

Social Movement Organizations in Spain – Being Partial as the Prefigurative Enactment of Social Change

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Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management 2017, Vol:12, issue:4

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to analyze how activists of the Spanish protest movement 15M conceptualize organizational practices in relation to the movement’s goals.

Design/methodology/approach – In order to theoretically understand social movement organizations (SMO), the concept of partial organization is placed within the context of the politics of prefiguration. Empirically, the paper is based on field research conducted in Spain in three consecutive years (2014-2016) that included 82 qualitative interviews and participant observation.

Findings – Activists consider the organizational practices as crucial means to achieve social change. They conceptualize SMO in a meaningful and systematic way as partial organizations, specifically, by aiming at open membership and non-hierarchical structures. As they do this to enact the movement’s goals prefiguratively in their daily organizational practices, the limits and restrictions of the practices of self-organization are widely accepted.

Research limitations – The research focused on studying the relatively young and often very successful organizations of the Spanish movement. It remains open to what extent the prefigurative practices will survive organizational life cycles.

Practical implications –By contributing to a deeper understanding of the underlying philosophy of SMO, this paper is useful for social movement activists and scholars.

Originality/value – This is one of the first papers, which analyzes the organizations of the Spanish protest movement with respect to both empirical and theoretical aspects.

Keywords Organization, partial organization, prefiguration, social movement, Spain, self-organization

1. Introduction

“If you aim at real social change, you need an organized society that is able to enforce it.” (55)¹

Worldwide, we are seeing intensive eruptions of mobilization that include civil society protests, activism and voluntary self-organization (Benski et al., 2013, Kaldor and Selchow, 2013). It is even argued that contemporary societies can be seen as ‘social movement societies’ characterized by the high significance of protest (Quaranta, 2014). Along with this development, there is growing attention to social movements’ organizations (SMO), not only in research but also from activists. While the concept of organization – often associated with formality and hierarchy – had for a long time had a negative connotation among alternative movements, and, at first sight may seem to contradict activists’ principles to uphold

¹ Texts in italics are quotations of interviews; numbers in brackets refer to the number of the interview.

horizontality and fluidity, it has recently appeared in a new light as a means to change society by changing quotidian practices of organizing (Reedy, 2014). Many actors of social movements explicitly refer to alternative forms of organizing in their identity and in their perceptions of the way to achieve societal change.

This was especially obvious in the organizations of the Spanish protest movement 15M that started in 2011 as a reaction to a deep political and economic crisis. Following occupations of city squares in Madrid and other cities, the movement soon spread throughout the entire country. The initial demonstrations had been planned by a platform called Real Democracy Now (DRY, 2011), which included about two hundred organizations. In the years that followed, many new movement organizations were founded and existing organizations gained importance, some of them now having worked successfully for more than five years. All the SMO investigated showed a strong commitment to participation and self-governance, and viewed these elements as crucial for their identity and the lasting effects of the movement. Thus, not only *what* SMO do was considered relevant by activists, but also *how* it was being done.

The purpose of this paper is threefold. First, it shows how SMO aim to shape their organizational practices in relation to the movement's goals. Therefore, it contributes to an understanding of SMO by highlighting the underlying meaning of the practices of self-organization, open membership and the manifold experimentations with organizational practices.

Second, the paper contributes to organizational theory. The concept of partial organization is discussed (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011), critically assessed and combined with prefigurative approaches (e.g. Yates, 2015, Maeckelbergh, 2011). By doing so, it becomes obvious that being partial can be interpreted as a decided order to prefiguratively actualize political ideals in the "here and now". Partial organizations do not use all elements of formal organization, such as hierarchy, membership, rules, monitoring and sanctions. While in literature, partial organizational elements are coined as result of deficits like the lack of resources or difficulties to establish clear hierarchies or control systems, in the light of prefigurative concepts they can be framed as the results of clear and focused decisions.

Third, the paper highlights the value of organisations who do not adopt rigid, centralised and formally structured practices. Compared with conventional organizations, SMO might be seen as unstructured, chaotic, or even aimless, but by constructing the organizations as partial, activists deliberately choose these deviations from traditional formal organizations to implement political ideas not only in their goals and activities but also in their organizational structures.

In the following, the paper first gives an overview of SMO in organizational theory. We argue that due to the little attention that has been given to SMOs, there is much room for

empirically informed theoretical work. Further, it explains the methodology that guided the research process. Based on this, organizational practices in the Spanish movement are analyzed in relation to their goals and their meaning is discussed theoretically by combining the concept of complete and partial organization with the politics of prefiguration. In the conclusion, it is argued that activists design SMO in a partial way to prefiguratively achieve societal goals.

2. SMO in organizational theory

Social movements have always used organizations to advance their goals. Several authors stress the significance of SMO for social movements and argue that they contribute to activism and civic engagement (Hensby et al., 2012) as well as to their sustainability, especially in phases of latency (Münch, 1994), and moreover help to hold social movements together by transforming values into context-specific practices (Maeckelbergh, 2011). However, the theoretical discussion of SMO has intensified only in the recent past (De Bakker et al., 2013, Den Hond et al., 2015, Walker, 2012). SMO still are under-researched, considering that they are not only a phenomenon of quantitative significance, but are also an important condition for the effectiveness and sustainability of social movements. This is in line with Touraine's analysis of the ability of present day social movements to shape society by actions aiming at democracy, freedom and justice (Touraine, 2002, Touraine, 1985), an effort that deserves closer attention.

Up until the early 2000s, organizational scholars did not give much attention to social movement theory (Davis et al., 2008). This could be due to what Reedy characterized as the hegemonic discourse of managerialism (Reedy, 2014). Organizational theory discourse tends to focus on business organizations thereby sustaining the dominant 'myth of organization studies' (March, 2007). Social movement studies, on the other hand, have concentrated on non-routine, fluid and radical activities directed toward social change (Zald, 2008). Diani argues that these studies have often mistakenly described movements as an aggregation of individual units (Diani, 2014).

Yet, organizational scholars have been increasingly drawing on social movement research (Walker, 2012). Part of the discussion deals with the interaction between social movements and corporations, focusing on how movements address and influence corporations (e.g. King, 2008, Briscoe and Safford, 2008). Additionally, it is discussed how social movements can be used to learn about business organizations: mainly to understand organizational change, institution-building and new organizational forms of business organizations such as entrepreneurship (Rao et al., 2000).

2.1. *Prefiguration and anarchist approaches to SMO*

Social movement scholars have only in recent years started to show a heightened interest in the organizations of social movements. The main topics of research have been general internal structures and decision-making processes (Della Porta et al., 2009, Leach, 2009, Kreiss, 2014, Polletta, 2002, Maeckelbergh, 2012, Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2014, Polletta, 2005), leadership and hierarchy (Milam and Heath, 2014, Sutherland et al., 2013, Spicer and Böhm, 2007, Briscoe and Safford, 2008, Western, 2014), tensions and conflicts (Laamanen and Den Hond, 2015, Maeckelbergh, 2012), and everyday routines (Glass, 2010, Tilly, 1995). While some of these contributions are situated in critical leadership studies (Sutherland et al., 2014), the contributions that relate to organizational theory refer mainly to the concepts of anarchist or prefigurative organizations.

Many scholars argue that the organizations of the new social movements show features of anarchist organizational concepts (Gibson, 2013, Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2011, Epstein, 1991, Graeber, 2011, Bratich, 2007, Imas et al., 2012). Anarchist approaches (Reedy, 2014, Graeber, 2002) argue for the necessity of a theoretical re-framing of organizations. The inherent democracy in SMO is seen as a starting point for developing theory. They criticize that the alternative sites of organizations are usually conceptualized with respect to conventional ones, thus defining them by what they are not (Wachhaus, 2012), on the basis of normative models that support the dominance of the imperatives of hierarchy, control and economic instrumentality (Parker, 2002). The key principles of anarchist thinking are the rejection of imposed political authority, hierarchy and domination. They aim at a decentralized and self-regulating society, consisting of a federation of voluntary associations of free and equal individuals (Marshall, 1993) with rules worked out within communities that are voluntarily accepted or rejected by equal and free individuals. The ideal anarchist organization is thus essentially made up of dynamic, negotiated and fluid processes (Reedy, 2014) that are decentralized, non-hierarchical and, whenever possible, based on consensus decision-making (Graeber, 2002).

Moreover, it is argued that prefigurative approaches are basic principles in many current SMO (Den Hond et al., 2015, Laamanen and Den Hond, 2015, Maeckelbergh, 2011). The term “prefiguration” was coined by Carl Boggs and refers to the “embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal” (Boggs, 1977). Thus, concepts of prefiguration deal with the question how social change can be enacted (Epstein, 2002, McCowan, 2010, Siltanen et al., 2014, Van de Sande, 2013, Yates, 2014). This is expressed in popular slogans such as “acting as if one is already free” (old anarchist principle, recently popularized (Graeber, 2011) or “being the change you wish to see in the world” (attributed to Mahatma Ghandi). Prefiguration is a heterogeneous concept, meaning the way in which

protest is performed, where the means reflect the ends (Graeber, 2002) and the way how movements build institutions and organize (for an overview see Yates, 2015). Thus, the focus is on creating alternatives, involving alternative or additional sets of activities, communities and ways of life (Breines, 1989), and the “literal embodiment” of prefigured alternatives (Juris, 2008). A main goal of prefigurative politics is the disruption of “dominant” (e.g. Young and Schwartz, 2012), “hegemonic” (e.g. Polletta, 1999) or “mainstream” (e.g. Leach, 2013) institutions, which are to be gradually replaced by alternative ones. Proponents of prefigurative politics believe that the transformation towards a more peaceful, democratic and equitable society needs organizations that embody those values from the ground up, because traditional reforms within existing institutions would be insufficient (Rivera, 2012).

The key characteristic of prefigurative alternatives is that they involve practices that foreshadow the desired future of society. In other words, “there is a clear and strong link between means and ends and this is why organizational forms, decision-making processes, and forms of action are not just means to an end, but ends in themselves” (Flesher Fominaya, 2007). Prefiguration refers to the experimental actualization of political ideals in present forms of organizing and social relations. It is argued that not only external messages, but also internal organizing practices of movements matter and that modes of organization and tactics should reflect the future society being sought by the group (Gordon, 2007) in line with the idea that the practices developed by the movement are part and parcel of the movement's aims (Flesher Fominaya, 2007). Laamanen and Den Hond characterize SMO as genuinely prefigurative organizations where “the macro-political alternative is elaborated and practiced – imagined, experimented, and shown – in the micro-political.” (2015). Thus, collective learning processes and social change are enacted: “Movement actors are learning how to govern the world in a manner that fundamentally redesigns the way power operates” (Maeckelbergh, 2011). The views on the effects of prefigurative practices may sometimes seem too optimistic and many authors have argued that these alternative and autonomous practices are embedded in the restrictive contexts of hegemonic powers that seek to stop these experiments (Böhm et al., 2010, Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Nevertheless, in the “contradictory dynamic of both radical demand and recuperation”, autonomy has the potential to open “new ways of thinking and doing politics” (Böhm et al., 2010).

2.2. Applying the concept of partial organization to understand SMO

Anarchist approaches focus on how organizing should work without domination and the concept of prefiguration connects organizational practices to goals for societal change. This paper adds to this discussion by combining these arguments with the theory of complete and partial organization (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011). Ahrne and Brunsson characterize

organization as a decided order and contrast it with other forms of order, namely, with networks as less structured forms of interaction among highly autonomous actors, and with institutions as highly structured forms with little freedom of action. They define complete organizations as including all elements of formal organization such as membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring and sanctions. All these aspects of organization are objects of decisions. Membership refers to who may join the organization, and hierarchy to the right to obligate others to comply with decisions. Rules shape members' actions and monitoring is about the evaluation of compliance with commands and rules, with positive and negative sanctions being the allocation of resources to members. The authors argue that these elements can also be used selectively. They call organizations that do not use all of these elements partial organizations. Thus, the authors conceptualize organization more broadly than the usual concept of formal organizations, allowing for "both 'complete' formal organizations, and for various forms of what we call partial organization — the use of less than all organizational elements" (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011).

The concept is suitable for understanding organizations that differ from conventional business organizations. Some authors thus used it to analyze organizations as well as the organization of social movements (Haug, 2013, Laamanen and Den Hond, 2015, Den Hond et al., 2015). Yet, Reedy (2014) criticizes that although it starts from a critical position, the model again characterizes alternative organizations within conventional frameworks by implicitly assuming "complete organization" as the norm. We argue that "partial" does not need to be judged as "incomplete" or otherwise deficient. On the contrary, it could very well reflect the hybrid character of many SMO, which are not sure if they are (and want to be) organizations or rather less formalized groups and initiatives. Thus, the experience of being "on shaky ground in determining what is organizational and what is not organizational" (Wilhoit and Kisselburgh, 2015) could be eased by a more open concept of organization that moves away from a theoretical focus on only hierarchical organizations. We will further develop two aspects of the concept; namely, the reasons for partial organization and the interpretation of decided and emergent order.

In the following, after explaining the methodology, the study will thus analyze the movement goals and show, how they are reflected in the practices of its organizations. Interestingly, the link between prefiguration and complete and partial organization has not been dealt with intensively so far. The paper will show how these different approaches are connected in the investigated SMO: Specifically, partial elements of these organizations are reflecting movement-goals and are thus directly connected with the prefigurative approach of the SMO to enact goals for societal change in organizational practices. Further, analyzing the data in the light of the concept of partial organization has the potential to question the norm

of complete organizations by highlighting explicit decisions for constructing organizations as partial to contribute to social change.

3. Methodology

Empirically, the paper is based on field research conducted in Spain between October 2014 and April 2016 in Madrid, Valencia and Sevilla. Methodologically, the study follows a circular approach and leverages multiple sources of data, particularly a combination of interviews and participant observation. The data of the entire research was generated by qualitative interviews with 82 interviewees including activists, SMO representatives and experts, lasting from 45 minutes to 2.5 hours. Both long-term activists as well as activists mobilized in the context of the movement were interviewed. Interview partners were initially recruited face-to-face during on-site research and the “first best” principle, and in later stages of research, also by ‘snowball sampling’ (Kruse, 2015). We used narrative interviews (Schütze, 1987), because it allows for openness but also to use key questions. At the beginning, they were designed as rather informal “discovery interviews”. These allowed for the necessary degree of flexibility and openness. As organization turned out to be a topic of high relevance for activists within different contexts in a progressed stage of research, the approach was focused and the coding refined regarding organization (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Thus, the approach was guided by the grounded theory methodology as a suitable approach to generate a new theory from data. Despite the diversity of organizations, activities and people involved, these SMO have much in common regarding their organizational principles.

All 82 interviews were recorded and 36 interviews, which were specifically fruitful for organizational topics and thus used more intensively for this paper, were transcribed, coded and analyzed, especially with regard to the activists’ views on organizational practices and societal goals. The analysis focused on the activists’ rationale and motivations for specific forms of organizing. As multiple cases are likely to support a better grounded and more accurate theory-building (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, Yin, 2013), the theoretical sampling followed the aim to cover the broad spectrum of heterogeneous actors and initiatives. It was orientated on the principles of grounded theory methodology regarding the simultaneous phases of data collection and analysis, the building and refining of codes and categories, and the contrasting of data and concepts.

Regarding the socio-demographic background of the interviewees, the sample covers people from the age of 21 to the age of 75, academics as well as the unemployed and people without formal education, activists from various cities as well as from rural areas. Organizations in the sample include nation-wide SMO like “PAH”, the platform for mortgage victims; internationally-operating SMO like “Youths with No Future”; smaller SMO like

“Protest-Grandparents”; soup kitchens; an advocate’s initiative; occupied houses; a women’s centre; a time bank.

To avoid disadvantages of using single methods (Flick, 1992a, Flick, 1992b) and to allow for open-mindedness in the research process (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007), data gained from interviews were complemented with insights from 30 incidents of passive participant observation in meetings and other activities. Short summaries of these observations were drafted immediately afterwards. They were not coded but used as background information. Documents like resolutions, minutes, self-descriptions and articles in social media were also considered to enrich the background knowledge, although they were not analyzed in detail. With respect to validation (Denzin, 1978, Flick, 2002), these summaries and the general interpretation of the data were discussed in an ongoing process by the authors.

Thus, the analysis is primarily based on data gained from interviews with SMO activists. These self-descriptions allow to uncover the at times implicit knowledge on which everyday organizing practices are grounded, and most of the activists did not neglect the problems, tensions and conflicts or the necessity of intensive learning processes as a basis for constructing organizations in a prefigurative way. Nonetheless, it is a limitation of the study that the degree to which the aspired processes are implemented in daily practices was not analyzed thoroughly.

Further, the research focused on studying the relatively young, successfully operating organizations of the Spanish movement. It remains open to what extent the structures of self-governance will survive organizational life cycles. The further institutionalization of parts of the movement in the guise of new parties, for example, showed the gradual reduction of partial elements such as egalitarian structures, a development that went along with the success achieved in elections and with formalization.

Recently, conditions for the SMO investigated have deteriorated. This is due partly to reduced activism as a consequence of the movement’s cycle, but also to stricter laws on public security and terrorism prevention that restrict even non-violent engagement (Simsa and Berraquero-Díaz, 2015). The effects of these developments remain to be assessed.

4. The Spanish movement, its goals and organizational practices

4.1. The movement’s goals and practices

In 2011, dissatisfaction with the economic and political status quo in Spain led to the protest movement, called 15M, or, likewise the movement of the Indignados, the outraged (Feenstra and Keane, 2014, Hughes, 2011, Perugorría and Tejerina, 2013, Taibo, 2011a, Taibo, 2011b). In the following years, there has been a massive increase in nonviolent protests and other forms of civic engagement.

The movement began quite surprisingly for many people, yet it showed elements of continuity with former manifestations in Spain regarding themes and forms of organizing as well as connections with other movements like feminist movements (Gómez Fuentes, 2015), the free culture movement (Morell Fuster, 2012), anti-capitalist movements (Bieler, 2011, Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010) and autonomist movements (Flesher Fominaya, 2014). It also exhibited characteristics similar to other current movements such as in the heterogeneous composition of the participants (Taibo, 2013, Kraushaar, 2012), the high significance of public space (Benski et al., 2013, Flesher Fominaya, 2014), and the use of social media (Anduiza et al., 2013).

The movement's goals are very broad. The initial manifest, which formed a core part of the movement's identity, demanded "equality, progress, solidarity, freedom of culture, sustainability and development, welfare and people's happiness" especially the "right to housing, employment, culture, health, education" and "political participation" (DRY, 2011). The manifest presented itself as moderate, targeting "ordinary people". Activists reclaimed "the notion of citizenship" and "new political orientations that reflect the changing economic and social conditions in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis" (Gerbaudo, 2016).

The core goals reflected in most of the movement's activities and communications can be clustered into four aspects: a change of the economic system, political representation, inclusion, and solidarity. These goals are mentioned quite unanimously by most interviewees. First, the economic goals question the hegemonic system as such: "The interests of people shall regain priority over the interests of capital" (2). Activists reflect upon the neoliberal model as an underlying cause of the crisis. They aim at heterodox economic concepts to secure the redistribution of wealth; at the revalorization and redistribution of remunerated and unpaid work; and at a solidarity-based economy. Second, starting with the slogan "They do not represent us", the movement criticized insufficient political representation and expressed the goal of a self-organized society. Activists aspire to substitute representative democracy by more participatory and autonomous forms. They want to strengthen society's capacity for self-organization and reinforce its autonomous and critical position. The third goal is inclusion. Activists claim that social change cannot be realized solely by institutional reform, but needs broad participation. One facet of inclusion is the reclaiming of the commons; therefore, public space is politicized as a central issue of high symbolic significance. The fourth goal is solidarity in the sense of strong personal ties, mutual aid and the need for assuming responsibility for others. Consequently, strengthening civil society through the creation of horizontal links between individuals in similar conditions (Castañeda, 2012) was an initial approach. Many respondents emphasized the importance of fighting for a community rather than pursuing self-interest.

Soon after the end of the initial manifestations, a process of what can be called shifting activism took place: the movement decentralized and transformed into various forms of civil society activism like protest, popular assemblies, neighborhood associations anti-eviction campaigns, self-help groups, soup kitchens, occupied houses and social centers. Various organizations were founded or existing ones enlarged offering legal advice, educational training, and support to people at risk of being evicted. Moreover, new parties emerged on the national and local levels (Simsa and Berraquero-Díaz, 2015, Ayllón, 2014).

While their activities differ, Spanish SMO show many common features regarding their organizational practices and principles. They aim at self-governance, based on egalitarian, non-hierarchical structures, and at a high level of inclusion and open membership. The core form of organizing takes place in the so-called *asambleas*, which form the forum for decision-making in every SMO. The term *asamblea* generally means meeting, but is now used for specific meetings with the norms of being open to everybody, public, egalitarian, consensus-based and largely unstructured. They are prepared by working groups and the outcomes are often published on the internet. They have no leaders, only speakers who should rotate (Madrilonia, 2012). Relationships among activists should not be pre-defined by formalized rules and roles; the goal is to establish and stabilize social relations that facilitate collective action. "Our movement organizes in *asambleas*, (...) it is a horizontal movement, where decisions are taken in *asambleas*, where we have speakers, but they can only say what the *asamblea* has decided. (...) We trust in our rhythms, for the respect of an *asamblea*-based, democratic process" (24).

The core of most *asambleas* is formed by a very stable group, but their boundaries are rather diffuse and open. Larger organizations, like the nation-wide platform for mortgage victims, have a complex system of thematically and regionally structured, partly overlapping *asambleas*, held together by double-affiliations of persons and rules that clarify which *asambleas* can decide on which topics.

Although there are difficulties in maintaining the goal of equality and consensus-based decisions in practice due to the differences in motivation, time and knowledge of people, the form of the assembly has become more or less generalized: "I believe that this tendency is pretty widespread. There may be groups that at a certain moment decide to use some kind of majority: a 2/3 majority, simple majority, or others. Above all, a lot has become generally accepted, the assembly has been adopted, let's say as an organizational element. Belonging to a collective in which I can express my opinion, in which I take part, for which I take responsibility. I believe that this used to be something very marginal and now it has become much more important." (55).

These key organizational practices are based on a long history in other movements (Flesher Fominaya, 2014, Graeber, 2011), mainly in their preferences for an active creation

of non-hierarchical relations through open and fluid decision-making processes like the small-group-to-large-group principle or network-based decision-making to allow everyone to be included in decision-making (Maeckelbergh, 2009). The pattern of participatory and direct democracy, with its crucial form of assemblies was also found in mobilizations in Greece and Israel, and in the Occupy movements (Benski et al., 2013).

4.2. *How movement goals are reflected in the movement's organizations*

The goals of the movement regarding political participation, inclusion and solidarity are reflected in the internal practices of the organizations. Political participation corresponds to organizational self-governance, inclusion corresponds to fluid and open membership, and solidarity to the attempts to maintain personal relationships.

Approaches to economic change are reflected in the activities of some SMO; these can be subsumed as being needs-oriented, with a view to strengthening the local supply infrastructure and experimenting with new forms of economic relations. Examples for the needs-oriented approach are food banks, which position themselves not only as service providers but also as politicized with the aim of empowering people by raising awareness and fostering solidarity. Examples for strengthening the local supply infrastructure are neighborhood activities like consumer cooperatives. New forms of economic relations are also developed theoretically, for instance, in de-growth initiatives or associations of critical economists. Some SMO try to put these ideas into practice in time banks or in a broad range of alternative currencies. Yet, economic goals are reflected more in what organizations do than in how they aim at doing it. Nonetheless, SMO prefiguratively attempt to build an alternative economy in the here and now, regardless of the acknowledged dominance of the capitalist system.

The societal goals of political participation, inclusion and solidarity have a direct impact on aspired organizational practices. The goal of **political participation** is to be reflected in organizational self-governance and thus also in egalitarian structures, as “without them, self-governance would be an empty word” (37). In almost every interview, self-governance is mentioned and related to the broader political goal of the movement, witness the following: “I think that assemblies are really empowering. (...) It creates processes of more control of your own life; you learn (...) to take command over your own decisions (...). Today, I think, people find it more difficult to accept when in a political organization someone else tells them how to do things. Thus, if organizations democratize, society becomes more democratic and perhaps we can hope that also the state will become more democratic (...). Today, citizens are demanding the capacity to lead, while before they only blamed the state. Instead of saying “they have to do it well”, they are saying “I want you to let us do things our own way” (55). Specifically, *asambleas* are seen as a form of direct democracy, as a “promising model

of organizing” supporting the “democratization of spaces of organization (...) and the horizontalization of processes” (55).

The goal of **inclusion** is reflected in the very open design of organizational membership. With few exceptions, organizations have minimal membership requirements, like attending two subsequent meetings, asking to put one’s name on an e-mail distribution list or simply asking to become a member. Usually, there are no formal mechanisms to bar interested people from membership. Nonetheless, there is a difference between movement-assemblies and meetings of SMO. In movement-assemblies, practically everybody, who shows up in spontaneous assemblies, may take part, with sometimes people disturbing processes and hindering the group from working effectively. The investigated SMO show both open boundary lines and subtle, yet clear informal and personalized regulations of membership: “There are about 30 persons who are active, they work, come to the assemblies – between 20 and 30 persons. Also, there are about 40 people around who like us and participate in certain actions. (...) We have a set of rules (...) that regulates, among other things, how we deal with new members who enter strong internal dynamics (...). Thus, there is always somebody responsible for a new member, to translate certain things for him or her and to explain certain topics” (40).

The goal of **solidarity** is not only reflected in the organizational activities such as offering legal advice, education for marginalized people or running soup kitchens. Also, in line with what Pickard called ‘personal identity relationships’ (Pickard, 2006), a lot of attention is paid to personal ties, mutual aid and responsibility, thereby also respecting emotions and personal needs. “I support cooperativism and anything that may arise from the local level, such as a neighborhood association. I believe that all this should be complemented by organizations, for me, by anarcho-syndicalist organizations. In my view, society needs people to work together (...) Social relations I believe are very satisfactory, when they are positive. To work or participate in something one believes in is a good thing, and in the end, I would say, having a sense of doing something for your society (...) maybe, possibly, it would be possible to recover a bit of that sentiment of belonging, of the group.” (52) Activists argue that the movement’s goal of solidarity requires attention to communication rules and processes. “There are dynamics of proximity we have to be attentive to” (68). Another activist stated; “Within the Pumarejo (a social centre) people emphasize the value of living together and the realization of social inclusion and solidarity” (52). Because of the goal of solidarity, SMO strive to avoid the “objectification” of people, as is seen in formal organizations.

4.3. *Partial organization as a way to prefiguratively enact movement goals*

While the goals for a new economic order are reflected mainly in the activities of the SMO, the goals of political representation, inclusion and solidarity lead directly to the

construction of internal organizational structures in a partial way. This means that not all of the elements of formal organization, namely hierarchy, membership, rules, monitoring and sanctions, are used.

Regarding the elements of complete organization, the organizations investigated showed clear, and in many aspects, homogeneous patterns. Most obvious was the clear rejection of hierarchy as a common feature of all SMO in conjunction with the goal of political participation through self-organization and egalitarian structures. Further, membership is regulated in most organizations, but the way this is done is so inclusive that it may be characterized as being not regulated in a complete sense. Thus, explicit decisions have been taken to design the organizations as partial ones in these respects.

When asked about rules, many activists first say that rules are established and agreed upon, yet deliberately set to a minimum degree to allow for a maximum freedom of action. Thus, compared to conventional business organizations, only few rules seem to exist. Yet, on scrutiny, rules are a highly elaborated and very encompassing. When discussing this topic further, many interviewees stressed the importance of rules and were, therefore, in line with Buchanan et. al. who argue that rules are crucial to enable political work and need much effort to be established and maintained (Buchanan and Brennan, 1985). The rules mentioned mainly refer to the goal of preventing hierarchical structures and strong individual leaders; they shall enable and ensure self-governance. Some SMO have established codes of conduct for internal discussions, in others, existing rules are more implicit and only become clear in cases of deviant behavior. Still, there are clear and detailed rules, which refer, among others, to the way to speak, the way to act during protest activities and at assemblies, the way to argue, or, more implicitly, the way to dress, think or live. "What we like most is that we do not have a document that explains our discursive strategies; it is not necessary because we – for some reason or the other – have internalized a specific language (...), we are not monolithic, but from outside, a certain cohesion appears. That results from daily work" (40).

Hardly any formal systems of monitoring have been established. As assemblies work mainly face-to-face and decisions should be documented transparently, monitoring is done in the form of personal control by every participant. There is no formal monitoring comparable to that of business organizations, for example, by measuring individual contributions to goal achievement. Nonetheless, some rituals to ensure monitoring were developed that are directed mainly at communication modes. For example, in one organization, after each meeting, participants reflect on the way the facilitator did his or her job; another group agreed on interrupting meetings whenever their internal rules of "good communication" were not complied with.

Sanctions are also used rather informally. SMO depend to a high degree on consent and commitment. Thus, sanctions are a contested and often still open topic; there is a lot of discussion going on about how to reconcile sanctions with egalitarian structures.

Therefore, the SMO in our sample are clearly partial organizations. Apart from rules, the elements of formal organization were either deliberately rejected (hierarchy) or the organizations had difficulties in establishing them (sanctions) or they were handled in a very open and informal manner (membership, monitoring). Partial elements regarding hierarchy, membership and monitoring result from the conviction of most interviewees that organizational imperatives “impact individuals, organizations and society simultaneously” (77) and that organization is a means to change society. “You can only achieve social change with the right forms of organizations” (55). Activists stress the importance of the way things are being done: “The methodology of our initiative that means to guarantee democratic and transparent processes, in which decisions are taken in a democratic way, where democratic mechanisms are guaranteed. This was my goal. For me, the forms are very important, and the methodology is a tool for the social transformation.” (71)

Interestingly, the partial elements – although at the core of the identity of SMO – seem to be specifically challenging and most conflicts reported related to them. Most experimentation as well as most discussions centered on how to guarantee non-hierarchic, but effective organizing. Conflicts arose for example when informal power structures emerged. “Nobody can always participate in the same intensity (...). Further, we live in a patriarchal society. There are logics coming from our education and experiences, which have the effect that some talk out and participate more than others (...) Of course there are always natural leaders and individuals who fill a position permanently due to their expressive skills or mere presence. But it was tried to avoid this and do it totally collectively.” (68). Spokespersons who acted too authoritarian were heavily and immediately criticized. Further, open membership, combined with non-hierarchic structures is a challenge: “This is a topic of open assemblies. (...) Somebody can show up, saying ‘I want to speak’, he takes the microphone and talks for 15 minutes. Then he never shows up again. (...) And he is given the same possibilities, the same voice and the same importance like people who have worked on this topic for four months. I don’t think that this is good (...). Very ineffective and not respectful. (94) In these situations, the limited possibilities for sanctions or the exclusion of members were sometimes seen as a problem. Often, difficulties with putting egalitarian structures into practice arise from gender differences. “Even within an assembly, albeit a space of communality, those who speak out the most, who speak loud, are men.” (55).

Although *asambleas* are generally surprisingly well facilitated and seem to work effectively, they are quite time-consuming and need both individual and collective learning processes, as the following quotations show: “I have gone through all these phases of

illusion and frustration regarding the assemblies. I see that it is very difficult; I get angry with people and learn that I should not do this. Thousands of people have gone through this whole assembly-learning-journey” (29); “In other words, you must know that to learn to function in an *asamblea*, to self-organize, is not something you can learn by reading a manual and that’s it. These learning processes take a long time” (55).

Still, present movements have learned from previous ones, trying to avoid the often cited “tyranny of structurelessness” (Freeman, 1970) and thus no longer refuse leadership as such (Western, 2014). To enable leadership without leaders (Sutherland et al., 2014) and to avoid formal and informal hierarchies, the SMO investigated put a lot of effort in the development of elaborate practices and processes. Generally, activists of the SMO investigated deal intensively with organizational questions; they argue that the organizational practices and processes are essential to put movement goals prefiguratively into daily organizational practice. Therefore, they also accept time-consuming experimentation and setbacks. Interviewees explained that new forms of cooperation, including suitable ways of dealing with conflicts, were worked out in an ongoing learning process initiated by the movement. Setbacks are seen as part of this transformation, which takes time and occasionally works by trial and error. In this context, it is often stated “We move slowly, because we have a long way to go” (e.g. 55). New forms of organizations are conceptualized as viable alternatives and explicitly put into the frame of prefiguration. “It is important because it also means to prefigure that another world is possible. (...) We do not have to wait till the day X, but we can already build the basis for a change” (77).

Activists developed complex sets of communication rules such as the establishment of facilitators and non-hierarchical facilitating styles, diverse practices for the rotation of specific roles, the use of go-rounds where every participant can voice an opinion or a zipper-style list of speakers. Some assemblies, for example, experiment with different colored cards, each representing a certain amount of time to share speaking-times equally; after having used up their one and three-minute cards, participants are not allowed to speak longer. Examples for softer means are short rounds after each meeting, reflecting on how well the attempt to discuss in an egalitarian way worked. The approach of non-hierarchical decision-making is described as challenging and often imperfect, but nonetheless as operating efficiently to a satisfactory degree.

Although, partial elements can cause difficulties, they are described as an answer to the ambivalence towards formal organization. Activists want to set off SMO from the conventional political and economic system, which is based on complete organizations, and they describe their way of organizing as different from formal organizations, including traditional non-profit-organizations. Partial elements are thus the backbone of egalitarian and

dynamic structures, they are highly motivating and form the core of SMO's identity, and they are challenging, they require collective learning and experimentation.

Our data suggests that the partial character of the SMO investigated is a core and deliberate element of these organizations. All organizations were to a remarkable extent engaged in discussing, reflecting upon, experimenting with and deciding on their organizational forms and structures. This shows that being partial is part of the chosen strategy of SMO. Activists decided to design the organization as partial to achieve the societal goals of the movement in a prefigurative way. Interviewees stressed that the purpose was to break with the dominant logic that couples organization with hierarchy and leaders, by drawing on "alternative and more complex forms of organizing" (52). Further, inclusion and solidarity are seen as processes that enable social change. Belonging to a collective shall foster participation and relationships, and thus strengthen people's capacity to voice their opinions. One activist who had also been active against Franco stated that apart from the use of social media, the most important innovation of the new movements were their processes, their way to ground political action in organizational structures (77).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper explores how the organizations of the Spanish movement 15M aim to change society through their organizational practices. Activists describe these SMOs as aiming at non-hierarchical, anti-authoritarian structures and at radically participative decision-making practices, with relatively open membership and personal identity relationships. These practices, which to a large degree correspond with anarchist organizational principles, are processed mainly in assemblies, which form the core and the forum for decision-making in SMO.

Findings clearly reveal that the underlying meaning of these organizational practices is the prefigurative character of SMO. Thus, experimentation with organizational forms and the development of reasonable organizational processes – though time-consuming, full of conflict and strenuous – is seen as a necessary and integral part of SMO's agenda. The attempt of enacting the movement's goals into daily practice is done in a highly conscious and theoretically informed manner, sometimes even being explicitly described as prefigurative. Therefore, what Graeber illustrated for the Occupy movement – "Those new forms of organization are its ideology." (Graeber, 2002) – is also true for the organizations of the Spanish Indignados.

Consequently, the main goals of the movement are reflected in aspired organizational practices. Internal self-governance corresponds with the goal of political participation, fluid and open membership with the goal of an inclusive society, and the goal of a solidary society

is reflected in the attempts to maintain a high internal level of personal relationships, thus avoiding the usual “objectification” of people by formal organization.

Viewed in the light of the theoretical concept of Ahrne and Brunsson (2011), which distinguishes between complete and partial organization, it becomes obvious that specifically the partial elements of these organizations are used to attain the desired objectives for social change. While complete organizations include membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring and sanctions in their processes and structures, partial organizations operate without some of them. The SMO investigated developed clear rules mainly for guaranteeing and maintaining egalitarian structures. Other elements of formal organization were either difficult to establish as in the case of sanctions or were deliberately rejected as in the case of hierarchy, or, with respect to membership and monitoring, were deliberately handled in a very open and informal manner.

Thus, our findings suggest an interpretation of the theoretical concept that stresses the value of partial organization for building alternatives. Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) concede that partial organization may be a deliberate choice, but they describe decisions for partial organization as rather defensive by stressing mainly situations in which it is not necessary or possible to organize in the form of complete organization. Examples of situations in which it is not necessary to decide on all aspects of complete organization could thus be the possibility of relying on an existing order like strong norms, with rumors, gossip or reputation being a functional equivalent of sanctions. Moreover, it might be advantageous to abstain from some organizational elements to save resources. Further, Ahrne and Brunsson “expect some partial organization to be the result of the organizers’ inability to use more than one or a few organizational elements” (ibid., 93). Interpreted this way, partial organization, in fact, shows a somewhat shadowy existence based on conventional views. Other authors interpret partial organization as exhibiting specifically high degrees of emerging order instead of decided order (Laamanen and Den Hond, 2015).

We argue that partial organization is not necessarily connected to higher incidences of the unplanned emergence of organizational elements. In this regard, one has to clearly distinguish between the organization of social movements and their organizations (De Bakker et al., 2013). While a high degree of emergent order might, in fact, prevail in the organization of social movements, our data strongly support the hypothesis that the partial elements are a result of deliberate choice in the movement’s organizations.

Our findings thus contribute to refine and extend the theoretical approach on complete and partial organizing by stressing aspects of the deliberate and conscious establishment of partial organization. They thus offering a theoretical re-framing of organizations, which is not based on normative models that support the dominance of the imperatives of hierarchy, control and economic instrumentality. Partial organization might not be a “second choice”,

but rather might be the state deliberately aimed for, in line with the organization's ideologies and goals. The SMO investigated are constructed as partial organizations to prefiguratively enact the movement's goals through organizational practices. Interestingly, although the partial organizational elements are at the core of the SMO's identity, they seem to be specifically challenging. Most conflicts and difficulties related to them and they require collective learning and experimentation.

Activists design organizations that do not adopt rigid, centralized and formally structured practices as a way to change society through changing organizational practices. Considering the complexity and the severe problems of modern society, creative solutions and processes are needed and organizations play a crucial role in these processes. As one interviewee stated: "We have to get rid of our phobia of organization, if we want to be successful. (...) We need organizations, but we have to build them in a different way." (40). Thus, the practices of SMOs are – despite their often imperfect character – a promising field not only for further research, but also for organizational learning in other fields.

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