How Can Activism Make Change Happen?

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INTRODUCTION
Does civil society contestation and mobilization make a difference in terms of policy and institutional reform? What constellation of tactics and conditions is conducive to progressive changes in policy? This concluding chapter distils the main findings from the studies presented throughout the volume in terms of characteristics of mobilizations and political contexts, variations in demands, proposals and tactics, as well as policy and discursive impacts.

The analysis identifies key elements related to the global nature of the issues of contention, the institutional and historical context, power relations and political opportunities, as well as ‘internal’ dimensions of activist organization and networks, including issue framing and identities, access to resources, representation, legitimacy and alliance building. These factors shaped the way demands for policy change were formulated, and thus the possibilities for success in affecting government decisions and the implementation of policies.

First, we summarize the main policy changes actually achieved by the mobilizations investigated in the preceding chapters. Second, we propose a synthetic overview of how activism can make change happen, identifying the key factors affecting outcomes and the main lessons emerging from this book. Third, a more detailed discussion of policy contexts and issues of contention is provided, with a comparative perspective across issue area, type of mobilization and country. Particular attention is given to a comparison of the cases of France and the United Kingdom in view of their differences in policy regimes and state-business-society relations. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the implications of the findings for activism in the contemporary context of global crises.

THE ACTIVISM-POLICY BALANCE SHEET
Building on the definition of the effects of activism provided in the Introduction to this volume, the findings provide evidence of different impacts of global justice activism – at the national level as well as in their cross-border activities – in relation to:

a) the framing of issues, including the public understanding of global challenges;

b) the building of consensus, with the support of public opinion, as well as public participation in mobilizations and trust in activist agendas;

c) the legitimation and recognition of activists’ role in such global issues; institutionalizing social dialogue with governments, international organizations and corporations; and other forms of participation in policy processes;

d) specific policy changes, obtained in the life span of mobilizations, leading to government actions that were coherent with activist demands;

e) longer term influences on policy making, including the setting of the policy agendas to be addressed by governments and decision makers.
In this book we have mainly focused on the fourth type of outcome – the introduction of specific policy changes. The results of case studies point out four main types of policy and institutional reform or responses from governments and corporations:

- **The introduction of new legislation** inspired by activist demands, as in the cases of the introduction of the International Airline Ticket Tax initiated by the French government, of company reporting in the UK and of debt cancellation in Italy;
- **The stopping of policies** opposed by activists, as in the case of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) and of the failure of the trade liberalization agenda at the Cancun WTO summit, slowing the pace of neoliberal reform;
- **Increased financing for development**, as in the case of re-commitment (namely at the Gleneagles G8 summit) of governments to the 0.7 per cent target for Official Development Aid as a percentage of GDP (although with frequent failures to deliver on such commitments¹), as well as with funds coming from multinational corporations associated with corporate social responsibility (CSR) and public-private partnerships (PPPs);
- **Introduction of ethical considerations in the criteria for government policy**, particularly in the fields of trade and investment; cases include the withdrawal of support by the UK Export Credit Guarantee Agency as a response to the Sakhalin Island Project and increasing commitment of the UK government to promoting corporate social responsibility. Other well known cases (not examined in this book) include initiatives to protect children’s and labour rights in countries trading with Europe.

Conversely, in several cases no policy change emerged as a result of activism, as in most trade and international taxation mobilizations in Europe. Different reasons for failure have been identified.

First, failure may result from a lack of legitimation of activists. This emerges when justice issues are framed and campaigns organized by NGOs with limited representation and ineffective participation of subaltern groups that are victims of injustice. Northern NGOs have sometimes been accused of replicating the inadequacies of ‘top-down’ approaches typical of international institutions (Bendell 2006). Second, lack of success may be due to inappropriate strategies and inadequate resources, leading to activists’ inability to ‘stick with it’ and achieve broad-based acceptance of their agendas (Smith 2007).

Third, while demands and proposals have often been initially developed as strong alternatives to existing policies, institutions and processes—ones that recognize the need for structural change—the positions eventually adopted by activists have frequently been watered down in the course of policy processes (such as from debt cancellation to debt reduction). Watering down is to be expected and can be part of a negotiated compromise that yields intended results. But it becomes more problematic when results are not achieved, and where

¹ For an assessment of compliance with commitments made by governments at Gleneagles, see Oxfam 2010.
dilution is associated with co-optation or giving up on structural change (Bebbington et al. 2008).

**HOW CAN ACTIVISM MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN? LESSONS FROM THE EVIDENCE**

The evidence of this book leads to five main results on the dynamics of activism on global issues in Europe and its impact on policies.

1. **Global issues matter for national activism**

Debt relief, trade policy, international taxation and corporate accountability—the fields of activism investigated in this book—are typical issues of contention associated to the global economy and development. A multi-level governance system exists, with decision making power distributed in supra-national organizations such as the WTO and the IMF, regional bodies such as the European Union, national governments, and major business organizations, such as multinational corporations. National activism on such issues has emerged in parallel to the rise of cross-country links among mobilizations, resulting in common framing of issues and, sometimes, in common objectives, strategies and forms of action. The mobilizations examined in this book have been influenced by the presence of transnational networks such as *Jubilee 2000* on debt, *Our World is Not for Sale* on trade, by links among national chapters of Attac on international taxation, and by transnational experiences on corporate accountability. Activism in European countries has received from such cross-border links an impulse to develop national campaigns, but the ways the latter have evolved and defined their demands for policy change have much to do with national contexts.

2. **National political cultures and policy regimes matter, and differ across countries**

Country case studies emphasize the specificities of each mobilization, their roots in national political cultures, their adaptation to a particular policy regime—aspects pointed out, among others by Giugni, Bandler and Eggert (2006). Common building blocs in terms of issue framing—such as the injustice of Third World debt—and broad objectives—i.e. the need for debt relief—have been turned into in different national strategies—including calls for debt cancellation; for reduction and rescheduling; and proposals of debt buy-back by civil society. This diversity across national mobilizations is the result of the long term persistence of political identities, of the political opportunities and civic domains (Fowler and Biekart 2011) that existed and of the resources—political, organizational and financial—available for activists.

One evident result is the distinction between more ‘radical’ and more ‘moderate’ campaigns, with French and Italian mobilizations often taking a more radical political stance, and UK campaigns showing a closer interaction with government policy making and business interests. Interestingly enough, it appears that more ‘moderate’ demands are not necessarily more successful in achieving policy change.
Another major distinction concerns the focus of activism. Mobilizations directed at political authority and changes in government policies were present in all countries. Efforts to change business behaviour were most evident in the UK. Experiences of self-organization of civil society, such as with fair trade groups linked to trade justice campaigns, were more common in Italy.

3. Activism for policy change is shaped by political opportunities, network links and strategies

In the cases examined in this book, specific demands for policy change emerge from the strategies of national mobilizations as a result of particular contingencies. The factors influencing such outcomes can be grouped into those ‘external’ to mobilizations, shaping political opportunities at the national and the transnational level; and those ‘internal’ to mobilizations, including the robustness of transnational networks supporting national activism; the strength of the national coalitions that are created; the effectiveness of political strategies and forms of action carried out by activists.

Important political opportunities that opened up at the national level include:

- long standing characteristics of national politics—for example, the contrasting attitudes on trade of French and UK states;
- the presence in power of a ‘progressive’ national governments, open to policy changes on global issues—for example, the interest of New Labour in the UK for a new development policy, and the opening on debt relief by the Italian centre-left government;
- the degree of access to policy makers—for example, the close links between development NGOs, politicians and ministry officials in the UK; and
- the presence of élite business interests amenable to reform, as in the case of some corporate accountability initiatives in the UK.

Political opportunities at the transnational level were relevant when multilevel decision making systems existed on specific cross-border issues. They included:

- the launch by inter-governmental organizations of policies that responded, even if inadequately, to activist demands, encouraging governments to take action. Examples included the IMF debt relief programme on Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC), or the attention of some European institutions to proposals for a Tobin Tax;
- the possibility for activists to build tactical alliances on particular issues with like-minded governments in order to obtain policy change in supranational institutions. Examples include the veto posed by the French government in the case of the OECD talks on the MAI, and, the opposition to the trade liberalization agenda by a group of countries of the South at the WTO conference in Cancun;
- the presence of particular global events, attracting the attention of politicians and international public opinion, such as the G7/G8 summits or the Catholic Jubilee in the year 2000.

The main factors ‘internal’ to mobilizations include international networking and national strategies. The presence of international campaigns on the issues of
debt, trade, international taxation and corporate accountability—such as Jubilee 2000 on debt—has provided national activism with important support and resources in terms of issue-framing, understanding of highly complex and technical issues, and the possibility to articulate policy demands in national contexts. Transnational networks contesting a particular global issue were able to open up an international debate, building shared frames (such as the view of debt, trade liberalization and corporate behaviour as unjust for Third World countries). A strong network could lead to an intense international discussion among activists, building stronger and more common identities, leading to a common policy platform, especially when decision making power was mainly located at the supranational level. Typical in this regard is the case of trade and the experience of *Our World is Not for Sale*. Weaker international networks on debt and international taxation were capable of framing the issues, but not of developing common policy demands that were shaped by national factors. At the other extreme, the weak international links of corporate accountability campaigns correspond to a more fragmented pattern of national activism. Similar findings are reported also in the comparison of 24 transnational campaigns by della Porta et al. (2010).

Conversely, at the national level, demands for policy change emerge as the result of national organizations or coalitions developing particular political strategies, leading to various forms of action. Domestic contexts are crucial for the possibility to build broad-based mobilizations. Activist strategies have to devise actions that reinforce identities and the urgency of the issue, building at the same time alliances with various actors, so that mobilizations can be sustained over time. The policy changes that are demanded need to resonate with public opinion and engage political forces and decision makers; actions are also needed to build their credibility and feasibility. The need to address such different objectives explains the wide range of actions—at the international, national and local level—that were carried out in the mobilizations examined in this book, including street demonstrations and other protest actions, ‘parallel summits’ and alternative fora for presenting policy alternatives, media events, participation in consultative processes, lobbying of policy makers, and so forth.

In sum, the ability of activism to advance demands for policy change appears to be shaped by the complex combination of external opportunities and internal capabilities, at both the international and national levels. Within these patterns, there may also be scope for the ‘boomerang effect’ (Keck and Sikkink 1998) whereby national mobilizations link up with transnational networks in order to obtain greater legitimacy and strength in national contestation.

4. Change includes short term success and long term influence on policy framing; change happens when strong, feasible demands find a political space and are supported by multiple actions at multiple levels.

What, then, is the recipe for success of activism? First we need to identify more clearly what success is. The literature on the effects of social movements has pointed out that they may have a broad range of outcomes – on state actions (including repression), political cultures, business practices, civil society, social behaviors, and public opinion (see della Porta et al. 2010; Giugni, McAdam and
Tilly 1999 ). In terms of policy change—as pointed out in the previous section—our case studies show that two types of outcomes can be identified. First, success in the ‘short term’, that is, within the life span of a mobilization, with the introduction of a specific change in policy, such as legislation on debt relief, or bringing a halt to a business practice demanded by corporate accountability campaigners. Second, mobilizations can influence policies in the longer term—even after they subsided—when the issue framing and policy proposals developed by activists becomes accepted by policy makers, political forces, business groups and communities of experts. The chapters of this book largely focused on the former effects; the latter require a longer historical perspective and the impact of mobilizations may be combined with a variety of other developments. Nevertheless, on the global issues of debt relief, trade policy, international taxation and corporate accountability we can find evidence of both types of effects. Short term change did take place in a number of issues areas, with legislation on debt relief in Italy, new financing for development in France and the UK, and increased attention to corporate responsibility in the UK. Longer term change is still taking place with the rethinking of the trade liberalization agenda, growing support for a financial transaction tax, and the evolution of business practices and international standards associated with corporate accountability.

In relation to policy changes achieved in the short term, what are the factors that led to the successes reported in the mobilizations we examined? On the basis of those considered in point (3) above, it appears that policy change on a given issue is more likely to happen when:

- the issue at stake is framed as an important, urgent and feasible challenge, with a global relevance that resonates in national political cultures and public opinion, leading to a sustained mobilization;
- political opportunities open up at both the international and national levels, with access to interested policy makers; when a strong transnational mobilization closely interacts with national activists;
- a broad coalition exists, with wide public opinion support and alliances with relevant institutional actors; when a variety of forms of action—protest, proposal of alternatives, lobbying, etc.—are used to advance all the above elements; and
- the interaction of activists with policy makers, ministry officials and the community of experts facilitates the implementation of policy reforms.

Interestingly enough, it does not appear that more ‘moderate’ demands and greater access to policy makers necessarily leads to higher probability of policy change, as the UK experience shows.

5. When policy changes are introduced, their outcomes and implementation often fall short of activist demands

Disappointment is a frequent experience for activists, even after success is achieved. The cases examined in this book point out a systematic gap between the ‘political’ success of the announcement of a particular policy change, and the outcomes that emerge from the actual implementation of novel policies. The
diversity of effects at different points in the policy process has long been pointed out by the literature on the impacts of social movements (see Schumaker 1975). Several factors are important here.

First, the dynamics of negotiation typically involve a moderation of initial demands, as in the shift from requests for debt cancellation, to accepting measures of debt reduction. Second, national policy making on global issues is much less established and organized than government action on traditional, typically domestic issues. State institutions may have limited competences and resources for actual implementation, may need to go through learning processes, may operate in uncharted territory, and effective outcomes may fall short of expectations. Third, possibilities for policy reversals are high, when national governments (or key officials and experts) change, when international or business contexts become less favorable, when urgent domestic priorities may subtract resources from action on global issues. This happened with the implementation of debt relief legislation in Italy and the failure to follow through on a commitment to substantially increase development aid. Fourth, such ‘watered down’ results are partly a ‘physiological’ outcome of institutional action, associated with the structural gap between the issue-centered approach to policy advocated by activists and the process-based activities of policy makers and officials in state bureaucracies. This suggests that, in order to achieve effective change, activists need to continue their efforts even after the announcement of a change in policy, with close monitoring and lobbying for appropriate implementation of new actions. Fifth, business and political elites are ‘hegemonic’ in the Gramscian sense, and often accommodate elements of ‘radical’ agendas through discursive shifts and the piecemeal uptake of reforms, thereby controlling the process of reform on terms which do not pose a fundamental challenge to their interests and worldview.

6. Cycles of mobilization on particular issues are part of an evolving and sustained global justice activism

Case studies in this book have shown clear cycles of mobilizations on particular global issues, ending with different degrees of success. However, they also showed the strong persistence of political cultures and organizational links—at the national level as well as in increasing cross-border relationships—that connect one mobilization to another. Mobilizations for decolonization and anti-imperialism in the 1970s, for example, paved the way for the subsequent focus on development issues in the 1980s, laying the foundations for understanding the challenge of Third World debt and trade injustice in the 1990s and 2000s.

Connections are visible not only over time, but also across issues. In fact, a major novelty of activism in the new millennium has been the rise of global movements—using transnational networks as ‘backbones’ (see Chapter 4)—supporting different waves of mobilization on specific themes, and making links across different issues. As shown by a large literature (della Porta 2007; Pianta 2001a, b) and by the decade-old experience of World Social Forums, global justice movements developed a common strategy of resistance to neoliberal globalization, and a vision of globalization from below, driven by cross-border
civil society actions for economic justice, human and social rights, democracy and participation.

Set in this context, the case studies of this book can be seen as particular waves of activism that are part of an evolving and sustained global justice mobilization. The issues addressed—debt, trade, international taxation, corporate accountability—are all permanent themes of such long-term, cross-border activism. On most of them, the wave of neoliberal policies promoted by the ‘Washington consensus’ and the several EU governments, appears to be subsiding. Third World debt is now less dramatic and the role of the IMF and rich countries as lenders has diminished. The drive to liberalize trade has lost some momentum, with the WTO unable to complete its ‘Development Round’. The need for international taxation—as with the financial transaction tax, heir to the Tobin tax—is increasingly accepted by the IMF and the EU. And initiatives associated with corporate accountability are more widespread.

Some major developments in economics and politics, such as the financial crash of 2008, the rising economic power of China, India, Brazil and other emerging countries, and the Obama administration in the US, have clearly shaped the new policy landscape. But such changes can also be considered signs of the ability of mobilizations to influence policies in the longer term, even after the end of protest cycles. The framing of several global issues and some policy proposals developed by activists have become increasingly accepted by policy makers, political forces, corporations and communities of experts. Mobilizations for economic justice have anticipated a much wider understanding of the importance of global challenges and charted some of the paths to address them. Moving from the general findings summarized above, we now turn to national specificities and differences in policy regimes.

COMPARING POLICY REGIMES AND ISSUES OF MOBILIZATION

Policy regimes represent arenas of opportunity as well as constraints. The institutional context of policy regimes has long been recognized as a filter or mediator of activism, affecting the choice of strategies and capacity to bring about change (Hooghe 2008). While the notion of transnationality and the universal nature of activist claims suggest a disengagement of justice activism from (national) policy regimes, the findings presented in previous chapters support the ongoing relevance of national contexts (Giugni, Bandler and Eggert 2006). This was seen clearly in relation to the issue of path dependence presented in Chapter 2, which partly originates from traditional relationships and functions associated with the state, business and civil society. Context related to the wider political culture is also key. Chapters dealing with movements and networks in France highlighted the extent to which certain positions and causes of French activist groups and organizations resonated with public opinion and ‘French’ anti-/alter-globalization sentiments and protest traditions. Survey data for 2003² presented in Tables 13.1, 13.2 and 13.3 show the somewhat more

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favorable public perspectives on global justice activism in France as compared to the United Kingdom and Italy.

Insert Tables 13.1, 13.2, 13.3 (Public Opinions on Global Justice Activism)

As outlined in Chapter 1, within activist networks and movements power relations are complex and fluid, with élites and other interests simultaneously positioning and repositioning to gain or regain influence and control through diverse means and forums. Furthermore, political opportunity structures and activists’ mobilizations are in a state of considerable flux, in contexts where the nature of governance has changed significantly in recent decades. The power and influence of activists must be seen not as a static unit or force of political power but relative, vis-à-vis other civil society actors and epistemic communities engaged in advocacy and lobbying, and elite interests exercising power and influence.

Yet, the studies of this volume demonstrate that it would be too simplistic to view the manifold experiences of activism as being determined by either particular political regimes or corresponding activist traditions and forms of mobilizations alone. On the one hand, it is demonstrated—for example by the mobilizations targeting the WTO summits in Cancun and Doha (Chapter 5)—that justice activism can successfully open up political opportunities through scale-shift, through which activists can capitalize via strategic alliances and other means, when their capabilities to explore and shape these opportunities and constraints define the very capacity to exert effective agency. On the other hand, equally strong concerns have been raised about the ‘internal’ difficulties that activists face in overcoming tradition-bound and new obstacles, engaging effectively in policy processes; and reflecting critically on issues of élite domination, inequality and conflicting interests and agendas. The cases presented in the preceding chapters show that such capabilities and the strategies activists employ differ considerably across mobilizations. They may involve specific campaigns as well as broader-based alliances and networks, and display different degrees of organization, resourcefulness, durability, representativeness, strategic-orientation, amongst other factors, which all play a role in contributing to the success or failure of the collective actions.

The findings demonstrate the complexity of interactions at the policy-activism interface. Such interactions cannot be understood solely with reference to the political opportunities and constraints that activists encounter, or to the actions, agendas, and capacities of activists to explore them. At issue is how specific initiatives interact with other actors and institutions under different social models, policy regimes and activist traditions. The cross-case analysis conducted for this concluding chapter provides insights into these interactions that shape the activist-policy nexus.

Justice-related discourse and policy are closely intertwined with ‘global’ paradigms and historical, often colonially-imprinted, legacies and institutional trajectories. Such contexts result in certain configurations of power and other relationships among the state, business and activists that yield different degrees of leeway for activist agendas. A comparative analysis of the experience of
activism in France, the UK and Italy reveals the variety of traditions and power configurations that characterize policy contexts and activist strategies. Differences in activist experiences and the activist-policy nexus across countries emerged clearly in the two contrasting cases of France and the UK, with regard to the four issue areas of debt, trade, international taxation and corporate accountability.

Debt

Policies and concrete governmental and inter-governmental action to reduce the debt burden of heavily-indebted poor countries took hold after the turn of the millennium. In the case of France and the UK, there was a marked increase in debt relief from around 2003 (see Figure 13.1). In the UK, the issue of debt (re-)gained popularity in the 1990s under Labour and the leadership of both Tony Blair and, particularly, Gordon Brown who strongly supported the Make Poverty History (MPH) campaign (Brown 2010).

Insert Figure 13.1: Debt Relief: UK and France (1985-2010)

Unlike the Jubilee 2000 coalition, however, which had succeeded in putting debt relief on the British government’s agenda, the net impact of its successor, the MPH campaign, was less clear. Despite the strong public attention and support of the British government that MPH generated, Chapter 6 describes how—over the years and stages of the policy process associated with the debt issue (see Figure 13.1)—the approach to debt relief was considerably diluted. Initial demands that had centered on immediate and full cancelation of unpayable and unjust debt eventually gave way to debt relief as part of a wider approach to poverty reduction. Chapter 7 in contrast, describes how in France, the comparably more radical demands for total debt cancellation by Plate-forme Dette et Développement (the successor initiative of the French branch of Jubilee 2000, ‘Ça suffit comme ça’) resonated with the ‘alter-globalization’ sentiment of the French public and other left-wing organizations (see Table 13.4). Both initiatives however, were deemed to be ‘too radical’ by many government officials, since they explicitly make a connection between contemporary North-South inequalities and the French colonial heritage, which was reflected in the slogan ‘Debt, apartheid, colonies, enough!’. Ultimately, the Platform failed to mobilize French public and governmental support to an extent that was sufficient to produce the change in policy that would have matched their demands.

Insert Table 13.4: Key activists demands on debt

Moreover both, the British and the French movements failed in successfully linking their efforts. The French ‘2005: plus d’excuses!’ campaign distanced itself from the UK agenda, with French activists insisting on their demands for total debt cancellation, the inclusion of a reference to historical domination and the creation of a body of international law, which would oversee the paying back of existing loans and all future debt-related multilateral and bilateral negotiations (see Table 13.4). Unlike Italy, where activists succeeded in pushing for a debt cancellation law (Chapter 8), in France and the UK, activist demands related to debt were not translated into binding policies. Instead, the concrete initiatives of
the French and UK governments—related to an international airline tax to finance development and increased levels of ODA, respectively—have been driven to a considerable extent by the governments themselves and international real-politik. Consequently, the message conveyed by both governments, was more one of charity rather than justice, with the powerful leaders of the world seen to be helping the unfortunate rather than correcting their own countries’ involvement in global trade and financial injustice.

Trade Policy

Different trade justice agendas have been pursued by French and British activists, each largely in line with those of their governments (Chapters 5, 7 and 8). The demands and positions of certain French government institutions and activists converged along protectionist and anti-liberal lines, with a substantial agreement that trade policies lacked responsiveness to the issue of policy space for developing countries to protect and regulate their domestic— in particular agricultural—markets. Apart from divergent policy goals related to Non-agricultural Market Access (NOMA), the position of British activists, represented, for example, by the British branch of the Trade Justice Movement (TJM), War on Want, Action Aid International, Oxfam International, the World Development Movement and Christian Aid, bears significant similarities with the position of the British government, calling for the end of (agricultural) subsidies and more policy space for developing countries.

Despite convergence around national agendas, key differences emerge with regard to degrees and types of interaction among different actors and in relation to policy impacts. In France, NGO agricultural specialists carried significant weight in consultative processes and there was a high level of permeability between NGOs and government personnel in French trade policy making. Despite a similar degree of access to policy makers enjoyed by British activists, Chapter 6 points to scant evidence that the government produced policy that took into account activists’ demands, when they diverged from the government’s own stance. Apart from the ‘Aid for Trade’ initiative, no other aspect of British activists’ trade policy agenda was incorporated in the government’s G8 Gleneagles brief.

The agreements reached by governments and activists in each country had varying impacts on trade policy transnationally. Chapter 5 explains how, through strategic alliances and significant prior agenda building, activists were instrumental in temporarily derailing the conventional WTO trade liberalization agenda. At the Cancun conference there emerged a new assertiveness on the part of developing countries, manifested in the prominent role taken by the ‘Group of 90’ in collaboration with activists. At the following ministerial conferences in Hong Kong and Geneva, however, the unity of the South collapsed and Southern delegations went into negotiations of ‘individual deals’ with Northern countries, partly reflecting broader geo-political shifts associated with the rise of the BRICS

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3 Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
While activists and national governments in France and the UK could find much common ground, these national agendas found little echo at the EU level, where authority for trade negotiation was centered (DG Trade). Before the G8 summit in Gleneagles in 2005, the UK asked to shift the agenda from negotiations on competition and investment to a transition period for tariff cuts, safeguards and alternatives to trade ‘reciprocity’. The Committee of the French Parliament to the EU published an equally critical report on EU-ACP trade policy agreements in 2006. While activists in both countries embraced these reports to the EU, political opportunities were missed, when activists, like their governments, failed in conciliating their agendas in a way that would have facilitated stronger joint action at the EU level. One can assume that by harmonizing and jointly targeting the EU, influence would have been stronger. The Director General for Trade acknowledged that ‘celebrities and NGOs’ had caused the EC to change its view on trade with the ACP. In the face of persistent disagreement on the issue of agriculture, however, this ‘change’ did not result in any substantial modification of policy.

**International taxation**

Quite different activist positions on the issue of international taxation emerged in France and the UK. Chapter 12 outlines how in France, the majority of members of the ‘Action for a Tobin Tax to Assist the Citizen’ (Attac), which included trade unions, alternative media, ‘sans’ movements and feminist groups, took on the issue of finding alternatives to neoliberalism, by initially emphasizing the ‘regulative’ aspect of global taxation (see Table 13.4). Until 2001 the international and national policy contexts were favorable to this ‘regulative’ notion of the Tobin Tax proposal. In the following years greater attention was focused on using international taxation for funding development. Moreover, domestic developments and stagnating membership, led Attac to shift its attention to issues ‘closer to home’, such as employment, defense of public services and gender equality.

In the UK, networks of development NGOs, were the main drivers behind international tax reform initiatives. British activists were primarily concerned with questions about financing for development (see Table 13.5). As such, Chapter 11 posits that the UK campaign fell within the ‘moderate’ spectrum of activist proposals for international taxation. In a number of policy briefs, British activists, notably War on Want, funded experts to produce detailed studies of how revenues could be leveraged for development and to fight poverty. The generation of these proposals, however, proceeded in conformity with official agendas, producing ideas that would be acceptable to both the New Labor government’s position and the transnational business community. Such moderation may partially be explained by the strongly finance-oriented British economy and a set of legal constraints on the political activities of charities, which constrained the possibility of crafting a more encompassing agenda for

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4 The African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
5 In particular from the debate about the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and the the ACP countries.
the regulation of financial globalization. In contrast, in France a wide public debate framed around the threat of globalization favored a convergence between Attac, mainstream politics and public opinion over the need to regulate global markets. Eventually, the positions of activists in both countries however, converged around an agenda of ‘innovative sources of financing for development’, which sidestepped the question of regulation. This position closely resembled that of the more moderate British view, rather than the initially more radical French position.

*Insert Table 13.5 Evolution of key activists’ demands on international taxation*

**Corporate Accountability**

In Chapter 2, account is given of the development of British and French state-market relations from colonial times. In France, close ties between the state and French corporations persisted long after decolonization, being anchored in a system of cooperation in dealings with the former colonies, and characterized by tolerance of malpractice of French firms abroad, particularly in the oil industry. This analysis shows the limits of corporate accountability in France that result from such an institutionalist setting, key features of which were central government *dirigisme* and comparably low levels of involvement of French civil society. This was due to a long history of corporatist dialogue and public expectations and demands for social well-being directed at public authorities rather than at private firms.

In contrast, in the UK contemporary corporate social responsibility is rooted in a contractualist model of the firm and closer interaction with civil society actors. The UK case, analyzed in Chapter 6, demonstrates how corporate accountability initiatives manifested themselves largely through voluntarism and self-regulation, influenced by a tradition of campaigning and ‘naming and shaming’ by activists that served as means to exert pressure on firms. Activist-policy interactions related to corporate accountability mainly involve well-supported NGOs, in collaboration with certain government agencies such as DFID, and involve ‘private regulation’ and partnerships between business and civil society. The UK activist networks referred to in Chapters 3 and 6—the Corporate Responsibility (CORE) Coalition, the Sakhalin Island Network (SIN), and the Publish What You Pay (PWYP) campaign) thus adopted a legalistic approach to activism, targeting the legislative process and British commitments under international agreements, alongside the use of legislation associated with redress that was already in place.

Chapters 3 and 6 point out that British activism has been criticized for being dominated by a few large NGOs and for being too narrowly focused on particular issues and campaigns, rather than developing comprehensive alternative proposals to the neoliberal paradigm. In fact, compared to French activists, some British NGOs are more broadly involved in policy processes and enjoy stronger financial support from the government and (some) businesses. Hence, while the British collaborative governance approach seems to facilitate activist participation in mainstream consultative and policy processes, at the same time this approach causes rifts within the activist community. Chapter 6
demonstrates how British NGOs with very close relationships to policy-makers and business are hesitant to embrace more radical agendas because they fear that they might alienate their more conservative supporter base and jeopardize their ‘insider’ status and reputation with policy makers and business allies. These relations thus often turn out to be ‘too close for comfort’ and detached from grass-root agendas.

This approach contrasts with that in France where tactics of targeting individual firms, or collaborative engagement of NGOs and firms, are still comparably rare. A strong presence of trade unions instead is a hallmark of the French activist tradition, as evidenced in the number of so-called international framework agreements signed by global union federations and French transnational corporations. The state remains the main target of collaboration between French NGOs and trade unions to push for more socially responsible business practice, for example, through the development of standards related to financial responsibility. Given the association of France with the so-called stakeholder model of capitalism, one might expect French corporations to be more proactive in relation to corporate accountability. Yet, there seems to be a double standard, whereby French firms at home need to comply with binding law that is advanced through legislation, while abroad, French corporations continue to benefit from near immunity (Capron 2009).

From these different institutional trajectories and modes of interaction between different actors related to funding and the policy process, it is possible to identify schematically distinct configurations of state-business and civil society relationships and corresponding policy regimes (see Figure 13.2). Such configurations point to i) quite different levels of interaction and convergence of agendas between civil society and business (relatively weak in France; stronger in the UK); ii) activism that targets the state in France, and ‘collaborates’ with the state in the UK; iii) activism that targets and engages business in the UK, while far less so in France; iv) and in relation to state-business relations, a more dirigiste French state.

Insert Figure 13.2: State-Business-Civil Society Relations in France and the UK

COMPARING STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

The ability to mobilize effectively on issues of contestation depends on the capacities of activists to overcome limitations deriving from differences in traditions and policy regimes, and to exert agency. This requires that conflicting interests and agendas among activists themselves be addressed. National and transnational networks and alliances between a broad range of diverse activist groups are a key mechanism to pool and generate resources and effectively employ them in the policy process. Recognizing and adequately addressing ‘internal’ impediments in the organization of collective action is particularly relevant for justice activists who denounce the democratic deficit in decision-making in institutionalized policy processes and stress the need for their radical reform.

Resources for action
From various cases it is clear that the pooling of resources is one of the key motivations for activists to collaborate. Benefits were obtained from the exchange of resources between diverse groups, ranging from material ones, such as the financing of campaigns, to symbolic resources, such as legitimacy, information, member support, and contacts with the media and policy actors. In addition, joint action served as a basis for the (co-) creation of new ‘collective’ resources, e.g. new approaches to and proposals for change\(^7\). In Chapter 5, Silva identifies such processes of knowledge creation and the emergence of a densely connected ‘epistemic community’ as one of the main reasons for ‘success’ in Cancun. In contrast, in Chapter 6, Bendell and Ellersiek identify resource pooling and exchange, (in particular of material for campaigns), as the primary mode of resource management with much less attention given to processes of co-creation of alternative agendas. When some network members did think outside of their ‘institutional box’, this was largely the result of ‘learning-by-doing’. This proved to be a challenge especially for the established groups, who had to leave ‘their comfort zone in the NGO community’\(^8\). The limits of this approach are particularly evident with regard to the highly complex issue area of trade policy (Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8). Here, the development of alternatives requires knowledge and competencies that go far beyond what can be brought to the network by any individual group alone. And activists need to delve into and jointly develop comprehensive proposals for change to resist the tendency to readily identify with existing ideas\(^9\). In summary, two limitations to such processes of resource creation and mobilization became apparent. The first concerns the limited capacities and willingness of groups to allocate adequate levels of resources, when those groups felt caught between two stools: their own individual organizational needs and the resource demand of the network. This occurred even in networks with well-resourced members. The second limitation relates to resource scarcity. This prevented the networks from implementing and sustaining an effective coordination mechanism (board structures, learning and evaluation tools, etc.). This is important for creating the structural preconditions that enable processes of resource co-creation and for preventing unilateral actions by some organizations to dominate the networks’ agenda and action (Chapters 3, 6 and 8).

**The representative function of activism**

One of the key resources of justice activism, its discursive legitimacy, builds upon the legitimate representation of the interests of others, who are not directly involved in the policy processes (Biekart 2008) but are disadvantaged by aspects of neo-liberal globalization which they cannot control. Such aspects include, for example, inequitable terms of aid and trade, the burdens of debt and economic malpractices by corporations. Regardless of whether mobilizations target supranational powers or national policy making related to ‘global’ issues, activists claim to represent not only their direct supporters but also millions of people.

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\(^7\) See also Bazán et al. 2008; Sikkink 2005.

\(^8\) This and the following quotes are taken from the interviews conducted for the case studies.

\(^9\) See also Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin 2008.
without a ‘voice’. The British Make Poverty History coalition, for example, discussed in Chapters 1 and 6, not only brought together over 500 groups and organizations, but more generally spoke on behalf of ‘the world’s poor’. Laying claim to a representational function, however, presents major challenges for activists. With the exception of some unions, none of the groups or networks has a wide membership base. In such contexts, NGOs are vulnerable to criticism about promoting their own self-interest, rather than those of the victims of injustice. A concern raised in the analysis of the ‘success of Cancun’ in Chapter 5, for example, was the instrumentalization of Southern government delegates for Northern activist goals.

A major problem relates to imbalances in the participation to international networks by Northern and Southern actors. Despite the global implications of the contested policies, Southern organizations and groups are often heavily under-represented. Even when they are involved, the representation of their interests in network-level decision making is often in doubt. This occurs particularly in contexts where networks lack the organizational structures that enable reciprocal control, mutual learning and joint decision making (della Porta 2007). Mechanisms to ensure the involvement and control of members over the ways their interests in network-level decision making are represented were generally absent or ineffective in most of the cases examined in this volume. Although almost all the mobilizations examined in Chapters 3 and 8 were coordinated via boards and regular meetings of thematic sub-groups, at the same time concerns were voiced that resource scarcity prevented networks from establishing rigorous procedures to assure balanced representation in network-level decision making.

**Strategies of engagement**

To be effective, collective activism requires the development of both a common identity—the ‘us’ opposed to the ‘other’—and the self-understanding of being part of something bigger than the efforts of single actors or groups acting alone. Building a shared identity emerged as crucial for diverse groups to cohere in networks and coalitions and for the effective communication of claims in the policy process. Favorable conditions for strategy building, such as a widely-shared dissent and expert analysis—as occurred in the case of the initial CTT proposal in France (see Chapter 12)—may be the exception rather than the rule.

The study of the four activist networks in the UK in Chapters 3 and 6 found that when confronted with less favorable conditions, activists focused on identifying less disputable goals and more moderate strategies. These reflected the objectives of (powerful) core members, focusing on easier policy targets. Gerbaudo and Pianta (Chapter 8) describe how discrepancies arose about unnecessarily doubling efforts within the Italian debt movement. The Catholic church founded its own initiative parallel to those of the secular groups to facilitate pastoral action on debt in order to avoid taking a ‘too radical’ political stance. Saunders and Papadimitriou (Chapter 9) point out how Jubilee 2000 members Oxfam and Christian Aid (for example) distanced themselves from the more radical street parties at the end of the 1990s when charity laws had only recently been relaxed. Frequently, the transformation of agendas and actions
towards the more moderate view broadened political opportunities, allowing, for example, alliances with other groups and policy actors, while at the same time, considerably limiting representation and the range of potential policy proposals and responses.

The building and operation of networks, moreover, can be problematic. Whilst recognizing the added value of acting as a network, large organizations—typically, NGOs—may make little effort within networks for developing a common understanding of deeper policy issues. In the case of UK mobilizations, statements by British civil servants and businesses suggest that the message communicated came across as that of individual NGOs, rather than that of the network (Chapter 3 and 6). In a similar vein, membership and participation in European and global networks is often limited to advisory bodies, comprised of national and regional representatives. Coordination efforts, in the sense of linking national efforts of activists to a broader justice movement tend to occur en route, in an ad hoc manner – in particular during major mobilizations for global events – rather than taking place in a more structured manner.

**Monitoring change**

The potential and limits of activism also relate to the fact that processes of policy reform—including design, implementation and review of the required changes—can become extremely protracted, while the public attention span and related mobilizing efforts are fairly limited and not well-suited to long-term engagement in policy and institutional change. This can affect not only the potential for new policy and institutional reforms, but also implementation and follow-through. Momentum may be lost due to multiple reasons, for example, when policy work through campaigns is relatively short-lived, which in turn may be related to the short attention span of the media and its narrow focus on specific events such as the WTO ministerial conferences and G7/8/20 summits. Or activist pressures may subside when partial gains have been achieved, such as in the cases of the UK Companies Act, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) or the International Airline Ticket Tax. When adopted, such reforms potentially lock-in gains and make it difficult for governments and businesses to back-track. However, activist pressures may dissipate once agreement is reached or a law has been passed.

Yet, as seen in several of the cases in this volume, when activist proposals are internalized in policy and law, they are often diluted and deviate considerably from original demands. The French International Airline Ticket Tax (Chapter 12), for example, bypassed the core demand of the Tobin Tax proposal for regulating financial markets and became a ‘financing for development’ initiative that leaves financial markets unchecked. Similarly, whereas the Publish What You Pay campaign had called for ‘harder’ legal reforms, the resulting EITI was a softer voluntary initiative. Many of the adopted policies and reforms lack the binding character envisaged by activists. Accommodated by ‘voluntarism’ and ‘private regulation’, policy reform often requires continuous attention and action to promote and monitor the uptake and application of voluntary standards. This can also occur when demands result in the adoption of ‘binding’ law. The annual adjustments in levels of ODA and commitments to debt relief, such as the debt
cancellation law in Italy (Chapter 8) are such examples. Most national networks, however, were established in an ad-hoc campaign-centered manner and tended to remain independent and were transitory. Continuous policy work would require a transformation in network structures to facilitate long-term commitment to complex justice-related issues.

**THE EVOLUTION OF GLOBAL JUSTICE ACTIVISM**

Above we argued that, in spite of their limited time span, the mobilizations for global justice investigated in this book can be viewed as part of a longer evolution of global justice activism. In recent years, each of the issues examined has had a different trajectory in terms of mainstream practices, activist responses and policy changes.

The urgency of the issue of Third World debt has declined, and private lenders in global financial markets (rather than government lenders) have become key players. Mobilization at the global level has stopped, and only in countries affected by financial crises—most recently in Europe rather than in the South—foreign debt has emerged as an issue of contention.

The neoliberal trade agenda has failed to progress in the recent WTO Ministerial meetings, due to persisting differences between the US, the EU, emerging powers of the South, and poorer countries. Some of the criticism voiced by activists concerning the illusionary gains from trade liberalization has now become more widely accepted. Moreover, the global economic slowdown after the 2008 crisis has reduced export flows, and the prominence of trade as a policy issue.

Conversely, the financial crisis of 2008 has led to much greater attention to the potential of international taxation for reducing financial speculation and instability. The proposal for a Tobin Tax on currency trade has been turned into the project of a financial transaction tax—covering all financial deals—that is now supported by the EU, while even the IMF considers the tax to be feasible. The arguments activists developed in the 1990s have now become mainstream, and are issues of continuing mobilization in global and European summits. However, actual policy change may still be far way. The G20 Finance Ministers’ meeting in June 2010 in Busan, South Korea, failed to reach agreement on a FTT. In 2011 Germany and France relaunched the idea in the context of the European crisis, and in September that year a concrete proposal was put forward by the European Commission. More governments and supra-national institutions seem to be in favor of embracing mechanisms that stabilize financial markets and generate additional budgetary funds in times of severe constraints.

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10 At the International Peoples Conference that was held parallel to the G20 summit in Seoul, South Korea, in November 2010, the financial speculation tax was again high on the agenda. Before the conference, justice activists developed and communicated a global civil society statement in support of a financial speculation tax that was endorsed by 183 organizations from 42 countries from the global North and South. The proposal, to be pushed at subsequent G20 preparatory and summit meetings, was to place a small levy on each trade of stocks, derivatives, currency, and other financial instruments.
However, activists’ demands and proposals may easily become diluted again in any implementation of such a measure. Nevertheless, the current financial crisis, and the considerable ground work undertaken by groups like Attac have put Financial Transaction Tax high on the agenda of policy change.

Corporate accountability has also become more widely accepted by the business and policy communities in recent years, in spite of modest activist campaigns. In the UK, civil society organizations, networks and ‘experts’ have influenced international policy processes, playing a significant role, for example, in the 2010 revisions to the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, in the consultative processes associated with the UN ‘Protect, Respect and Remedy’ Framework for Business and Human Rights approved in 2011, and in the adoption of the ISO Guidance Standard on Organizational Social Responsibility.

Regardless of the precise trajectory of activism, ongoing repudiation of the neo-liberal doctrine and the recent multifaceted crises and contradictions of capitalism—food, energy, finance and climate, as well as precarious employment and polarizing inequalities in- and between countries—the issues and demands formulated by justice activists appear ever more pertinent.

In Europe, opposition to neo-liberal globalization has increasingly been taken up by national and grass-root mobilizations, reflecting geo- and national political differences in the social and economic effects of the crisis (della Porta 2007). Paradoxically, shared grievances generated by economic globalization, which previously mobilized justice activists across borders, are presently expressed to a much stronger degree through local and ‘sectoral’ lenses and arenas. The current tendency is to focus on specific issue areas (for example, austerity measures, pensions, university fees, precarization of work and life) that mobilize specific groups, such as workers, public sector employees, students and youth. Although the systemic and global aspects of these developments are seen clearly by many groups and across the globe, efforts to coalesce become a challenge as activism disperses in this way (Tarrow 2005). The global protest of 15 October 2011, against the social effects of the economic crisis, inspired by the ‘indignados’ of Madrid and Athens, and by the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ movement, may open the way to new global mobilizations. According to the organizers, on that day there were actions in 950 cities of 80 countries. The power of finance capital, the extreme wealth of the richest ‘1%’ of the population, austerity policies and the ‘lack of future’ of the young generation were common themes of the protest that may well evolve into a new wave of global activism.

New proposals for change continue to emerge and open up new spaces for mobilization and policy reform. While the most overt (and visible in the media) expressions of mobilization, such as mass protests, wane periodically, global justice activism appears to be able to transmit values and visions over time and across countries, and to sustain repeated waves of mobilization, exerting more institutional influence.

11 For different perspectives on the trajectory of activism, see Pianta (2001b).
12 See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/blog/2011/oct/15/occupy-wall-street-times-square>
The studies in this volume demonstrate that significant progress has been made by activists in understanding the multifaceted issues at the root of global injustice, developing and advancing comprehensive responses for achieving policy change. As spaces re-emerge for global justice campaigns, activists will have to confront, however, the challenges identified in this volume. In particular, they need to build and sustain mobilizations that connect multiple grass-roots and single-issue struggles and, at the same time, build a broader perspective for change that links different themes and leads to comprehensive alternatives. Addressing such challenges is crucial if justice activism is to live up to its own claims and promises of change.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


13 This clearly emerged in the Assembly of Social Movements that came together during the 8th World Social Forum in Belém, Amazonia (Bonfond 2010).


