Global-net for Global Movements? A Network of Networks for a Movement of Movements

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the use of Computer-Mediated Communication by the movement for global justice, with special attention to the organisations involved in the movement and its activists. We examined data collected during two supranational protest events: the anti-G8 protest in Genoa in July 2001 and the European Social Forum (ESF) in Florence in November 2002. In both cases, we have complemented an analysis of the Genoa Social Forum and ESF websites with a survey of activists, including questions about their use of the Internet. We then examine hypotheses about changes new technologies introduce in collective action. The Internet empowers social movements in: (a) purely instrumental ways (an additional logistical resource for ‘resource-poor’ actors), (b) a protest function (direct expression of protest); (c) symbolically (as a medium favouring identification processes in collective actors) and (d) cognitively (informing and sensitising public opinion).

The Internet is often considered a symbol of globalisation, and a means for disseminating ideas and moving capital at global level. As well as globalisation, the Internet represents an opportunity, combined with a challenge for social movements. Similarly to earlier technological innovations (Tarrow 1998, chap. 3), it has broadened political communication and made it easier. In terms of increased speed and range of communication, it gives the new movements what printing, the postal system, the telephone, and fax represented for movements in the far and more recent past. At the same time, however, it contains risks typical of new technology, namely generating alienation by eliminating face-to-face contact and increasing hierarchical power structures through centralising control of complex technology. Both scholars and social movement activists are aware of this complex blend of advantages and risks.
Communication has always represented a strategic dilemma for social movements. The mass media are a significant (often ephemeral) source for attesting a movement’s existence: a movement lacking media coverage is, in the public eye, non-existent (Rucht 2003a). Media-spawned communication affects different people in different ways and this has obliged social movements to seek communication strategies capable of satisfying their own constituencies while increasing support and sympathy within public opinion. In a comment still relevant today, Michael Lipsky (1965) pointed to the role of the media as selector of information about protest, with violent protest often getting more attention but also being stigmatised. Furthermore, the media are not only a projector, with a greater or lesser degree of accuracy, of the protestors’ identity but also a fundamental partner for their interactions (Neveu 2000).

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) – in particular, the Internet – gives social movements the possibility of spreading uncensored messages, and of attempting to influence mass media. Social movements have traditionally created their own communication media (including publishing houses, journals and self-managed radio stations), which were, however predominantly inward-oriented. The Internet has enormously increased the potential for developing alternatives and making the border between inward and outward-oriented communication much more permeable. Indeed, CMC differs from the traditional media in that it favours ‘disintermediation’: movements present themselves directly to the general public with low costs especially facilitating resource-poor actors. Some observers optimistically stress the capability of CMC to create a new comprehensive, pluralistic arena for political communication open to social actors whose access to the traditional media is not extensive or unfettered. The ‘individualized identities’ typical of a networked society discover creative forms of organisation through the Internet (Castells 1997). Besides making communication easier, the Internet also seems to have some effect on how movements structure themselves by fostering loose ties and ideologically heterogeneous campaigns (Bennett 2003). In fact, the Internet theoretically favours movements with polycentric and non-hierarchical forms of organisation (Gerlach 2001).

Nevertheless, even within social movements there is a growing concern on the specific problems Computer-Mediated Communication raises: from commercialisation and problems of reliability (Rucht 2003b: 26–28) to censorship and control. Many believe that Internet campaigns have ‘inherently weak mechanisms of information quality control’, and the ‘Internet is a better medium for disseminating information and opinions than for building trust, developing coherence and resolving controversies’ (Clark and Themundo 2003: 114).
Scholars also disagree about the effects of CMC in terms of empowerment of poorer people. While some stress a potential equalisation (e.g. Myers 2001), others suggest instead either a neutral impact (Margolis and Resnick 2000) or even further concentration of power (McChesney 1996). Not only does CMC seem easier for the elite to use than for the masses, but it also tends to reproduce hierarchy, developing vertical relations instead of interactive, horizontal relationships (Rucht 2003b: 28). Online activism could become a low-cost but also a low-effect substitute for off-line protest (ibid: 31).

In social movements, and in other fields too, only recently has empirical research begun to produce more nuanced interpretations of the effects of the Internet as a challenge and an opportunity. In particular, empirical studies of social movements have singled out some specific contributions that the Internet makes to the activities of these collective actors. First of all, its purely instrumental use is helpful in the organisation and the logistics of demonstrations, and as a means for different groups to keep networked. Secondly, the Internet can also be a specific means for the direct expression of dissent and protest. Thirdly, it has a cognitive function, enabling information to be disseminated and public opinion to be sensitised on issues scantily covered by mainstream media, and also reinforce collective identities.

In this paper we will focus on these uses of CMC by the movement for global justice (Andretta et al. 2002, 2003; della Porta 2003), with special attention to both the organisations involved in the movement and its activists. The movement for global justice has been particularly interested in the Internet as a means for transnational communication. The emphasis the movement places on its global identity and transnational aims, as well as on a ‘networked’ organisational structure, and its attention to the development of alternative knowledge, are all factors in the high relevance the Internet has for the movement.

We shall examine data collected during two supranational protest events: the anti-G8 protest in Genoa in July 2001 and the European Social Forum (ESF) in Florence in November 2002. In both cases, we analysed the websites of the main organisations involved and interviewed activists using semi-structured questionnaires. Both in Genoa and Florence interviews took place in workshops, seminars and plenary sections. We selected seminars and workshops according to the type of proponent organisation – environmentally-oriented, religion-based, pacifist, feminist, unions, left-wing political parties, and anticapitalist groupings. For the ESF, we also took into account the nationality of those organisations, focusing especially on Italian, French, Spanish, German, and English organisations. Interviewers were asked to distribute questionnaires at random. In Genoa we interviewed only Italian participants.
A similar method was applied for the sampling in Florence, where however we also included non-Italians: the questionnaires were indeed translated into French, English, German and Spanish. In Genoa, we collected 763 questionnaires; in Florence, 2,581 questionnaires. From the ESF full sample we excluded the Tuscans (863 participants) because they had a very different profile from other participants in terms of socio-demographic dimensions (gender, age, education, social condition), by virtue of their nearness to where the event was taking place Tuscans needed in fact a lower degree of commitment. We will refer to the total ESF sample when we will test hypotheses without referring to the countries of origin. Of the total number of interviewees, 1,668 were Italian, 124 French, 77 German, 88 Spanish, 118 British, and 309 from other countries. The different sizes of the country samples are proportionate to the national presence at this international event. However, for cross-national comparisons, we weighted the responses in order to compensate for having oversampled the Italian population—randomly extracting a subsample of the Italian activists.

An analysis of the Genoa Social Forum and ESF websites and how activists use the Internet allows us to develop hypotheses about how the Internet is put to use. In the next part we shall discuss the purely instrumental function of the Internet (stressed among others by Diani 2001), as an additional logistical resource for resource-poor actors. We shall then analyse the use of the web as an instrument of protest (della Porta 2003), the Internet being not only a tool to organise protest but also a means for ‘a new repertoire of collective action’ (Cardon and Granjon 2003). The next part will study the capability of the Net to have a symbolic function (Freschi 2002), favouring identification processes. Finally, we shall discuss the cognitive function of the Net, in particular its potential for informing and sensitising public opinion on issues to which the mass media give scanty coverage (Warkentin 2001).

Organising via the Internet

The Internet provides social movements with a cheap and fast means of international communication which simplifies mobilisation and favours highly flexible, loose organisational structures. The Internet ‘becomes an organisation force shaping both the relation among organisations and in some cases, the organisations themselves’ (Bennett 2003: 156). CMC facilitates internal and external communication, enabling the same message to be sent contemporarily to hundreds of addresses, overcoming barriers in space and time. Being horizontal, bi-directional and interactive (Bentivegna 1999), the Internet favours participatory organisational processes (Warkentin 2001). Whenever the networked organisational
structure of contemporary social movements reaches across international borders, CMC makes it easier ‘to transform sets of geographically dispersed aggrieved individuals into a densely connected aggrieved population, thus solving one key problem of mobilisation’ (Diani 2001). Organisational structures can be shaped differently by CMC since, as Smith (1997: 58) writes, ‘the advancement of communication and transportation technologies has made more decentralized organizational structures viable’. According to Castells (2001: 135–6) the Internet ‘fits with the basic features of the kind of social movements emerging in the Information Age (…). The Internet is not simply a technology: it is a communication media, and it is the material infrastructure of a given organizational form: the network’. As Naomi Klein (2002: 16) observed, the use of the Internet is ‘shaping the movement on its own web-like image’, with hubs at the centre of activities, and the spokes ‘that link to other centers, which are autonomous but interconnected’.

Most scholars agree that, at least in the short run, CMC’s impact on organisational structures would be highly varied: organisations with a longer history would be more reluctant to adopt CMC or, even when they do, they continue to use it similarly to the old media of communication without exploiting many of its more innovative aspects such as interactivity. In fact, while ‘newer, resource-poor organizations that tend to reject conventional politics may be defined in important ways by their Internet presence’ (Bennett 2003: 145), established organisations seem to have a conservative approach toward CMC (Smith 1997). As Tarrow (2003: 31) argues ‘the Internet as a form of movement communication has had a more transformative effect on new movement organizations than on established ones, which continue to rely more on face-to-face communication and on conventional organisational channels of communication’. But we should also consider that some resources available for richer organisations facilitate more effective use of the Internet – as some findings on political parties (Margolis and Resnick 2000) and NGOs (Warkentin 2001) seem to point out.

Research on non-conventional and conventional political participation has stressed that the organisation of supranational protest has very high transaction costs – which may go some way towards explaining why protest remains at a national or even local level despite higher competencies at international level. However, the Internet has substantially reduced the cost of communicating with large numbers of individuals spread all around the globe. Already during the campaign against land-mines, it was observed that ‘The global web of electronic media, including telecommunications, fax machines, and especially the Internet and the World Wide Web, have played an unprecedented role in facilitating a global network of concerned supporters around the issue’
In the last few years, the use of CMC has been crucial in the organisational phases of very large, transnational demonstrations, that have been staged with a frequency and number of participants previously unheard of. CMC makes transnational mobilisation easier whether in the form of a series of demonstrations going on at the same time in different countries, as happened in the hundreds of demonstrations against the war against Iraq on February 15th 2003, or protest events in one place with the participation of activists from different states and continents, as was the case of the World Social Forum. Connected rapidly and cheaply over the Net, networks of activists and an increasing number of global organisations have worked together in Seattle, Genoa, Porto Alegre, Florence, Paris and other places.

For the transnational meetings held in both Genoa and Florence, the Internet played an important logistic function. The site of the Genoa Social Forum (GSF), which coordinated the protest in Genoa, contained a map of the city with meeting points, a calendar of the activities during the days of the protest, some documents, press releases, information material, and links to the various organisations that signed the ‘working agreement’, the document containing the main rules and guidelines of the Genoa protest that the organisations taking part committed themselves to respect. The international character of the movement was manifest in its multi-language website: the most important documents were available in English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

Similarly, CMC made it possible for the organisers of the ESF to lower considerably the costs of mobilisation by providing virtual visitors with information on the genesis and objectives of the social forum, its official program and its preparatory and conclusive documents. Visitors to the website could register for the forum online and book a place to stay during the ESF, many of which were offered free of charge by Florence residents. An online forum was created to discuss and make decisions on the official program: everyone could propose and organise, once accepted, a specific workshop. The ESF website was used to recruit volunteers for fund-raising and appeared in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish.

Furthermore, the ESF website was particularly attentive to communicating the content of the forum, and made a press area available with news, press releases, press clippings and a press kit with the basics on the ESF. Here activists and professional journalists created an ‘open space’ for exchanging information in which every type of material (documents, texts, audio and video products) produced at and about the ESF could be uploaded, downloaded and freely used and distributed, by-passing copyright rules. There was also a constant and frequent link up
through non-public mailing-list between the spokesmen of the main organisational sectors.

The main networks of organisations involved in the Genoa and Florence protest also had their own websites. The international platform of ATTAC promotes diffusion to a global mailing-list of the intercontinental network because ‘it assures a great speed of communication and a notable saving of money. (. . .) it guarantees a big democratic transparency in our communications’ (Vanier 2000). According to Christophe Ventura, the person entrusted with international relations in the French branch of the association, ‘the creation of the ATTAC associations out of France is a spontaneous phenomenon. In this sense, our website has played an important role’ (in Ancelovici 2002). During the organisation of the Genoa events, the website of Rete Lilliput (the Italian ecopacifist network) was frequently updated with documents, information, bibliographical references, articles written on particularly successful initiatives held by local branches. It also contained links to the associations who promote the network. Online petitions and campaigns are frequently promoted and supported from this website too. The network of anticapitalist organisations (http://www.ecn.org) also use the Net extensively. During the anti-G8 protest, their website was particularly rich and interactive, promoting and coordinating protests and campaigns. Furthermore, the perception of the usefulness of the Net can be seen also in the number of Italian squatters’ social centres that, despite being present with their own pages on this website, have in addition created their own specific domains. Genoa and Florence were nothing new in this respect. Even before Seattle, organising supranational protest was made easier by websites devoted to specific events, the majority of which disappeared after the event, leaving behind a valuable archive.

CMC is a fundamental means of communication among activists of the global justice movement: in Genoa, 65 per cent of interviewees declared that they used the Internet regularly; in Florence 88 per cent declared using it at least once a week, and almost half daily (Table 1). Internet use by activists does not reflect national differences in Internet rates of access among selected European countries. As other research has already indicated (Bédoyan et al. 2003), activists from abroad tended to make a more frequent use of Internet than did locals.

While the Internet provides social movements with the means for managing logistics, the extent to which it has a levelling effect among social groups is still an open question. Reflecting on this, McChesney (1996) talks of a ‘partial’ public sphere in cyberspace, access to the Internet still being limited to an elite with high levels of education and income, while female and older cohorts are less present. Indeed, the Internet is the very cause of a new form of inequality: the ‘digital divide’.
Differences emerge in Internet access between different territorial levels, not only rich regions versus poor ones but also between rich and poor people in the wealthy nations, penalising those lacking economic and cultural resources, and between social sectors with different degrees of interest in politics, favouring groups of citizens already active and interested in politics (Norris 2001). It is significant that institutions of global governance have recently put the issue of digital divide in their agenda.

Our data on ESF participants confirm that movements share a certain degree of digital divide, but also point to the role played by the movement organisations in socialising their members in the use of Internet. In order to explain the differential use of the Internet by our activists, we tested five hypotheses that we considered plausible:

(a) socio-demographic hypothesis – the selectivity of Internet access is linked to socio-demographic features such as gender, age, education, income

(b) media consumption hypothesis – people wanting information and having the means to access it use a variety of different sources: thus previous media consumption explains the use of the Internet

(c) organisational belonging hypothesis – since social movement organisations can motivate marginal and disadvantaged subjects to participate, present or past membership in social movements using the Internet can play an important role in extending Internet access and literacy

(d) participation hypothesis – since CMC influences the possibility of participation in politics (Hill and Hughes 1998), those who are more politically committed will be motivated to use this new media in order to enhance their participation: having taken part in a wide repertoire of political activities encourages use of the Internet

(e) cosmopolitan identity hypothesis – seeing oneself as belonging to Europe or the world indicates a cosmopolitan mentality; encouraging Internet use to obtain information on other countries, and contacts with people there.

### Table 1: Use of the Internet by ESF participant’s country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internet use</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many times a week</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total cases: N (147) (138) (83) (113) (148) (629)

Source: Our database on survey with ESF activists (balanced sub-sample).
The effect of these sets of variables on CMC has been checked empirically using a model of binary logistic regression (Table 2). We transformed ‘use of the Internet’ into a dummy variable excluding the three intermediate categories of the original five point scale. This decision stems from previous analyses of the same database which indicated clearly that the main difference in Internet use was between two groups: non-users and daily users (Mosca 2003). The backwards stepwise method confirmed the significant influence of socio-demographic variables: education, with a regression coefficient of 4.4; age, with 2.8; and gender, −2.2. It also highlights the positive influence of listening to news on the radio (regression coefficient 2.1) and the negative impact of disruptive forms of participation (−2.3). The most important variable in the model, however, is familiarisation with new technologies, in particular, past or present use of CMC in organisations to which the interviewee has belonged (regression coefficient 6.7).

Since having used the Internet inside an organisation increases the individual probability of making frequent use of it afterwards, this suggests a general hypothesis: if CMC is used by the organisation an individual belongs to, accessing the Internet tends to become an important activity for previously ‘unwired’ individuals. The organisation makes its members familiar with new technologies. Socio-economic centrality is not a satisfactory explanation not only for political participation in general (Pizzorno 1993), but also for participation in the

### Table 2: Activists Use Computer Mediated Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of the Internet (dummy)</th>
<th>Regression coefficient</th>
<th>T statistic</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(binary logistic regression model)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-demographic variables:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (woman = 0)</td>
<td>−2.242</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (four categories)</td>
<td>2.840</td>
<td>**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education (three categories)</td>
<td>4.362</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media consumption</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listens to radio news (4 degrees of frequency)</td>
<td>2.072</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarisation with CMC in organisations to which the interviewee belonged/belongs to (dummy)</td>
<td>6.663</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive forms of participation (additive)</td>
<td>−2.304</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>−0.153</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cox and Snell R Square</td>
<td>0.149</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R Square</td>
<td>0.339</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*=significant at the 0.05 level; **=significant at the 0.01 level; ***=significant at the 0.001 level

Note: The variables were entered in the order presented in the table and a backwards stepwise method applied.
information society. This hypothesis is furthermore supported by other
studies that have already indicated that, for example, in developing
countries NGOs have made marginal social groups familiar with the
political use of the Internet. Information on protest in Chiapas spread
thanks to the technological support provided by a Mexican group of
NGOs (Cleaver 1995, 1998; Castells 1997). An analysis of website links
points to the brokerage role played by the Zapatistas Global Support:
‘Zapatista-related sites are crucial to global NGO networks, and con-
tribute to binding them’ (Garrido and Halavis 2003: 181). NGOs have
also performed an important role in the creation of the first electronic
networks, which allowed social movements to become independent of
government support in their use of CMC (Stubbs 1998).
There is however no technologically-driven homogeneity in the use of
CMC. Different organisational sectors of the movement as well as their
activists make different uses of CMC. As shown in Table 3, if we cross
check ESF participants’ use of the Internet with their organisational
affiliation (eco-pacifism, anti-neoliberalism, anti-capitalism), we find
that CMC is more used by organised activists than by non-organised
ones. This is particularly true for eco-pacifists and anti-neoliberalists,
while the pattern of Internet use by the anti-capitalists is more similar to
that of non-organised participants.
Almost all Internet users access alternative sources to obtain infor-
mation on what protest events a movement is organising and to get
immediate data on the contents, programme and logistics of the social
forum (see Figure 1). Activists use CMC also to exchange opinions, and
to participate in online surveys and petitions. The online petition seems
to be the best known and most used protest tool of 66 per cent of the
sample. The netstrike – which will be examined in the next section – is
much less present (19 per cent). While those who use the traditional
media of press and television are more numerous, the role of the Internet
in political communication and mobilisation appears evident when one
considers that 64 per cent of Internet users state that CMC influenced, at

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Organisational sectors and frequency of use</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eco pacifism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey of ESF activists.
least ‘a little’, their decision to participate in the Genoa demonstration (Andretta et al. 2002). Moreover, the political use of the Internet is more frequent among activists who belong to the principal networks of the movement.

Activists from different movement areas differ in the way they use Internet. The anti-capitalists make less use of online surveys and petitions and use the Internet mainly to find out about alternative websites (95 per cent) and gather information on protest organisations (93 per cent). Eco-pacifists log on to Internet for many reasons, particularly to take part in online surveys and petitions and to express political opinions online, a characteristic they share with anti-capitalists. More than a quarter of eco-pacifists take part in net-strikes. The use of CMC by anti-neoliberalists is very similar to the average, with a preference for online surveys and petitions.

Protesting over the Internet

The Internet is also a means for protest and is exploited for online mobilisation and acts of dissent, such as online petitions, website defacement or cloning, netstrikes and mail-bombings. The term electronic advocacy refers to ‘the use of high technology to influence the decision-making process, or to the use of technology in an effort to support policy-change efforts’ (Hick and McNutt 2002: 8). Most hackers who log on to the Internet to participate in online protest belong to the global justice movement, and raise specific issues such as free access to information, in particular, free software and right to privacy (Castells 2001, chap. 2; Freschi 2003; Jordan 2002).
CMC has made it possible to conduct Internet transnational campaigns against multinational corporations such as De Beers, Microsoft, Monsanto and Nike, run especially via online petitions: some even talk of ‘dot-causes’, (see Clark and Themundo 2003). International mobilisation through online petitions has also denounced certain human rights violations and put pressure on governments against the death penalty. These campaigns grew to be longer, less centrally controlled, more difficult to turn on and off, and forever changing in term of networks and goals (Bennett 2003).

A tactic used by online activists is to create websites (with domain names such as http://www.worldbunk.org or http://www.whirledbank.org) that mock international organisations and their activities. Similarly, fake websites are built using the names of international organisations (e.g., http://www.gatt.org or http://www.seattlewto.org or http://www.genoa-g8.org) in order to attract users looking for the official websites (Vegh 2003).

Another form of online protest – netstrike – proliferated in recent years among radical organisations as a ‘virtual practice for real conflicts’ through StranoNetwork, (Freschi 2000: 104). Netstriking consists of a large number of people connecting simultaneously to the same domain at a prearranged time, in order to jam a site considered a symbolic target, in order to make it impossible for other users to reach it. The mobilisation and its motivation is normally communicated in advance to the site against which the netstrike will be made. A netstrike is ‘comparable to a physical procession that occupies a road to make it inaccessible’ (http://www.netstrike.it). When a netstrike is in progress, online protestors activate a channel of communication, generally a chat-line or a mailing-list, in order to coordinate their action of protest. A netstrike was promoted against the WTO website during the protests in Seattle, ideally linking offline and online environments (Jordan 2002). Some groups prefer netstriking to online petitions because the latter requires the construction of a database containing personal information, which is considered a threat to privacy.6

Similar to the netstrike, but less used, mail-bombing consists of sending emails to a website or a server until it overloads and gets jammed. This online form of action was criticised because ‘its eventual success does not depend on the force of the arguments but on the mere power of computers and bandwidth available to the aggressor as compared with that of the victim’ (Alfonso 1997). Mail-bombers are not easily identifiable since they normally use special software to safeguard their privacy such as cryptation, and keep their identity hidden.

Cyberprotest is promoted by the website of the Italian social centres (http://www.ecn.org). The project of ‘Islands in the Net’ – successor to
the European Counter-Network – represents the virtual place for cohabitation and meeting of most Italian social centres. In fact, it ‘has favored a great external visibility, but above all a great mutual knowledge between the different local experiences of the movement’ (Freschi 2000: 98). It represents a sort of platform to coordinate mobilisation, support protests and campaigns and allow people to exchange opinions.

During the Neapolitan protests against the UN Global Forum in March 2001, prior to the Genoa protest, some organisations promoted netstrikes to challenge the forum. After some initial success, the website that offered technical information for protesting online (http://www.netstrike.it) was closed by the judiciary. The information on the decision immediately spread within cyberspace and the website involved was immediately cloned and reproduced on about ten servers in countries that were not subject to Italian courts (Jordan 2002).

Our data on ESF participants show that the more a person is connected to the Internet, the more s/he uses all the participatory possibilities offered by CMC from consulting sites related to protest events organisation and alternative information, to participation in online surveys and petitions; from the expression of opinions to participation in netstrikes. Kendall’s Tau b varies from 0.21 for participation in netstrikes to 0.30 for participation in online petition, all significant at the 0.01 level.

While online petitions, campaigns and netstrikes are often ignored by those they are directed against (Rucht 2003b), their impact on observers depends on how much they capture the attention of the mass-media (Gurak and Logie 2003: 26), leading to loss of face rather than loss of money (Vegh 2003). Beyond the concrete effects, however, it has been repeatedly observed that online activism can replace offline activism, thus becoming just a simulacrum of real protest.

In order to test this hypothesis, we analysed to what extent online forms of protest influenced offline activism. As our data show (Table 4) offline and online protests are strongly related and tend to reinforce each other. Sometimes they are used contemporaneously to heighten protest visibility. More in particular, some online forms of action are correlated with specific forms of offline protest: online petitioners are more likely to be also offline petitioners and boycotters while netstrikers have a more varied (mainly unconventional and radical) offline repertoire of action.

**Internet and non-virtual identities**

Cyberspace has been singled out as a promising setting for deliberative forms of democracy. Scholars of social movements have underlined its capacity to generate new identities. For example Park observed that ‘not
only the formation of collective identity is easier due to the Internet’s ability to put [together] people of similar grievances in disparate geographical area, but also the diffusion of collective identity is faster and easier’ (2002: 19). Diani (2001) claims CMC’s contribution to the collective identities of social movements is mainly in reinforcing existing ones, while Freschi (2002) studied how virtual communities can develop an identifying function, creating social networks with internal solidarity and common beliefs, acting online and offline. In fact, ‘real community can and does take root in Internet-based space’ (Gurak and Logie 2003: 43).

Our research indicates that CMC is conducive to making people think. Online forums and mailing-lists favour discussion on specific topics (such as logistics, forms of actions, agreements among organisations, slogans, etc.) before a protest begins and, later on, collective reflection on demonstrations among ‘distant’ activists. Before the countersummit in Genoa, the Internet provided occasions for dialogue within the movement. Discussion forums and mailing-lists facilitated the emergence of common interpretative schemes among activists and organisations. In particular, the activists of Rete Lilliput (nonviolent Italian organisational network; http://www.retelilliput.org) made an extensive use of the Internet not only to spread information, but also to discuss themes of interest internally (for instance, a list focused on the G8 countersummit), through a national, regional and local system of newsletters and mailing-lists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offline forms of action (dummy variables)</th>
<th>Online forms of action (Kendall’s Tau B)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offline forms of action (dummy variables)</td>
<td>Online forms of action (Kendall’s Tau B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taken part in past demonstrations</td>
<td>0.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squatting</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking part in elections</td>
<td>0.07**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking part in sit-ins</td>
<td>0.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrating violence against property</td>
<td>0.16**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking part in boycotts</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handing out leaflets</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking part in strike action</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending political meetings</td>
<td>0.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupying school/university</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canvassing for a political party</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signing petitions/referendums</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party activism</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey with ESF activists.
Local groups use mailing-lists to communicate between one (physical) meeting and another. The website of Lilliput periodically activates regional and national lists discussing issues that the organisation puts on its agenda, allowing interaction between geographically distant subjects in the discussion and in the preparation of events such as regional and national meetings. Some weeks before the G8 summit in Genoa, the Lilliput site had a chat-line which enabled synchronous discussions between visitors. After Genoa, the website promoted online surveys among its users to let them express their opinions about the GSF and the forms of mobilisation to be adopted in particularly delicate protest events.

Before the Genoa protest, the website of the Tute bianche (White Overalls) (http://www.tutebianche.org) hosted a lively discussion forum on which forms of action should be adopted in Genoa. Recalling the Zapatistas experience of consulta (Cleaver 1998), they promoted a referendum asking cyber-voters: ‘(a) will you support disobedience to the ban on demonstrations and the enclosure of forbidden areas? (b) do you think that mass invasion of the forbidden area is a viable common purpose? (c) do you agree that people need collective self-defence in order to keep the police off, avoid man-to-man fights, degeneration, beatings and mass arrests?’ The consultation was published in four languages and received significant mass-media attention and coverage.

Their presence on the web enabled organisations of the GSF and the ESF, including the more radical ones, to base their protest activity against the G8 on transparency and publicity. From the analysis of mailing-lists (Cristante 2003) included on their websites has emerged opening and availability to debate, also with very different actors.

This leads us to another question, namely the type of identity fostered by Internet. A broad range of empirical studies seems to indicate that Internet users have richer social relationships (Hampton and Wellman 2001; Haythornwaite 2001a; Howard et al. 2001; Katz et al. 2001; Nie 2001; Müller 2002). According to one of these studies, online networks often have their roots in offline ones, with a strong overlap between the two environments and, furthermore, ‘online communication services allow broadening the network of social relations, providing access to people and information, not only on a global level, but also in a geographically smaller regional or local context’ (Müller 2002, 8). According to other empirical research, ‘the Internet favors glocalization: it increases the local contacts and the global ones’ (Hampton and Wellman 2001: 492). Caroline Haythornwaite (2001b) suggests that a medium such as email can act as a diffuse, background contact mechanism, connecting the very weakest of ties, and which requires little work by the individual to access the social network. CMC can create connections
between isolated, distant and unlinked networks, favouring collective action toward a common goal.

In theory, the Internet fosters pluralist, open identities. If the Internet multiplies the stock of social ties for each individual, allowing them to activate a wide and variegated net of ‘latent’ ties, transforming them into ‘weak ties’ (Granovetter 1973), we might expect a greater opening towards the external environment from people using CMC and, accordingly, a greater availability to identify with a broad range of collective actors. Indeed the Internet enables contact to be made between individuals completely unknown to each other when the knowledge is mediated by the common affiliation to shared spaces for communication such as newsgroups or mailing-lists or to maintain very weak ties through irregular, occasional exchanges of messages. This process is enhanced since ‘in sharp contrast to telephoning, online messages are extremely non-intrusive because receivers can retrieve, read, store (or delete) and answer them at any chosen time’ (Geser 2001). Therefore CMC enables the establishment and maintenance of a broader stock of ‘latent’ ties that can then be activated very quickly and used selectively according to each situation and specific necessity. As research on peace activists in eight nations indicated, the more individuals participate in multiple types of organisations, the more frequently they use the Internet (Bennett et al. 2004). However, other researchers stress a sort of ‘balkanization’ of the web, with a tendency for web-users to only contact groups with an ideology similar to their own. For instance, Sunstein (2001) applied a link-analysis to a random sample of 60 political websites and found that only 15 per cent provided links to websites with different opinions while almost 60 per cent linked with websites of the same ideological orientation as themselves (2001: 59). Furthermore, when a site publishes links to a site that holds an opposing view it normally does so to criticise it.

We assessed the impact of CMC on identification processes at micro level with the ESF survey data. In our model, we considered a broad set of variables in order to point out the main causes for people identifying with the movement, an organisational sector or a specific group. While socio-demographic variables are not relevant, such processes are particularly influenced by organisational belonging (although there is a high percent of non-organised that have high level of identification with the movement in general and with an organisational sector), by previous participation in demonstration (that increases identification with a movement sector), and by a cosmopolitan vision (identification with the world). Media consumption can also play a role in identifying with a social movement or an organisational sector. It is interesting to note, that the Internet has an influence in the identification process with a specific organisation (regression coefficient significant at the 0.01 level), and an
organisational sector (regression coefficient 2.1 significant at the 0.05 level), but not in the identification process with the movement in general. Hence, if the Internet strengthens identification, this is especially true under conditions of ideal or ideological proximity, such as in the case of areas of the movement or specific organisation characterised by internal homogeneity in regard to frames and forms of action. We also considered that if the Internet tends to produce a higher trust in the movement, it should also be positively correlated with multiple memberships—which, in general, has an important role to play in integrating different areas of a movement (della Porta and Diani 1998), encouraging participation and favouring mobilisation of resources, stimulating information exchange and the adoption of convergent interpretative schemes. The processes of exchange established on an interpersonal and inter-organisational level have positive effects because it promotes cooperation and diffusion of trust. In fact, in our data, the correlation between multiple membership and use of the Internet is significant (Kendall’s Tau B 0.15 at the 0.01 level).

Trust is often considered as easily spreading from one object to another. In order to evaluate if the use of the Internet accounts for trust in institutions and political actors, the data set is tested for the difference in trust between the group of interviewees not using the Internet at all and the group of interviewees who use it daily. The analysis was carried out applying an approximate Mann–Whitney-U test. Our data indicate that, if controlled by other variables (particularly education), the use of the Internet does not explain trust in different institutions.

**Spreading information**

The Internet also has a cognitive function through information dissemination and gathering. A case often quoted is the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, that via the net attracted attention to a region of the globe that was until then virtually unknown and to mobilisation that the traditional mass-media had neglected. Online resource networks facilitate organisation: they function as a common Internet getaway to hundreds of NGOs; they offer them and individual activists Internet based services; they provide established means for the affiliates to communicate, and they serve as information resource sites for whoever is interested. (Warkentin 2001: 143). Also, new media can influence the mass media (Bennett 2003: 153).

Epistemic communities and advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998) have communicated information on global issues they highlighted the negative consequences of economic globalisation and pointed to possible alternatives to neoliberalism. They encouraged the creation of
the movement for global justice by providing alternative knowledge on specific issues, as well as access and visibility on the web and linking organisations acting in different parts of the globe. Beyond supra-national protest events, long-lasting campaigns make use of the Internet: ‘weblogs, lists, and networked campaign sites create an epistemic community that makes the campaign a source of knowledge about credible problems, while making the target an example of both problems and solutions’ (Bennett 2003).

Within the global justice movement, some organisations specialise in the diffusion of information via the Internet. The Institute for Global Communication (IGC), the Association for Progressive Communication (APC) and Oneworld are online resource networks that operate as Internet portals for a large number of NGOs. The IGC (http://www.igc.org) is a network of networks, incorporating PeaceNet (pacifist portal promoting the constructive resolution of conflicts), EcoNet (the world’s first computer network dedicated to environmental preservation and sustainability), WomensNet (portal advancing the interests of women worldwide), and AntiRacismNet (platform providing information and technical support for those interested in issues of civil rights, racism and diversity related issues). LaborNet – also originally part of the ICG, and now with an autonomous network (http://www.labornet.org) – connects labour protest on the Internet. Another anti-neoliberal portal focusing on the issue of labour and unemployment is the website of Euromarches (http://www.euromarches.org) created in 1997 to mobilise against unemployment, insecure jobs and poverty in Europe. As the site specifies ‘within this network, these organisations regularly exchange information, experiences and reflections, defining what they have in common; they elaborate common claims at the EU level and organise together some actions at this level.’

In 1990, the IGC co-founded the APC (http://www.apc.org) in partnership with six international organisations, creating an international coalition operating in more than 130 countries that includes 25 affiliated (wholly autonomous) members and 40 partners. Since 1995, the APC have had consultative status to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Its mission consists in empowering and supporting organisations, social movements and individuals in and through the Internet in order to contribute to equitable human development, social justice, participatory political processes and environmental sustainability.

OneWorld (http://www.oneworld.net/) claims to be the online media gateway that most effectively informs a global audience about human rights and sustainable development. It created themed portals on AIDS (http://www.aidschannel.org), the knowledge divide
(http://www.learningchannel.org), the digital divide (http://www.digitalopportunity.org) and for counterinformation in general (http://www.mediachannel.org). Besides OneWorld, there are lots of networks that promote alternative and critical information such as the French Samizdat (http://www.samizdat.net), the German Nadir (http://www.nadir.org), the Italian ECN (http://www.ecn.org), and the Spanish Nodo50 (http://www.nodo50.org). For instance, Nodo 50 is a server hosting more than 750 alternative and anticapitalist groups. It was created in Spain in 1994 to provide virtual support to the campaign ‘!50 años bastan!’ (Fifty years is enough) challenging the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Bonet i Martí 2003, Pastor 2002). Since then, it continues a campaign of counterinformation ‘to spread the real struggles starting from cyberspace.’

The better known alternative media is Indymedia (http://www.indymedia.org) that defines itself in its homepage as ‘a collective of independent media organisations and hundreds of journalists offering grassroots, non-corporate coverage. Indymedia is a democratic media outlet for the creation of radical, accurate, and impassioned truthtelling.’ Indymedia is formed by more than fifty nodes all around the world. The raison d’être of the network is the critique of the established media (Rucht 2003b) and promotion of the ‘democratization of information’ and ‘citizen’s media’ (Cardon and Granjon 2003). Open publishing is an essential element of the Indymedia project that allows everybody from independent journalists to unknown activists to publish the news they gather instantaneously on a globally accessible website; since there is no editorial board filtering information (Cristante 2003; Freschi 2003). Anyone who respects a few ground rules can create a local knot of Indymedia. Indeed, besides global issue and counter information on the main network, local knots of Indymedia have dedicated themselves to the coverage of specific mobilisations against neoliberal globalisation; for instance, in June 2001 a demonstration against a meeting of the World Bank in Barcelona (later cancelled) was the occasion for the formation of a local knot of Indymedia. In the days of Seattle protest, the Independent media centre claimed to have received 1.5 million hits.

Due to its multi-media nature, CMC offers important tools to organisations active on human rights violations, police repression and environmental pollution. ‘Anyone interested in knowing about any harmful, unethical, or wasteful activities of companies or governments can now locate websites that contain a constantly updated historical record of transgressions against public interest’ (O’Brien 1999). Webcams enabled activists to shame enterprises who contaminated the
environment by discharging toxic liquid into rivers (Warkentin 2001: 78). Police violence in Genoa was documented by video activists using their cameras and spreading photos, images and films through the Internet. In Florence, the activists organised ‘marshalls’ armed with cameras.

In short, CMC creates easily accessible spaces in which any organisation can, at a low cost, communicate interpretative schemes and definitions of the situation which are alternative to the official ones spread by the mass-media. CMC provides the movements with the opportunity to create unmediated and unfiltered flows of information, addressing public opinion and diversifying the message in accordance with their specific target. Nevertheless cyberspace also seems to possess, at least partially, hierarchies and gate-keepers of different types (Koopmans and Zimmerman 2003). The visibility of websites is submitted to a series of criterions and it rewards actors more gifted with resources that make their presence in cyberspace felt through professionals who have more knowledge of the rules that favour prominence on the Net.

Second, the fact that the Internet makes an enormous quantity of information available does not automatically increase interest in politics (Margolis and Resnick 2000). In this sense, there is a risk that the Internet will merely turn out to be a new, additional resource for those already involved in public life (Bimber 1998: 30). CMC would then be a new resource for old activists and not getting new social sectors involved in politics (Bentivegna 2002).

Thirdly, the development of the web changed the political functioning of the Internet by heightening the problem of news verification (Gurak and Logie 2003: 26; see also Lebert 2003, on Amnesty International). Rucht (2003b) rightly observes that information in cyberspace is unreliable because there are no obligatory checking procedures. Also because of the highly temporary nature of the Internet itself, online information tends to disappear whereas information on traditional media is usually archived and accessible.

Fourthly, although CMC becomes increasingly a source of information for the journalists of more traditional media (Cardon and Granjon 2003), the capability of information to spread from the cyberspace to the more traditional media is unclear. As Bennett (2003) notes ‘since Seattle, it seems that a more familiar press pattern has emerged in both U.S. and European media coverage of demonstrations: protesters have generically been cast as violent and anarchists, and even equated with soccer hooligans in some European accounts’. According to a research on media representation of the Genoa G8 summit (Vindrola 2002) during the days of the meeting the three most important Italian television news dedicated only 2 per cent of the time spent on the summit to the counter-summit agenda and 21 per cent of that time to the agenda of the official meeting;
most television coverage focused on security and public order (33 per cent) and the organisations of protest (22 per cent); the police (28 per cent) and the black bloc (13 per cent) had the highest level of visibility, while the Genoa Social Forum got scant mention (10 per cent). Similarly, research on the press coverage by four of the most important Italian newspapers before, after and during the summit indicated a low attention to the content of the summit and of the protest (9 per cent; of which 6 per cent was devoted to the official agenda of the protest). (See also Cristante 2003: 83). In the coverage of the ESF (Cosi 2004), from October 23rd to November 23rd 2002 only 21.3 per cent of the articles selected from the three most important Italian newspapers gave coverage to the contents of the social forum; and almost 50 per cent in the alarm phase leading up to the ESF were devoted to violence and public order. Studies on media coverage of the movement for global justice in other European countries show similar results: newspaper coverage of the Spanish EU presidency was centred mainly on security and public order (37 per cent) while 17.2 per cent of articles covered alternative globalisation (Jimenez 2002); only 6.6 per cent of German press coverage of five protest events in Seattle, Prague, Genoa, Gothenburg and Berlin reported on the substantive arguments of the institutional organisers and 3 per cent those of demonstrators while violence, police and security scored 26.8 per cent (Rucht 2003b). The passage ‘from desktop to television screen’ (Bennett 2003) seems quite difficult.

Opinion polls indicate, however, that the movement on globalisation had indeed a high capacity of agenda setting, turning attention to globalisation processes and global issues. In countries like Italy, it was able to attract support from a very wide base. The Internet is a source of information for the activists, that work then as message amplifiers.

**The network as a new resource for social movements**

CMC has increasingly become a vitally important resource for those social movements that have acquired heightened visibility in the public sphere during recent years: the Internet has had, has and will continue to have a meaningful effect on collective action. The Internet empowers a series of fundamental functions of social movement organisations: it modifies their movements’ organisational structure (more and more networked, flexible and polycentric) and makes organising demonstrations easier; it increases the possibilities for a direct intervention in politics through different forms of cyberprotest, it influences identity processes and helps to spread alternative information.

As for the **organisational function**, our data indicated that social movement organisations made wide use of Internet for the preparation of the
transnational protest against the G8 in Genoa and the European Social Forum in Florence and that the activists who took part in these demonstrations were also frequent cyberspace navigators. Different sectors of the movement made different uses of Internet. While our empirical analysis confirmed that, despite the diffusion of CMC, digital access is still selective – socio-demographic variables like gender, age, education affect access, regularity and frequency of the use of Internet – social movement organisations tend to ‘socialize’ their activists to the Internet. Familiarisation with the new technologies on the part of organisations has therefore an equalising effect, reducing the digital divide. Besides, activists belonging to the organised sectors of the movement are more likely to make further use of it as a tool for political participation.

A lot of protest takes place online – the most frequent acts are petitions, but more disruptive forms such as net-strikes are also widespread. Our data challenge pessimistic claims of a progressive substitution of offline activism for online protest: activists perform their actions both offline and online, using cyberspace as a new resource to increase their chances of success. There is no sign that offline and online environments as alternative to each other. Since they are more and more integrated and overlapping, human activities such as protest also take place in both environments.

The Internet facilitates the construction of new, flexible identities and it operates as an intervening variable extending individual social relationships by demolishing the space-time barriers. Indeed, it is the very characteristics of cheapness and rapidity of the Internet that enable it to accumulate a stock of latent ties that can be rapidly transformed into qualitatively superior relationships producing a growth of the weak ties and of the social networks in which an individual is embedded. CMC multiplies the probabilities to keep this kind of tie active and, above all, to reactivate it with ease and rapidity. The extension of individual social relations via the Internet favours identification processes: the analysis of the empirical data seems to point out a positive relationship between the two variables.

As for its cognitive function, we noticed the movement for global justice made wide use of the opportunities offered by the new media to create unmediated flows of communication with their constituency and with public opinion. Portals, websites and the independent media centres, devote themselves to the production of alternative information, that is communicated over the web. Although the Internet helps to spread information with important agenda-setting effects, the passage from micro to mass-media is problematic and social movement initiatives risk being lost in cyberspace. Media coverage of protest events in particular
tend to focus more on law and order problems than on substantive proposals. Notwithstanding the ‘bad’ coverage in the mass-media, a series of surveys (see della Porta 2003, chap. 5) indicates that the movement for global justice is successful in sensitising public opinion on important issues related to the process of globalisation. Even if the movement websites rarely get direct media coverage, it seems the Internet plays a fundamental cognitive function in circumventing mass-media.

NOTES

1. Partial results of our research are published in Andretta, della Porta, Mosca and Reiter, 2002 and 2003. A previous version of this chapter was presented at the conference on ‘Internet and Governance’, Oxford Internet Institute, January 8–10 2004. We are grateful to the participants in the conference, and in particular to Richard Rose, as well as to Massimiliano Andretta and Herbet Reiter for useful comments. We also acknowledge the valuable assistance of Claudius Wagemann with data analysis.

2. To analyse websites no longer extant we used an online database that periodically downloads websites and files them under different dates (http://www.archive.org).

3. Although the distribution of most socio-demographic characteristics (education, age, and social situation, such as whether student status or not) was significantly different between the Italian sample and the overall population of Italy (likelihood ratio chi square test), the Italian sample was not stratified for these conditions, because the distributions of some other countries also differed from their respective national populations. Varying the Italian sample would have meant reducing the Italian sample to a median category and foregoing variation. However, the gender distribution was equal among all the other countries; only the Italian gender distribution deviated from this with males dominating. Therefore, a stratified subsample was drawn from the Italian sample which respected the equal distribution of men and women in the population. Furthermore, the Italian sub-sample was reduced in numbers, since overrepresenting the Italians would have biased the results and made some types of statistical analysis less applicable.

4. Arabic, Greek and Russian translations were also advertised on the site but were never made accessible to Internet users.

5. The participants that declared affiliation to organisations participating in the ESF were considered within organisational macro-sectors of the movement: eco-pacifism, anti-neoliberalism and anti-capitalism (on the definition of these, see Andretta, della Porta, Mosca and Reiter 2002). The category ‘eco-pacifism’ includes environmental and pacifist groups, catholic associations, lay volunteer organisations and NGOs; the category ‘anti-neoliberalism’ covers ATTAC, trade unions, the institutional leftwing parties and party youth organisations, student organisations of the institutional leftwing; and the category ‘anti-capitalism’ includes various kinds of squats (independent social centres), White Overalls/Disobedient, radical unions, neo-communist organisations, anarchist groups and autonomous organisations.

6. Even though there is no law against it, participation in a netstrike is considered by some experts as illegal. Netstrikers base the legality and legitimacy of this form of online protest on the right to strike (Freschi 2000).

7. Especially if attention is turned to such factors as the issues of debate, the degree of autonomy of the setting, the technological applications used, the rules of discourse instituted and the type of discussion management undertaken (Dahlberg 2001; see also Salter 2003).

8. Among 12,787 respondents, the three questions were answered affirmatively by respectively 87.3 per cent, 72.7 per cent and 79.4 per cent. It should be noted, however, that differently from the normal practice in conducting online surveys, this enabled more than one vote to be cast from the same PC.

9. Latent ties are created on the Internet in asynchronous shared communicative spaces and they can be activated by sending an email message. If the message stimulates an interactive relationship a weak tie is activated (Haythornthwaite 2000b).

10. Models were tested using as dependent variables three dummy variables \(0 = \text{none/a little/enough}; 1 = \text{a lot}\).
REFERENCES


