the live radio broadcast as something more than the mere alternative coverage of the parade, as this Spanish activist from Barcelona pointed out during the radio program, immediately before the EMP began:

"We will do radio links with the parade in Milan, because we want to be present not only in Barcelona, but also in Milan. The Mayday opportunity also offers us a moment

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[25] Paolo was an activist of the Cantiere social center in Milan and was also involved in Global Project. He was a temporary worker employed in the cultural sector. The interview took place in Milan on 27 January 2007.

of construction of Europe from below. So, we feel ourselves in Milan now and I hope that also you will experience the day [of struggle] in Barcelona as yours." (Global Project, 2004)

The Global Project website highlighted the same concept in 2005, when the number of European cities involved in the EMP increased and hence the live radio coverage was even more articulate than in the previous year: "[T]his is our first experiment to establish a continuous contact with the European groups working on precarity and migration. Connect our fights and connect our discourse to construct Europe, this is our project" (Global Project, 2005). The re-appropriation of the European space by people who had not been involved in the making of the European Union at the institutional level was hence obtained, according to activists, through the participation in common days of struggle and through the reinforcement of the linkages between activists and protesters that participated in them. The live representation of the EMP in radio programs, video materials, pictures and written texts and its subsequent diffusion through mainly CMC sustained the maintenance of the shared collective identity constructed within the transnational social movement network behind the EMP, even though the very moment of the parade did not physically gather all activist groups involved in it.

4. Opportunities and Challenges of ICTs

4.1. The national level

The previous sections implicitly underlined the opportunities that the use of ICTs opened at the national level of the MP, especially concerning their instrumental use: in particular mailing lists facilitated organizational processes and discussions; on the local level mailing lists were also the space of collective writing of common documents; Indymedia Italy, furthermore, played an important role with regards to processes of organizing and mobilizing. CMC reinforced previous contacts established through FTF. The decentralized character of the ICTs used in the campaign fitted well with the grassroots character of the MP

Analysis of the interview-transcripts, however, gives a more nuanced perception of ICTs by the interviewees, who underlined that ICTs were also a challenge for the social movement network, mainly in relation to the organizational level of the protest campaign. In particular, the translation of conflicts internal to the social movement network that promoted the MP in the online realm and the creation of potential exclusion of particular kinds of precarious workers due to the use of ICTs as a means to organize the parade.

The growth of activist groups that participated to the organization of the MP and the parallel growth of people that joined the parade on May 1 also brought internal tensions especially due to the difficult acceptance of more structured and sometimes even institutionalized activist groups. Many among the interviewees spoke about tense relationships during preparatory meetings, especially in 2004. Moreover, some physical encounters between activists occurred in 2005, on May 1 in Milan during the parade. Internal clashes were also visible within the independent informational website Indymedia Italy, which then revealed its ambivalence to the protest activity. Indeed, many of the interviewees considered the independent informational website as a precious resource in order to be informed about mobilizations and other political actions that activist groups all around Italy promoted at the local and national level. This is with regards to other kinds of protest campaigns that focused on other contentious issues as well. However, the same interviewees also stressed the misuse of Indymedia Italy in recent years: they did not blame the communicative tool *per se*, but rather the way in which some of its potentialities, such as the open publishing system and the lack of censorship, turned into negative aspects. Mario summarized this shared opinion in a few words:

"Indymedia born as an expression of free communication, not controlled and so on. And then, I don't know in other cities, but at least in Milan it became like the toilet wall. In the sense that everyone wrote an insult directed towards someone else and then had replies about the insult at stake. From this point of view, maybe some means are more mature than those who use them."

The point that Mario underlined was also recognized by those activists working at Indymedia Italy, which temporary closed on 2006 also due to problems in managing the newswire section of the website, where users posted insults or inappropriate messages (Indymedia Italy, 2006).

Internal quarrels within social movements' network are not a novelty and they could happen for many reasons: from the definition of the collective action frame, a mechanism that has been defined as frame disputes (Benford, 1993) to the concrete composition of the demonstration. Here, what happened was the partial reproduction of offline, internal social movements' tensions within the online environment, creating a high level of informational noise within a space originally intended to be a place where everyone could give its own contribution in order to overcome mainstream media biases about social movements and protest activities.

Another problem linked to the use of ICTs as a resource to organize the MP was the creation of new kind of inequalities among precarious workers. In fact, some of the interviewees considered ICTs in general and the Internet in particular, as the crucial tool that enabled the exponential growth of the parade. Here, the stress is on the strengths of a positive, viral communication through the web able to diffuse the MP call for action in many, different social movement families and to a vast number of precarious workers. On the contrary, some of the interviewees underlined that CMC could exclude some precarious workers, as Andrea[26] explained:

"It is clear that if you wanted to bring some workers employed in the local public administration to Mayday, you could not think to bring them because there was the Internet, because maybe they used Internet for work only, so you had to produce a leaflet."

These interview extracts suggest that activists did not renounce to use more

[26] Andrea was a radical trade unionist and a member of the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC). At the moment of the interview he was employed in the Provincia of Milan. The interview took place in Milan on 25 January 2007.

traditional kinds of radical media, as leaflets are, to promote the MP among certain categories of precarious workers who used the Internet, and thus CMC, as a tool to perform certain working activities. Moreover, also FTF interactions among precarious workers were considered important channels through which information about the MP could flow, as Giacomo[27] highlighted:

"In several firms Internet cannot be used. But those who give a look at the website or read email at home then could print these materials and bring them, let know them to colleagues. Therefore, from this point of view there is the multiplication of occasions, opportunities to reach workers."

Here, it is even clearer that activists frequently conceived the ICTs directly in connection with other channels of through which communication passed and thus organization was realized. In this particular case, a message that is circulated in the online environment, an article posted on a website or a text spread via email, could assume a more material form, a printed text, and then enter the offline realm of FTF interactions among precarious workers.

In other words, there seemed to be a twofold level of organization characterized by the use of two different means of communication. Among those activist groups that took part to the MP organization in a more direct way, the use of ICTs and CMC was not only accepted, but also considered extremely useful. Among those precarious workers who were possibly sympathetic with the collective action frame of the parade, but who were not directly involved in its organization, however, the use of more traditional radical media, like leaflets, diffused through FTF interaction was considered more effective than the use of CMC. Radical trade unionists emphasized the existence of this twofold level of organization and communication more openly than other interviewees did. This does not mean that other activist groups employ CMC alone to organize and promote the parade. On the contrary, the more or less regular occurrence of preparatory meetings and the creation of

posters and postcards were signals that the social movement network behind the MP expressed a complex combination of media practices that, at its organizational level, mixed in a variety of manners new and traditional media, the micro and the meso-level of communication. This also seemed to be the result of the coexistence, within the same social movement network, of various activist groups, each of them expressing a preference and, hence, developing more a particular communication performance in order to organize the MP.

4.2.   The transnational level

On the one hand, with regards to opportunities, the analysis revealed that also at the transnational level mailing lists served the important function both to prepare meetings and to continue work. Moreover, the website was used in order to spread a shared aesthetic language. Opportunities concerning the identification process seem to be bigger at the transnational level, for instance the net parade provided a symbolic space for identity construction.

On the other hand the use of ICTs seems to imply limits that are less evident at the national level. Activists did not emphasize, while speaking of the EMP, the presence of strong quarrels and conflicts within the transnational social movement network. In case of particular cases of frame disputes, like the one related to the recognition of Europe as a the reference political space where struggles against precarity should be rooted, only limited discussions went on in the Euromayday mailing list that did not create a real noise in the information flow. Rather, they contributed to enrich the internal debate of the transnational social movement network and hence the identification process beyond national borders.

This happened with the discussion about the possibility to organize a Mondo Mayday Parade in 2007.[28] In this regard, it is worth noting that the European level of struggles and hence the related collective identity were highly contested within the transnational

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[27] Giacomo was a radical trade unionist of the CUB. The interview took place in Milan on 26 January 2007.

[28] See the discussion in the Euromayday mailinglist in August 2006.

social movement network sustaining the EMP. On the one side, Europe was considered a common and fruitful space of struggle recognizing the European Union as a political institution to which protests and claims should be addressed. On the other side, some activist groups refused to consider the European space as a field of struggle and stress more their connections with the global justice movement as a whole.

Moreover, internal conflicts at the national level, like the one occurred in Italy in 2005, remained quite invisible at the transnational level both in the online and offline realm. In 2006, however, some Italian activist groups decided to join the EMP in Paris instead of the one in Milan. Among others, activists involved in Global Project participated to the French parade. As a result, the live radio broadcasting was no longer organized and the Global Project website focused on the EMP in Paris without mentioning the one in Milan, with about 100,000 participants. Therefore, internal conflicts at the national level had a rather significant impact on the transnational independent coverage of the protest campaign that imparted a partial representation of it. In sum, the use of ICTs at the transnational level seemed to be heavily dependent on what happened at the national level of activist groups involved in the EMP and this could turn into a weak point on the level of identification process for the entire transnational social movement network.

Another interesting aspect is, on the contrary, the risk of the EMP overrepresentation within the online realm. Guido explained this concept speaking about transnational level of the parade:

"In Europe, other Maydays were to some extent always little and marginal, but anyway ... the fact of doing a demonstration with the same keywords, with the same graphic style and with a network of little, homogeneous websites, to some extent amplified the thing."

In other words, the presence of quite advanced technical and communicative skills within the transnational social movement network, also due to the presence of activists employed in the information and communication sector, might contribute to depict the EMP as a protest campaign that

was managed and participated by a more rooted transnational social movement network than it actually was. To some extent, the extensive use of ICTs both in the organizational and identification process could have contributed to hide the lack of effective participation to the EMP at the transnational level. While in Italy, 100,000 people participated in the parade and a large number of activist groups contributed to its organization, the same was not true in other countries where the EMP occurred. This suggests taking into consideration the individual identity of activists involved in the protest campaign and their role within it. Among the Italian activist groups, the CW proved to have a rather developed knowledge related to ICTs and particular communicative skills. Indeed, many activists involved in it had or have been employed, mainly as precarious workers, in the information and communication sector. Therefore, they used the same knowledge employed within their workplaces also at the level of contentious political actions, such as the EMP. This was certainly a strong point, which could also open a reflection about new kinds of immaterial resources that particular kinds of precarious workers detain (Mattoni forthcoming). As Guido pointed out, however, the development and use of these immaterial skills related to ICTs could hide the actual weight that transnational social movement networks have in terms of participation and diffusion.

5. Conclusions

The article has analyzed the role of FTF interactions and CMC in two relevant protest activities that usually occurs in the backstage of social movement networks: the instrumental level of protest event organization and the symbolic level of collective identity construction. The article has taken into consideration these two aspects during both the national stage of the MP and the transnational stage of the EMP, hence comparing the use of FTF interactions and CMC within two different territorial contexts. By doing so, it has highlighted the way in which activists actually employed ICTs within a broader set of media practices and in relation to FTF interactions.

In sum, at both the transnational and national level of the protest campaign, ICTs played an important role with regards to the organizational process in which they intertwine, and not substitute, with FTF interactions. Therefore, the offline and online realms are important environments where organizing of the parade and where different kinds of media practices occur. In particular, the analysis has showed that activist groups first considered the need for a shift at the national and then transnational level of mobilization. To do this, they help themselves to achieve this goal using ICTs among other communication tools. Moreover, ICTs and among them the Internet infrastructure did not shape the organizational pattern of the protest campaign, which was, from the very beginning, characterized by a strong coordinated autonomy of activist groups involved in it, as exemplified by the relatively loose requirements in order to participate to the MP and the EMP.

Therefore, in this particular case, *both at the national and transnational level, ICTs strongly contributed to the organization of the protest campaign, though they do not predetermine an upward scale shift nor do it predetermine its organizational pattern*.

That is to say that the logic behind collective action is not changed by ICTs and, in particular, by the Internet infrastructure. Rather, choices made by activist groups – such as to connect national struggles in a country to those happening in another country or to maintain a loose coordination within the social movement network – may match some of the potentialities offered by the Internet. This result is in contrast with the findings of Lance W. Bennett, who underlines that the Internet can be subordinated to organizational patterns in established, institutional political actors, but that "the fluid network of global issue activism enables the Internet to become an organizational force shaping both the relations among organizations and, in some cases, the organizations themselves" (Bennett, 2004, p. 136). This difference in findings is probably due to the very organizational structure of the social movement network sustaining the EMP, which is conceived, from the very beginning, as an open and loosely coordinated network of activists' groups, individuals, and non institutional political actors. Therefore, the case study here is different from the organizations devoted to global activism like the ones considered by Lance W. Bennett. From this, it is possible to speculate that the Internet has a minimum short-term impact both on very rigid organizational patterns, like the ones of political parties, and on very loose organizational patterns, like the ones represented by the EMP. A similar finding is the one of Atton (2002) when dealing with alternative media managed by social movements that focus on direct actions. The author argues that "we see the alternative media of new social movements reflecting the organizational and social structures of the direct-action movement they document" (Atton, 2002, p. 102). Obviously, this hypothesis deserves further empirical research, especially in relation to the recent development of social web applications.

With regards to the symbolic level of the collective identification process, ICTs act in a different way at the national and transnational level.

More precisely, *at the national level of the protest campaign, ICTs play a marginal role with regards to the identification process in which FTF interactions at the meso-level of activist groups and at the micro-level of activists seem to play a more crucial role*. On the contrary, *at the transnational level of the protest campaign, ICTs play a crucial role with regards to the identification process in which they intertwine with FTF interactions, that are less present than at the national level due to lack of material resources*.

Here, the extensive use of ICTs in a varied range of media practices, from the establishment of a common website to the sharing of videos on the protest campaign, may have another meaning that goes beyond the mere lack of material resources. The lack of proximity among activist groups from various European countries, in fact, does not only imply that they are separated by physical distances. Rather, there are also political, cultural, social and economic distances that characterize the daily live of activist groups in their own countries. As a result, the meaning of the precarity and its condition becomes

multifaceted. While at the Italian national level activist groups start from common external conditions, such as the same legislative interventions and the same welfare state system, this is not true at the transnational level of the protest campaign. In the EMP, activist groups partially overcame this lack of proximity, understood in its broader and inclusive sense, by referring to the common belonging to the global justice movement. However, this did not seem to be enough and then all the potentialities offered by ICTs were extensively exploited in order to create a dense exchange of narratives, meanings and interpretations about the precarity condition. This constituted the necessary common ground upon which the social movement network that sustained the EMP was constructed and maintained over the years. At the same time, this was also the way in which proximity in its broad sense was also reached before and beyond proximity in its stricter sense, that is at the physical level.

Finally, it has been possible to observe that ICTs, and among them especially the Internet, constitute a challenge for social movements. As Mosca also underlines with regards to internal communication in social movement networks, the Internet may also create new "power inequalities" (2007, p. 19) that in turn lead to new forms of exclusions as noted above. This article offers further insights with regards to ICTs as challenges to face, since it compares their use at different geographical, territorial levels (national and transnational) and for different purposes related to

mobilizing structures (instrumental and symbolic). As a result, the following tentative conclusion can be drawn from the data analysis:

The Internet might constitute challenges that are different at the national level, where they affect more the organizational process of the protest campaign, and at the transnational level, where they affect more the identification process of the protest campaign.

These results are certainly linked to the EMP case study. Activist groups involved in the protest campaign stressed, however, the fact that they were part of the broader 'global justice movement' and actually they participated in many protest events which were linked to them. This refers to both single activist groups, such as in the ESFs or in the anti-WTO, G8 and EU summits demonstrations, and as transnational social movement network, in the last anti-G8 summit demonstrations in Heiligendamm, Germany, in 2007. Therefore, though these results could not be generalized as such, they might be the basis for a set of hypotheses that could be further explored. This could be done by taking into consideration other national and transnational social movement networked campaigns, acting in the context of the global justice movement, and by possibly looking at both the national and transnational level of the same protest campaign.

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