

Autores Varios

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THE INTERNET AND THE 15M MOBILIZATIONS IN SPAIN:  
CONTINUITIES AND DISRUPTIONS OF THE GLOBAL JUSTICE  
MOVEMENT

*INTERNET Y LAS MOVILIZACIONES DEL 15M EN ESPAÑA.  
CONTINUIDADES Y RUPTURAS CON EL MOVIMIENTO POR LA JUSTICIA  
GLOBAL*

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**ABSTRACT:** This article presents an empirical analysis, examining if and how the practice of adoption of ICTs could partly explain the continuities and disruptions of the organizational forms of the mobilizations that have taken place in Spain since May 15, 2011, in contrast with the Global Justice Movement wave of mobilization in the early 2000s. The methodology is based on case studies, with interviews and participant observation of both the Barcelona *acampada* of 2011 as part of the 15M, and the fifth European Social Forum as part of the Global Justice Movement. The analysis of the organizational form of the mobilization takes into account a set of features: space, time, scope, and composition, and ultimately the impact on the scale of the mobilization, and the ability to influence public debate.

**KEYWORDS:** 15 May Mobilization in Spain; Global Justice Movement; Information and Communication Technologies.

**RESUMEN:** El artículo ofrece un análisis empírico sobre si, y cómo, la tipología de adopción de las TICs contribuye a explicar las continuidades y rupturas de la forma organizacional de las movilizaciones ocurridas en España desde el 15 de mayo de 2011, con respecto a la adoptada por la ola de movilizaciones del Movimiento por la Justicia Global a comienzos de los años 2000. La metodología empleada se basa en estudios de caso, con entrevistas y observación participante, e incluye la acampada del año 2011 en Barcelona, como parte del 15M, y el Quinto Foro Social Europeo como parte del Movimiento por la Justicia Global. Para el análisis de la forma organizacional de las movilizaciones se ha considerado un conjunto de características: su espacio, tiempo, alcance, composición y, finalmente, su impacto sobre la escala de la movilización y su capacidad para influir sobre el debate público.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** 15M; Movimiento por la Justicia Global; Tecnologías de la Información y Comunicación.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This article examines the adoption of the Internet and information and communication technologies (ICTs) in European social movements. It aims to analyse if, how and to what extent the continuities and disruptions of the adoption of ICTs between the Global Justice Movement and the current wave of mobilizations impacted the scale of mobilization and influenced public debate.

Long before the Internet, De Tocqueville (1945) stressed the importance of information flows in collective action. As these information flows become richer, social interactions increase and intensify. Benkler (2006) exposed how far the Internet and, more generally, ICTs altered the distribution of costs of collective action. This new distribution favours the emergence of forms of cooperation that would otherwise be very unlikely to happen, such as Wikipedia, a collaborative writing encyclopaedia. There has already been empirical investigation into how the changes in transaction costs linked to the adoption of ICTs have shaped the emerging forms of collective action. This field of empirical analysis – still emerging and dispersed, but growing – has focused mainly on forms of interaction and collaboration that take place mainly through a platform of online participation such as Wikipedia or communities interested in free and open-source software programming. Similar transformations and other questions could be investigated in cases beyond the online creation communities (OCCs) that were at the centre of the first wave of empirical work. In this regard, the current wave of social mobilizations – with large social mobilizations occurring mainly since 2011 in several places such as the Arab countries, Iceland, Greece and the United States – offers another area for investigation, in order to determine if and how ICTs contribute to and shape the organization of collective action (Bennet & Segerberg, 2012; Bennet, Segerberg & Walker 2014; Castells, 2012; Juris, 2008; Mattoni, 2012). Online-based collective action is not the only form of collective action that seems to be affected by the adoption of ICTs; beyond the online sphere, collective action for political mobilization purposes is also affected.

Spain witnessed a surprising wave of social mobilization which started on May 15, 2011 (15M – alternatively known as the *indignados* movement) with some of the largest demonstrations since the country transitioned to democracy

in the 1970s, and *acampadas*, the occupation of public squares. 15M offers another area for investigation of the contribution of ICTs to the scalability of mobilization and the adoption of organizational forms.

As its principal slogans stated, these series of mobilizations demanded a radical change in the political system, a “Real democracy now” (DRY), and rejected the status quo of “a commodity of politicians and bankers.” The mobilization started with a surprising demonstration organized mainly via social networks – Facebook and Twitter – on May 15, 2011, staged close to the local and regional election due to be held on May 22. According to a survey released by Metroscopia (a Spanish private statistical institute) in June 2011, the majority of Spanish people (81%) considered that the *indignados* had good reasons to mobilize.

This paper aims to examine how much the adoption of ICTs contributed to the organizational form of the mobilizations that have happened in Spain since May 15, 2011. The organizational form refers to a set of features: space, time, scope, and composition, and ultimately the impact on the scale of the mobilization, and the ability to influence public debate. To have a point of comparison and provide a cross-temporal analysis, the 15M case will be compared with the previous cycle of mobilization within the Global Justice Movement (GJM). In 1999, a demonstration in Seattle against the World Trade Organization (WTO) became breaking news. The GJM was an international *movement of movements*, comprised of a confluence of movements against the injustice caused by the models of economic globalization promoted by global institutions.

This text will firstly present the cases studies and the methodology. It will present the ICTs employed in each case, and then analyse how the various uses of ICTs could have shaped the organizational form of the mobilization.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The 15M will be analysed using the Barcelona *acampada* of 2011. *Acampadas* – occupations of the main squares in cities across Spain – took place

after the large demonstration on May 15, 2011. The *acampadas* are considered one of the primary expressions of the 15M mobilization. *Acampada* Barcelona was like a town in the central square of Barcelona. Tents, kitchens, a library, etc., were set up, and thousands of people lived in or frequented the space. At the centre of the square, a forum of speeches, working groups, and assemblies were active during the day.

The GJM will be analysed using the case of the fifth European Social Forum (ESF), which took place in September 2008 at Malmö (Sweden). The ESF was the main gathering – which happened annually or biennially from 2002 to 2010 – of social movements of the GJM in Europe (Doerr, 2009). The ESF was the European part of the World Social Forum, which started in 2001 as a meeting of alternatives and as a critique of the neoliberal approach of the World Economic Forum at Davos. At the European Social Forums, feminist movements, trade unions, and environmental movements met with various NGOs including those seeking solidarity for the South Hemisphere. The meeting of the Social Forums was a reference event during the GJM wave of mobilization (Della Porta, 2004).

Both ESF 5 and Barcelona's *acampada* were central cases in the broader movements they were part of: GJM and 15M respectively. However, any comparison of the *acampada* and the ESF has a series of limitations that will be taken into consideration. On the one hand, the ESF has a continental dimension, while the *acampada* has a national dimension. Additionally, while the *acampada* coincides with the first year of the 15M mobilization, ESF 5 took place several years before the “start” of the GJM (Della Porta, 2004). On the other hand, both the ESF and the *acampada* were specific cases among broader movements. Different conclusions might have resulted had we used a different set of cases, such as the People Global Action network for the GJM or Democracia Real Ya for the 15M, which demonstrates the diversity within the movements of which they are part.

The case studies are based on the triangulation of various qualitative methods. Virtual ethnography of the website and tools, and participant observation of the *acampada* and the ESF event, were conducted in order for me to become familiar with the actors, and analyse their technological practices and organizational formats. Fifty-five interviews (33 from the ESF and 23 from the

*acampada* ) and documents from both cases were analysed to obtain the participants' understanding of the role of ICTs in shaping the organization. In the case of the ESF, data was collected in 2007 and 2008, whereas for the case of the *acampada*, data was collected in 2011.

### III. ICTS IN THE 15M AND IN THE GJM

Before reviewing the ICTs adopted by the ESF and the *acampada*, it should be noted that, when comparing the GJM and the 15M, and more specifically the ESF 5 and *acampada* Barcelona, we need to take into consideration the period and various technological contexts. The modern Internet is different from the Internet of 10 years ago. The information and the technology available at the start of the GJM in the late 1990s and that available at the emergence of the 15M case are significantly different, because of changes in Internet accessibility. ADSL had just reached Spain in 1999, while in 2012 65.6% of the Spanish population had access to the Internet (Internet World Stats: December 31, 2011; World Internet User Statistics: March 31, 2012). The availability of information and knowledge from the Internet was also significantly less 10 years ago. Another aspect to consider is that today Internet connectivity on mobile devices is considerably more widespread than 10 years ago, which makes cheaper and faster real-time mass communication possible.

Having disclosed the difference in penetration of ICTs at the time when the GJM started compared to when 15M began, we now compare the ICTs adopted by the ESF and the *acampada*. The comparison reflects similarities, but also differences.

The technology adopted by the ESF organization consisted of two official websites used to provide collectively agreed upon information. Only the webmaster of the site could access and change the content. The ESF also employed mailing lists that provided a forum for e-mail exchange among its members, and members did exchange e-mails or phone calls using regular phones or Skype. Similar features (official website, mailing list, and phone and e-mail exchange) were also employed by the *acampada*. Additionally, ESF set up *openesf.net*, a collaborative workspace and tool. The approach of the *openesf* was to emphasize the collaborative creation of content and its dissemination in a

lateral way, rather than the hierarchical system of the official website. However, the tool was poorly used, resulting in fewer than 1,000 people registering to use it in the 2 years that it was available ([www.openesf.net](http://www.openesf.net), available at Archive.org February 27, 2009). The *acampada* adopted a similar activist-networking platform named N-1. In contrast to the openesf, N-1 attracted a significant number of users. 41,975 users of N-1 registered in one year, 334 of them members of the *acampada* (<https://n-1.cc/pg/groups/243077/acampadabcn/> [accessed May 30, 2012]). Another difference between the cases can be seen in the use of commercial social networks, mainly Facebook and Twitter. None of these social networks were popular at the time of ESF 5, but they significantly gained in popularity since then, and in 2011, the level of social network use in Spain was much higher than in 2008. At the time of the emergence of the 15M movement, 53.6% of Internet users in Spain had an account on a social network (Sysomos [accessed May 30, 2012], Facebook statistics [accessed December 21, 2011], and eMarketer [accessed May 3, 2012]). Although they did not enjoy the level of popularity that they have today, these sites were available in 2008 when the ESF 5 took place. However, ESF activists from several sectors, such as the more institutional left and freedom-of-assembly movements, were critical of the use of social networks and campaigned against their use (Milan, 2013). An ESF activist said: “Using Facebook is like celebrating assembly lines in McDonalds,” referring to the spaces of their adversaries (Interview ESF member, December 13, 2007). In contrast to the ESF organization, the *acampada* made prolific use of Facebook and Twitter; furthermore, it could be said that Facebook was the *acampada*’s starting point. In fact, the broader Internet can be considered the starting point for the initial call to demonstrate on 15M: “After several years of crisis and the absolute inactivity of the Spanish political class in recent months, finally, at the height of the Internet, many movements are being organized by citizens” (Demonstration Call, May 15th). Facebook was where individuals started to create and disseminate the general call to citizens for mobilization on May 15 (Intervention of DRY member DRY, Terrassa *acampada*, June 2011). Additionally, according to our virtual ethnography, the *acampada* also made prolific use of other websites including YouTube, the video sharing site, and Flickr, a photograph repository.

Other technological features used by the *acampada* but not present in the ESF were a set of working tools that supported instant and remote collaborative work and interaction, using tools such as tablets (for collaborative writing of documents), Google maps (to localize activities and map actions), and live streaming (to follow activities remotely in real time).

From the 25 interviews of *acampada* participants, it is clear that there was great support among their initiators for exploring the interactive potential of Internet. However, the ESF was characterized by strong confrontation between those in favour of using interactive tools and those opposed, which ultimately blocked their adoption. Those opposed to the adoption of interactive tools saw them more as a source of risk than a possible way to reinforce mobilization (Fuster Morell, 2009).

As Kavada (2007) remarked about the previous ESF in 2004 in London, the ESF was characterized by a crucial confrontation between two visions of the adoption of ICTs – the *horizontals* and the *verticals*.

While both sides praised the value of ICTs for disseminating information, the horizontals were more appreciative of their use for collaboration, while the verticals feared that too much online deliberation might drain energy for action (Kavada, 2007).

This confrontation was less extreme in the ESF 5 of 2008; however, the contrast was still present. While in 2004, tension arose from the use and control of more than one official website (Kavada, 2007), in 2008, tension resulted from the adoption of the *openesf* networking platform and the protocols that guided participation at *openesf*, and specifically about the degree of openness and use of the tools to expand participation (beyond those participating in physical meetings) (Fuster Morell, 2009).

This confrontation was less intense at other times and in different sectors of the GJM; however, it was transversally present in the GJM (Kavada, 2007).

Just as the ESF adopted an activist networking platform by setting up *openesf.net*, the *acampada* also adopted a similar platform, N-1. However, the *acampada* differed from the ESF in that it not only used an activist networking platform, but also used Facebook as its first online touchpoint – a corporate social network that even the *horizontals* of the ESF refused to use.

Having compared the adoption of ICTs in each case, we will now analyse how the adoption of these diverse ICTs could explain the different organizational formats of the case studies.

#### IV. CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY BETWEEN THE GLOBAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT AND 15M

The following section contrasts the *acampada* with the ESF, and examines how the diverse ICTs adopted by each could explain their organizational features. We consider similarities and contrasts and take into account space, time, scope, and composition, and ultimately the impact on scale, and intervention in public debate.

##### *IV.1. Space: Digital arena for action and meta-coordination*

Commonalities between both cases could be pointed out in the range of action. Firstly, both used street demonstrations as one of their principal expressions of protest. With regard to blocking summits of global organizations, such as those called by the ESF on the European Union or the G8, in June 2011 the *acampada* also called for a blockade of the Catalan Regional Parliament to stop the approval of social budget cuts.

Secondly, another major distinctive action of the *acampada* is the occupation of central squares. Catalunya Square was occupied from 16 May to the end of June 2011. The occupation consisted of the construction of a city in the square where citizens lived and slept, with, among other things, a kitchen, a health service, an information point, and a library. According to our participant observation and the calendar of activities of the *acampada*, the square also became a forum, in the sense that a program of activities of discussion and debate was implemented (Barcelona *acampada* web calendar [accessed May 20, 2012]). The ESF was not characterized by long occupations of central squares; however, the ESF consisted of the congregation of activists from the whole of Europe in one city. During the 4 days, a forum of activities was created.

Finally, another characteristic of the *acampada* was the development of direct actions such as solidarity actions against housing evictions for mortgage non-payment or actions against the closure of neighbourhood primary-care centres, consistent with the direct actions celebrated during the ESF (Doerr, 2009).

In summary, even in diverse settings there are commonalities between the cases in the actions celebrated in the streets. However, a first aspect that we would like to highlight in the contrast between the ESF and the *acampada* is the increased importance of the digital arena as a space of contention for actions and protest. Despite the frequent off-line activities of the *acampada*, the range of action of the *acampada* also included cyber actions or actions in the digital arena, such as the promotion of a distributed denial-of-service attack (DDoS attack). A DDoS attack is an action based on disturbing the functioning of a website – such as a police website – by overloading it with visits. The ESF also operated in the digital arena, and cyber actions such as e-mail bombing were developed in the GJM (Loader, 2008). However, in contrast to the ESF, in the *acampada*, according to my observations, the use of the digital arena as a space of contention and the use of online direct action gained centrality.

It seems that the digital arena is central in another sense beyond becoming a space of contention and protest. The digital arena also played a role in the meta-coordination of mobilization and acted as a space of public communication with the movement audience of the *acampada*.

As pointed out in the previous section, the *acampada* adopted several ICTs. These ICTs interact with each other. According to my analysis, the connections created by *conversational* flows between the official website and commercial social networks such as Facebook groups, hash tags on Twitter, and mailing lists, as well as the organizational support of streaming technologies and content management systems such as wikis or PADstables, and the N-1 activist networking platform created an informational ecosystem. In this informational ecosystem, the information flow related to the *acampada* was not limited to the tools and accounts managed or controlled by the *acampada*. This ecosystem also encompassed the mass media such as newspapers and TV. According to Jenkins (2006), the online media did not replace the traditional media, but developed a convergence culture based on creating an online ecosystem where viral messages

on the Internet arrived in the media that qualify as mainstream (such as newspaper or television news), and also caught the attention of the news network, thus creating a dynamic pendulum between traditional media and the Internet.

The informational ecosystem seems to reinforce the organization not only from a communicative perspective, – i.e. it favours the spreading of messages in public spheres to reach large sectors of society – but also from an organizational perspective. The coordination among the various committees and groups involved in the *acampada*, and the coordination between the *acampada* and other networks of 15M, was supported by the online spaces. In this regard, the informational ecosystem contributed to the meta-coordination of the organization. Furthermore, some interviewees stressed that the ecosystem facilitated creating working capacity to support collaborative work through the use of working tools and access to information and knowledge online. As a participant of *acampada* said:

I use Twitter to follow the stages of activity in the square or to see if there is an urgent call to support an action. However, it is also worth noting that even when we are in meetings, tablets are useful to take notes of the meeting as it happens, without needing to wait for someone to write up the minutes after the meetings.... It increases our organizational capacity (Interview, *acampada* member, October 15, 2011).

Drawing on this comparison of the use of the digital arena by both the ESF and the *acampada*, we can deduce that the digital arena used by the ESF was considerably smaller – it only used official websites, a mailing list, and made limited use of an activist networking platform – and less connected with minor conversational flows between the several applications used. It provided only a small number of working tools and channels to intervene in the online public sphere, reach society through the public sphere, and increase its working capacity. Altogether, this suggests that the ESF operated within a less complex and less rich informational ecosystem than the *acampada*.

In summary, according to our analysis, in contrast to the ESF, the *acampada* seems to be characterized by a more sustained use of the digital arena

as a space of contention and in its repertoire of actions. Furthermore, the adoption of more ICT applications in the *acampada*, and, more importantly, the favouring of informational flows between official and unofficial media created an informational ecosystem that contributed to expanding the *acampada*'s ability to reach a larger part of society, and strengthen its work capacities, to the point where the digital arena became an important space to support and channel the communications and organizational dimension of the *acampada*. Even if the role of digital arena was greater in the *acampada* than in the ESF, this does not imply that off-line activity did not remain central. As presented previously, the repertoire of action off-line appears to be important and similar in both cases.

Furthermore, as Kavada (2007) concluded in her analysis of ESF 4, even if the e-mail exchanges and e-lists by activists played a role in information exchange and the preparation of decisions, the decisions and in the ability to influence the movement was based on participation in the physical meetings at the ESF. Similarly, even if the digital arena had increased in importance at the *acampada*, the role of physical meetings is still highlighted as significant for the *acampada*. As an activist from the Barcelona *acampada* pointed out:

At the start of the *acampadas* I lived outside Spain. Even so, I was doing networking, writing press reports, creating international connections, all through the Net. Even from a distance, I was productive. However, something that has not changed from the GJM is that we still need 'to be (physically) there.' You can contribute from a distance, but you still need to attend (physical) meetings to influence decisions. The meritocracy of the movement is still based more on attending meetings than doing actual work (*Acampada* member, Barcelona, October 29, 2011).

#### *IV.2. Time: The acceleration of processes*

A series of episodes at the *acampada* points toward the increasing ability to respond to calls in much less time. With regard to the organization of mobilizations, our participants reported that the *acampada* itself was organized in only two days. It took place just after the Madrid *acampada* started on May 15. Also, the mass action on June 14 and 15, 2011, to block the Catalan Parliament's approval of health and education budget cuts, was organized within

only one week. The reaction to police oppression is another area in which we could observe the capacity to accelerate reactions. According to our participant observation at Catalonia Square, during an attempted eviction of the *acampada* on May 27th, within minutes messages had spread through Twitter and Facebook, reporting what was happening and calling on supporters to come to the square, resulting in more people moving towards the square. The capacity for fast reaction was also observed in targeted direct actions such as massive chains of actions by dispersed individuals to block the functioning of websites.

The adoption of ICTs by the *acampada*, and, importantly, increased access to the Internet via mobile phones, seems to have favoured real-time and viral communication, such as through hashtags in Twitter, which could explain the acceleration of times for mobilization, as well as the increased ability to reach a wider sector of society, explaining the much faster and more unpredictable mobilizations.

No episodes of viral communication were tracked in the ESF case. However, in Spain there exist few precedents of viral and fast mobilizations supported by e-lists, e-mail exchanges and SMS messages, the media characteristic of the GJM. The revolt of March 14, 2003, to protest the Government reaction to the Madrid train attacks, was an important Spanish precedent as it was organized by mobile-phone messages on the same day (Sampedro, 2006). Viral mobilization through e-mail exchange was also present in the housing movement of 2006 (Haro, 2010).

In summary, episodes of fast and viral communication are not new and occurred before the *acampada* in Spain. The *acampada*, and more generally, the 15M, seem to have built on those experiences. What seems to have changed is the continuous or organic character of the virality, as supported by technology that increases and makes for more affordable real-time communication. Although, as we saw during the GJM, fast and viral mobilization was episodic, and occurred only in moments of high conflict (Sampedro, 2006), during the 15M this sort of mobilization was recurrent and emerged in a higher diversity of targets and situations.

#### *IV.3. Scope: Maxi and mini, broad and targeted, mega urban and urban mobilization*

Large demonstrations linked to the *acampada* took place in Barcelona, Spain, during 2011 – such as the demonstration on May 15 with 15,000 people and June 19 with 200,000 people according to organizers (50,000 according to the police) – though smaller than some that took place during the GJM cycle, organized by the Social forum process – such as the 1 million people demonstrating in Barcelona against the Iraq War on February 15, 2003. Additionally, the *acampada* of Barcelona, as well as that of Madrid in 2011, were among the longer and larger occupations of a public space during Spanish democracy.

The interviews of *acampada* participants revealed that the ICTs adopted by the *acampada* supported the organization of these large expressions of protest. Interviewees pointed to a plurality of ways in which ICTs supported the organization of large mobilizations. These can be grouped in four categories: the identification of common interest and wills; the provision of spaces to communicate and coordinate actions; the provision of channels to spread and amplify calls; and the provision of spaces to report on actions.

Beyond the organization of large demonstrations, in both cases several interviewees stressed that the scalability of mobilization not only referred to the organization of large protest events, but also to the ability to mobilize for specific or targeted goals. In the words of an *acampada* participant:

It does not make sense to organize only ‘big’ demonstrations, but coordination through the Internet also supports reaching sufficient people for a very specific target. That is, to mobilize people around a specific goal, such as blocking the eviction of a neighbour for mortgage non-payment. This is central to the movement, because it is truly solidarity, as we are able to block evictions and help ‘real’ people (Interview with member of the *acampada*, August 15, 2011).

Finally, scalability also refers to geographical expansion; mobilization not only took place in large urban areas, but there were also increased mobilizations in smaller cities and towns. In this regard, the demonstration on May 15 triggered mobilizations in at least 58 cities in Spain and *acampadas* were present in as many localities, not only in the major cities such as Barcelona (15Mpedia [accessed June 10, 2012]).

In sum, the adoption of ICTs by the *acampada* seems to have supported this flexibility in mobilization, characterized by the ability to scale up to large demonstrations in big urban areas, and scale down to targeted actions in a small urban area. This feature, even if in minor degrees, was also characteristic of how the social forum expanded geographically in many large and medium cities in Spain (e.g. by congregating social forums such as the Catalan social forum). Still, the analysis of the *acampada* seems to suggest that it had a greater capacity to develop specifically targeted actions, which could be connected to the greater accessibility of very specific information and knowledge related to those actions.

#### *IV.4. Composition: Ecosystem-like combination of several degrees and forms of contribution*

The GJM meeting at the ESF was characterized as a *movement of movements* composed of social movement organizations of various types. The 15M *acampada* also brought together or networked with other movements, but according to our analysis its composition seemed more complex and diverse than the GJM meeting at the ESF. In fact, interviewees characterized the *acampada* more by its aggregation capacity of autonomous wills, than by its networking capacity. “It is as if our actions were *swarms* of people; whoever felt connected to a particular action, – such as occupying a hospital or an unemployment office to prevent their closure – joined the action” said an *acampada* participant (Interview *acampada* participant, August 15, 2011). Similarly, the metaphor *swarm* appeared on the *acampada* Twitter account: “To all the bees, remember tomorrow we fly against the cuts, culminating at San Jaume Square at 6pm” This tweet was then “retweeted” (meaning it was resent to individual recipients’ own networks of contacts and friends), helping to spread the call without the intervention of other intermediaries. The use of the metaphor *swarm* captures the movement’s ability to aggregate by communality and contagiousness based on both individual, as well as collective, autonomy to join the actions.

Additionally, if, as suggested in our previous analysis, the digital arena of *acampada* 15M can be characterized as an informational ecosystem, this ecosystem-like character seems to also be a feature of the composition of the *acampada*.

On the basis of our observation, participation is organized in a way that accommodates a great diversity of types and degrees of availability of resources and takes into account people's interest in engaging with the mobilization. At the *acampada*, we observed a range of people: from highly committed people, who occupied the *acampadas* daily, to others who from their homes or workplaces contributed by retweeting messages. This allowed active citizens to contribute in their own ways, creating an ecosystem between strong and weak forms of commitment. In other words, active and committed participants were present, but sporadic or low contributors were also present and absent at different times.

Furthermore, the interviews and slogans pointed towards a citizen identity, in contrast to an activist identity as a mobilized minority. The 99% against the 1% was one of the repeated slogans. In the words of an *acampada* participant:

The 15M is based on the 99%, challenging the image of the strong activist hero or professional activists as the essential components of the mobilization.... 15M has also been a critique of previous activist forms (Intervention by *acampada* participant at LaTele, debate on the elections results, November 22, 2011).

A weak form of participation was also present at the ESF. However, the composition of the ESF pointed to a professionalization of participation over time (Della Porta et al., 2004), in other words, to stronger forms of engagement.

Weak forms of participation, such as attending the calls without contributing to their organization, are not necessarily connected to ICTs. However, the larger digital arena of the *acampada* opened forms of contribution through online settings, and seem to have contributed to the expansion of mobilization formats, giving centrality to "weak" forms of contribution, in contrast with the strong and professional activism of ESF.

The diversity we have observed at the *acampada* not only refers to the degree of involvement (from weak to strong), but also to the typologies of involvement: from individuals to several types of groups engaging in the process. A significant feature of the *acampada* was that individual forms of participation, rather than the participation of just organizations or groups, seemed to gain centrality in the *acampada*, which contrasts with the ESF.

Individual forms of participation were present in some sectors of the GJM, specifically the more autonomy-oriented and different generations of activism emerging from the GJM such as the Global Resistance Movement of Catalonia (Juris, 2008). However, individual participation at the GJM was a point of tension, if not directly rejected at the Social Forums (Fuster Morell, 2009). To register or intervene at the ESF assemblies, individuals were required to have an organizational affiliation, and similar approaches were present in the participation in online spaces.

As an Italian activist of the ESF said:

(At the ESF there is) a culture too connected to the traditional organizational logic ... that assumes that communication must pass through the control of organizations. The fact that there are individuals who directly communicate and do not pass through the filter of the representation of organizations is a factor interpreted as risk, disorder and chaos (Interview, ESF member, December 13, 2007).

There were some signs of tensions around individual participation at the *acampada* – for instance, the order of interventions in the assemblies, allowing collective interventions first, followed by individual ones, reveals that they were perceived to have different levels of legitimacy. Yet individual participation at least had a loose centrality at the *acampada* as individual interventions were allowed. Participation as individuals seemed possible in any instance of participation at the *acampada*. Additionally, during our ethnography of the *acampada*, we observed that multiple-belonging or distribution of activist participation across groups was also present in the *acampada*, an observation also made by a previous analysis of the ESF in the GJM (Della Porta et al., 2004). Additionally, the format of networked individuals, or non-belonging individuals, seems to have played a relevant role in maintaining the *acampada* informational ecosystem, but also in the functioning of the *acampadas*. These individuals are not members of, nor do they *participate* in or belong to, any stably organized initiative, but they participate through their own personal channels (namely e-mails among their friends, Tweets, personal blogs, and so on), recombining and

disseminating messages and thereby expanding the movements' public influence. As a member of DRY from New York City pointed out:

Single Spanish immigrants in New York have been specially active concerning Spanish immigrants' engagement with the 15M through the Internet..., I translate materials, or spread them to the USA even without knowing the people, which helps its internationalization (Interview, DRY New York member, September 17, 2011).

A programmer based in Boston said:

I am losing touch with the 15M because I am here, but we (referring to his partner who is also Spanish) were following everything, 24h hours on the Internet!... I developed a visualization tool to analyse the Twitter flows on 15M. At least I can do this (Interview with Spanish immigrant in Boston, March 21, 2012).

These testimonies also highlight that individuals seemed to have more autonomy. This increased individual autonomy is found in channels of engagement or participation where there are no *gatekeepers* to centralize the planning of participation and distribute its availability; individuals seem to decide where and how they want to contribute, such as in the examples of our previous interviewees, translating materials or programming analytical tools.

Not only did *acampada* interviewees stress that individuals seemed more autonomous in allocating their participation resources in the overall process of these movements, but they also stressed that the availability and replicability of resources to mobilize online, without the intervention of intermediaries, also seemed to favour group autonomy.

"15M is very copyleft" (Interview with member of *acampada* Madrid by Ramones, 2012). "Actions are conceived to be *copy and paste*", referring to the organization of the 'take the beach' campaign, following the 'take the square' one (Intervention by a DRY member in a seminar on communication and civic society, October 28, 2011).

In other words, actions seem to be conceived to be replicated; for example, by occupying other squares or leaving the source of a website of actions open so that they can be copied and replicated elsewhere on the Web, bypassing control mechanisms to use them. Social forums were also replicated. After the first WSF, social forums were also expanded to a regional, national, and local level. However, this replicability was restricted to geographical expansion.

In these first sections, we explored, through the analysis of features of changes linked to the adoption of ICTs across space, time, scope and composition, how these could explain an increase of scale of the *acampada*. In the next section, we will focus on the impact on the *acampada*'s capacity to increase incidence in public debate.

#### *IV.5. Incidence in public debate and policymaking*

According to our analysis, in contrast to the ESF, the *acampada* was in many ways less dependent on mass media to make its voice heard in public debate. A first way refers to reporting on events and police oppression. During the intended eviction of the *acampada* by police forces on May 27, 2011, *acampada* participants, using Twitter and Facebook, spread reports and images taken by them of police beating placid people sitting in the square, causing the oppression to become a trending topic on Twitter, which led to it also being covered by mass media organizations such as the newspaper *El País*. During the suppression of the demonstration of the ESF, members of the communication commission of the ESF reported that they were trying to reach the mass media by talking to journalists or sending press releases (Intervention to ESF general assembly, reporting on the communication commission's activities, December 13, 2007). Additionally, activists taking part at the ESF during the GJM used alternative media to report ESF events and to spread the movement's voice, such as Indymedia, – an open publishing site of activist news, which was innovative then – allowing activists to report events. However, Indymedia is an activist space in the sense that its agenda is restricted to mobilization, and it is not the general news. Twitter and Facebook are not only spaces for news related to activism, but spaces that aggregate general sociality and for which the agenda is much

broader, potentially favouring the conditions to amplify the ability to deliver messages and influence public debate. As a participant of the *acampada* said:

Facebook and Twitter are commercial organizations... with the capacity to censure political content.... These corporations made lots of money during the Arab Revolution, as with the 15M.... There have been more accounts created since the 15M.... That's all true, but these sites are crucial.... We use social networks as mainstream media, they allow us to reach the general public, not only our own circles (Intervention by DRY member, seminar on communication and civic society, October 28, 2011).

In summary, the media practices of the ESF allowed it to enter public debate through channels which avoided the filters of the mass media, or through alternative media whose audience is mainly comprised of activist circles. The *acampada* could make its voice heard in the public debate through the same channels as the ESF, but also through social networks populated not only by activists, but also by society in general, potentially amplifying its ability to engage directly with the general public.

Interviewees also stressed that in contrast to the ESF, the *acampada* had diminished dependence on representative intermediaries or traditional players representing social interests (namely, trade unions and political parties) in the public agenda and in policymaking. At the ESF, participation by trade unions was regular, and although participation by political parties was officially not allowed according to its founding Charter of Principles, in practice, political parties did take part in the ESF organization, such as the Italian Communist Refoundation Party's presence at the organizational assemblies of the ESF.

A first aspect that could explain the reduced relationship of the *acampada* to representative intermediaries, as Della Porta (2004) suggested for the GJM, could be related to the crisis of representative systems and the emerging conception of democracy beyond representation. Likewise, the discourse of the DRY network presents not only a lack of links to major political parties and unions, like the social forum's Charter of Principles, but goes beyond the ESF position in regard to political parties as the *acampada* also questions the role that they play (see the First Manifesto of the DRY). The slogan used in the call to demonstrate on May 15<sup>th</sup> – “We are not commodities of politicians and of

bankers” (First Manifesto of the DRY) – was from the start a critique of the political system. In fact, the view of the *acampada* was that political parties were part of the cause of the political crisis. Additionally, we observed this rejection of the representative format as not only being present in the discourse of the *acampada* and in the set of relationships that it built, but also in its own format. The *acampada* seems to be a type of protest that is in congruence with forms of social movements based on a dynamic of collective action without representatives. The *acampada* declaration clearly states: “We do not represent any party or association. Nor does one represent us.” Seemingly, the *acampada* takes decisions at its assemblies on the basis of consensus, and not on the basis of majorities. The *acampada* opposes the generation of defined representatives and does not base its legitimacy on the principles of representation; its legitimacy seems more based on the continued renewal of the ability to unite voices at crucial moments. Internal forms of representation are further opposed by the preference for policymaking based on moments of unification of wills and the sum or *swarms* of expressions of common interest.

Another aspect that could explain the reduced relationship with representative intermediaries is related to the transaction costs of organization. The transformation of transaction costs linked to the adoption of ICTs could affect the comparative advantages among diverse sectors of social movements: on the one hand, hierarchical organizations of civic society based on the principle of representation (such as trade unions, NGOs and political parties), and, on the other hand, more open and, in principle, horizontal organizations. Before the Internet provided better access to information and knowledge, access to mass media and the ability to raise monetary resources justified the need for hierarchical organizations, and put the hierarchical organizations of civic society in better positions than open and, in principle, horizontal formats and strategies (Bimber, Flanagan, & Stohl, 2012). For example, the major dependence on physical meetings to organize geographically large protests historically favoured trade unions or bureaucratic organizations with easier access to monetary resources. This was the case for the organization of international meetings of the ESF, and previous empirical analysis has demonstrated that hierarchical organizations were better positioned to attend than collective movements (Doerr, 2009; Kavada, 2007). However, in the current context, ICTs which have

the potential to expand the access to information and knowledge through the Internet, could open alternative arenas and ways to access mass media and influence public debate, and ICTs could support the ability to identify common interests and to facilitate collective organization communication at lower monetary costs. Additionally, ICTs could provide alternative sources of funding for groups. This was the case for the *acampada*, which used a crowd-sourcing campaign to finance its costs. Crowdfunding is based on collecting small donations through an online platform to cover the costs of particular goals. Finally, with regard to the intensive use of ICTs, organizations with lower technical knowledge could be at a disadvantage compared to organizations competent in online participation. Altogether, this could result in the decrease of dependency on and need for bureaucratic formats.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

A comparison of the ICTs adopted by both the ESF and the *acampada* shows similarities but also differences. In the cases analysed, both the *acampada* and the ESF adopted communications methods such as official websites, mailing lists, phone, and e-mail exchange among members. Both cases adopted activist networking platforms. However, although the *acampada* made intensive use of activist networking platforms, the ESF initiatives to adopt activist networking platforms eventually failed because they did not attract enough users. The main difference between the cases was the use of commercial social networking sites, mainly Facebook and Twitter. At the time of the ESF, these social networks were already available but much less popular; additionally, ESF activists, and even the more autonomous sectors of the GJM, were critical of using them and campaigned against them. In contrast, the *acampada* made prolific use of Facebook and Twitter. Other technological features used in the *acampada* but not present in ESF were a set of working tools that supported instant collaborative work and remote interaction.

After analysing the distinctions in technological adoption, the organizational forms were analysed and compared between the cases. The

comparison of the adoption of ICTs by the ESF and the *acampada*, with changes in time, space, and scope of the mobilization, points towards a continuing trend across the cases: There is continuity in the repertoire of action and the importance of off-line activity, although in the *acampada* case the digital arena acquires more significance. There is continuity as regards geographical expansion, but the *acampada* shows a slightly greater capacity to engage in very targeted actions. There is continuity concerning those moments of rapid acceleration of mobilization, but with faster and swarm-like reactions becoming more recurrent than sporadic in the *acampada*. However, in our comparison of the effects of the adoption of ICTs between the ESF and the *acampada* for changes in composition of the mobilization, we identified more change, with an increase in the plurality of components, the combination and connection of diverse degrees of engagement, and the major role of the networked individual in the *acampada*. The adoption of social networks, populated by general society, by the *acampada*, and not only sites directed to activist circles as in the case of the ESF, seems to have increased the capacity to engage with more components than the ESF. This observation could be the basis for further investigation in order to explore whether there might be a connection between both aspects. However, other factors might explain the more plural composition of the *acampada*.

Additionally, transversally throughout this article, it was shown how these continuities and changes in space, time, scope and composition of the mobilization relate to the typology of adoption of ICTs, which could ultimately affect the capacity to increase the scale of mobilization, and to intervene in public debate. However, further research and experimentation would be required to corroborate these hypotheses. Firstly, the adoption of ICTs could explain the major ability of the *acampada* to scale mobilizations. The more diverse, interactive, and large digital agenda of the *acampada* seems to have favoured connecting and reaching large sectors and informational fields. This potentially supports the conditions for the aggregation of wills at lower costs by supporting the identification of common interests, the exchange of information and knowledge for decision making, the spread of calls, the coordination of actions and diverse availabilities, and the direct reporting of actors' own viewpoints on specific events, thereby promoting actors' own agendas in public

debate. Particularly, the creation of channels of identification and communication between individuals and groups with several degrees of availability (from the strongly committed, to contributors and supporters), generating an ecosystem of several degrees of availability and forms of contribution, seems an aspect that could have supported the scalability of the *acampada*. Secondly, the *acampada* digital arena could explain a reduced dependency on gatekeepers and intermediaries and their impact on the public debate. Allowing channels for direct access to public debate, bypassing the filters of the mass media, resulted in less dependence on mass media communication to set the public agenda. The *acampada* could make its voice heard in the public debate through the same means as the ESF, but bypassing the filters of the mass media and alternative media, by using social networks populated not only by activists, but also by society in general, amplifying the *acampada*'s ability to engage directly with larger sectors of society and to intervene in the public debate.

To conclude, we would like to point out that the results of this study suggest the emergence in collective action of forms of mobilization that challenge the previous organizational logics of social movements (Ibarra & Tejerina, 1998), and as such invite the expansion of the definitions of social movements that refer to previous waves of mobilization.

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