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978-1-107-02830-2 - Meeting Democracy: Power and Deliberation in Global Justice Movements

Edited by Donatella della Porta and Dieter Rucht

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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.

Donatella della Porta is Professor of Sociology in the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the European University Institute. Her main fields of research are social movements, the policing of public order, participatory democracy and political corruption. Her previous publications include *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>List of tables</i>	viii
<i>List of contributors</i>	x
<i>Preface and acknowledgements</i>	xi
1 Power and democracy in social movements: an introduction DONATELLA DELLA PORTA AND DIETER RUCHT	1
2 A methodology for studying democracy and power in group meetings CHRISTOPH HAUG, DIETER RUCHT AND SIMON TEUNE	23
3 Types and patterns of intragroup controversies DIETER RUCHT	47
4 Patterns of participation CLARE SAUNDERS AND CHRISTOPHER ROOTES	72
5 Power and arguments in global justice movement settings MASSIMILIANO ANDRETTA	97
6 Emotions in movements DONATELLA DELLA PORTA AND MARCO GIUGNI	123
7 Quality of deliberation: a multilevel analysis MARCO GIUGNI AND ALESSANDRO NAI	152
8 Structurelessness: an evil or an asset? A case study CHRISTOPH HAUG AND DIETER RUCHT	179

v

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02830-2 - Meeting Democracy: Power and Deliberation in Global Justice Movements

Edited by Donatella della Porta and Dieter Rucht

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi	Contents	
9	Power and democracy: concluding remarks DONATELLA DELLA PORTA AND DIETER RUCHT	214
	<i>Appendices</i> Research instruments	236
	<i>Appendix A</i> General group portrait	236
	<i>Appendix B</i> Session report	243
	<i>Appendix C</i> Discourse protocol	252
	<i>Index</i>	271

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02830-2 - Meeting Democracy: Power and Deliberation in Global Justice Movements

Edited by Donatella della Porta and Dieter Rucht

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Figures

4.1 Duration of meetings and number of participants	<i>page</i> 86
4.2 Frequency of meetings and number of participants	87
4.3 Duration of agenda items and participation in agenda items	88
5.1 Typology of 'power' over/in communication	101

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02830-2 - Meeting Democracy: Power and Deliberation in Global Justice Movements

Edited by Donatella della Porta and Dieter Rucht

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Tables

2.1 Overview of the groups studied	<i>page</i> 27
3.1 Types of interaction in a controversy	58
3.2 Forms of communication	61
3.3 Modes of decision-making in group meetings	62
3.4 Themes of controversies	62
3.5 Distribution of types of controversies	63
3.6 Distribution of subcategories of deliberation	63
3.7 Types of controversies by group characteristics	64
3.8 Types of controversies by type of decision and outcome	65
4.1 Percentage of female participants engaged in controversies	78
4.2 Characteristics of controversies and participation by women	79
5.1 Outcome and mode of decisions by type of power used during decision-oriented controversies	108
5.2 Typology of 'convincing arguments' when preferences diverge	109
6.1 Degree of negative emotional tension during controversies by country	130
6.2 Degree of negative emotional tension during controversies by group	132
6.3 Degree of negative emotional tension and type of power	139
6.4 Degree of negative emotional tension and mode of decision	140
6.5 Degree of negative emotional tension and outcome of controversy	141
6.6 Degree of negative emotional tension and number of participants	141
7.1 Number of agenda items and controversies by group	165

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02830-2 - Meeting Democracy: Power and Deliberation in Global Justice Movements

Edited by Donatella della Porta and Dieter Rucht

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

List of tables	ix
7.2 Estimates of effects of selected independent variables on the presence of controversies	167
7.3 Average scores on the Index of Deliberative Quality of controversies and its components by group	170
7.4 Estimates of effects of selected independent variables on the quality of deliberation	172
8.1 Overview of group meetings	188
B.1 Session report – example	244
C.1 Discourse protocol – example	253

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02830-2 - Meeting Democracy: Power and Deliberation in Global Justice Movements

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02830-2 - Meeting Democracy: Power and Deliberation in Global Justice Movements

Edited by Donatella della Porta and Dieter Rucht

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii Preface and acknowledgements

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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978-1-107-02830-2 - Meeting Democracy: Power and Deliberation in Global Justice Movements

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface and acknowledgements

xiii

Haug, Ilhame Haiji, Raffaella Marchetti, Lorenzo Mosca, Alessandro Nai, Herbert Reiter, José Manuel Robles, Clare Saunders, Simon Teune, Mundo Yang and Duccio Zola. All of them contributed not only to the empirical collection of the data but also, with rigour and passion, to the interpretation of the results. We also thank Wolfgang Stuppert, who assisted us during the research. Sarah Tarrow was extremely helpful and efficient in copy-editing the manuscript whose chapters, with the exception of our British friends, were written by non-native speakers. Donatella della Porta is grateful for an advanced ERC grant from the European Commission, which helped her complete the work for this book. Finally, we express our gratitude to the activist groups that agreed to the participant observation for an extended period. This is by no means trivial because it was clear that this observation might also expose internal group conflicts and other kinds of problems. Without the consent of the groups, this kind of research would have been impossible.

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.