Meeting Democracy

The concepts of power and democracy have been extensively studied at the global, national and local levels and within institutions including states, international organizations and political parties. However, the interplay of those concepts within social movements is given far less attention. Studies have so far mainly focused on their protest activities rather than the internal practices of deliberation and democratic decision-making. *Meeting Democracy* presents empirical research that examines in detail how power is distributed and how consensus is reached in twelve global justice movement organizations, with detailed observations of how they operate in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the UK. Written by leading political scientists and sociologists, this work contributes significantly to the wider literature on power and deliberative democracy within political science and sociology.

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Meeting Democracy

Power and Deliberation in Global Justice Movements

Edited by

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Preface and acknowledgements

Meeting Democracy, in the context of our research, carries a threefold meaning: first, this book title refers to the sustained attempts to practise democracy in meetings of groups that are part of the global justice movement. After all, these groups strive to establish and/or enlarge democracy, not only at the local, the national and ultimately the global level, but also within their own ranks. Second, the title alludes to our experience of meeting (that is, being confronted with) these attempts at developing democracy within social movements during the research process – which, for this study, was essentially based on participant observation. This process was fascinating and rewarding for us as researchers and as citizens. We were stunned by the efforts of movement activists, who not only try to communicate in an egalitarian and respectful way, but who also seek to reach decisions that are acceptable to all members of the group. Not surprisingly, these efforts were not always successful. Third, the topic of meeting democracy affected our communication within the research group. Though we rarely talked about our ways of communication in the many meetings we held in various places, still there was an implicit consensus that such communication should be ruled by the force of arguments rather than shaped by formal status and informal reputation. Similarly to the groups we have observed, we were not always successful – though we are unaware of any incidents of bitter conflict among the seven research teams – but we can say that the attempt to put those norms into practice was a valuable experience for each of us.

Meeting Democracy, as a study, is the result of a long process that began around 2001/2, when Donatella della Porta took the initiative to bring together a number of scholars to set up a research project on global justice movements (GJMs) in various European countries. In spring 2003, a proposal was submitted to the European Commission and eventually accepted. DEMOS was used as a shorthand for the project called Democracy in Europe and the Mobilization of Society. The overall project was much more encompassing than the study presented here. It included analyses of the emergence and development of global justice movements, the strategies they use and the challenges they face.
movements in six countries and at the transnational level in Europe, of websites and programmatic statements of GJM groups, interviews with representatives from many organizations, surveys of activists who met at the fourth European Social Forum in Athens in 2006 and elsewhere, and finally the participant observations upon which this book draws. Results of the other parts of the project have already been published in three collective volumes (The Global Justice Movement in Cross-National and Transnational Perspective, Another Europe and Democracy in Movements, all edited by della Porta) as well as in several articles. In each of these parts of the research we were moved by substantive matters, but we had also an interest in developing the methods available for the study of social movements, and beyond. In particular, in the analysis of websites and fundamental documents of social movement organizations we combined qualitative and quantitative analysis, constructing instruments for standardized coding that we hoped could be useful for further research.

Additionally, in interviews with activists, we pursued a recently developing interest in using surveys at political protests. This fourth volume is even more innovative in terms of methodology. To be sure, participant observation is a standard method in social sciences. However, we also made efforts to systematize and quantify communication processes for which no ready-made templates were available. Accordingly, we invested considerable energy in developing adequate research tools. This was a joint endeavour in which the Berlin team took the lead.

As a book, Meeting Democracy would never have been produced without the help of many institutions and people to whom we wish to express our gratitude. For the institutions, we wish to thank the European Commission, who provided the necessary funding and support throughout the process. We also wish to thank the home institutions of the principal investigators for their administrative and material support: the European University Institute in Italy, which served as the co-ordination body (Donatella della Porta); the University of Kent at Canterbury (Christopher Rootes); Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (Dieter Rucht); Università di Urbino (Mario Pianta); Université de Paris I – Sorbonne (Isabelle Sommier); Instituto de Estudios Sociales de Andalucía (Manuel Jiménez); and Université de Genève (Marco Giugni). Thanks also to our colleagues Chris, Isabelle, Manuel, Mario and Marco, who led the national teams. While principal investigators are usually the driving forces and have to take responsibility, most of the cumbersome and time-consuming fieldwork for this study was done by their team members, to whom we equally express our gratitude: Massimiliano Andretta, Marko Bandler, Angel Calle, Hélène Combes, Nina Eggert, Nicolas Haeringer, Christoph
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We hope that Meeting Democracy spreads, not only in terms of book copies, but also as a civic spirit among both political activists and researchers.