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## **Global activists in local networks : evidence from Glasgow and Bristol\***

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### **Abstract**

*In this paper I discuss whether and how mobilizations around global issues actually occupy a distinctive position in the political space, apart from the most conspicuous displays of nonglobal (or new global) activism, taking place in the various counter-summits across the globe. To this purpose I focus on two instances of collective action at the local level, looking at the structure of networks of citizens' organizations in Glasgow and Bristol. I assess to which extent globalization issues do represent a distinctive set of political interests, rather than the articulation of already established ones; do translate into a distinctive set of collective actions, again conducted by organizations with specific traits; may be associated with specific social movement dynamics, rather than being the focus of ad hoc coalitions or becoming 'owned' by specific organizations with little or no interest in collective action cutting across specific organizational boundaries. The analysis of two different local settings suggests that, far from being a mere addition to the new social movements milieu, or the mere revitalization of established agendas on social inequality, mobilizations on global issues be the focal point of specific alliances, based on long term links and solidarities within British civil society.*

### **Issues, organizations, and movements**

In the North as well as in the South, collective actions against neo-liberal approaches, promoting a different model of globalization, have substantially grown over the last few years, suggesting a re-emergence of social movements on a scale surely unparalleled since the 1960s. Available evidence illustrates the rise of globalization as a major contentious issue in public discourse (Andretta, della Porta, Mosca, & Reiter, 2002), the growth of voluntary and/or political organizations

mobilizing on transnational issues (Smith, 1997) as well as of the density of interorganizational collaborations between them (Smith, 1997; Rohrschneider & Dalton, 2002; Schaefer Caniglia, 2001), the embeddedness of participants in major no-global gatherings such as Genoa 2001 or Florence 2002 in other social movements (Andretta et al., 2002; della Porta & Diani, 2004; Walgrave & Verhulst, 2003), the consolidation of a transnational community of professional activists and campaigners (Keck & Sikkink, 1998).

While the importance of recent developments is undeniable, I would like to take a step back from the implicit assumptions that global social movements are actually there – an assumption which seems to guide most commentators. I want to investigate whether and how mobilizations around global issues actually occupy a distinctive position in the political space, apart from the most conspicuous display of nonglobal (or new global) activism, taking place in the various counter-summits across the globe. To this purpose I focus on two instances of collective action at the local level. By looking at the structure of networks between citizens' organizations in two British cities, Glasgow and Bristol, I would like to assess to which extent globalization issues

- a. do represent a distinctive set of policy interests, rather than the articulation of already established ones such as the environment, ethnic & minority rights, or class inequality, and is carried by a subset of citizens' organizations with a distinctive profile;
- b. do translate into a distinctive set of collective actions, again conducted by organizations with specific traits;
- c. may be associated with specific social movement dynamics, rather than being the focus of ad hoc coalitions or becoming 'owned' by specific organizations with little or no interest in collective action cutting across specific organizational boundaries.

Why is this a meaningful exercise? First of all, the nature of 'global issues' can hardly be deduced by the contents of the issues themselves. Environmental degradation, the protection of labor conditions, the protection or expansion of migrants' rights can all be conceived of as global issues nowadays, yet they have been public issues long before the term 'globalization' even appeared on the scene. They may or may not represent 'global issues', depending on the meaning attributed to them, i.e., depending on their interpretation by social actors. Likewise, even issues that are most easily associated with globalization, such as sweatshop child labor, or developing countries' debt, may or may not be perceived as a specific set of issues. They may as well be treated as a further specification of already existing agendas, such as traditional left internationalism, or solidarity humanitarian campaigns by well meaning Western charities. Before exploring the nature of the 'new global movement' it is therefore appropriate to look at the structure of issues regarded as crucial by citizens' organizations (as Laumann and Knoke [1987] did in reference to policy networks), to see whether a distinctive space for 'global' issues may actually be identified.

Second, the presence of a distinctive set of issues need not imply that protest activities and other forms of collective action on such issues will be promoted; even less so that they will be linked into sets of activities which stand out from other episodes of collective action on cognate topics. From the point of view of protest events, social movements are best conceived of as sustained series of campaigns, where events are linked into broader topics through framing and discursive practices but also through actors' multiple involvements in a variety of events. Analogously to what happens for issue interests, it is how such events combine that qualifies collective action. For instance, even though interest in globalization issues

may encourage organizations to promote actions on environmental and peace issues alike, the two may be just as well promoted independently from each other, and linked to independent sets of events. Their combination in a broader, 'globalization related' protest agendas is far from granted. It is an empirical question to be explored, not a datum for the analysis.

Even if distinctive, both the interest in global issues and the promotion of specific episodes of collective action are not necessarily the preserve of actors with specific profiles. They may be found among organizations and activists with very diverse orientations, resources, or political backgrounds. Although one need not posit that each social movement display a very specific set of traits, analysts have often attempted to identify the defining properties of actors engaged, if not in specific movements, at least in 'movement families' (della Porta & Rucht, 1995), the most obvious example being the association between left libertarian 'new social movements', high levels of formal education, and new middle class social location. All the rest being equal, the more global issues may be linked with specific actors' profiles, the more one can expect to be witnessing a distinctive social process rather than the simple diffusion of new issues across the different sectors of a given civil society.

Last but not least, it is not granted that social movements exist from the fact that there are organizations working on certain themes, people participating in collective actions in various places, and protest events addressing certain issues. Although they are hard to conceive in their absence, social movements cannot be reduced to any of the following:

- a. sets of events on apparently similar issues, yet without any assessment of the meanings attributed to the specific events, or of the ties established by individuals and organizations through participation in multiple events, which might or might not link them into broader episodes of collective action and ultimately in social movements (see, e.g., studies focusing on protest events);
- b. sets of organizations interested in specific issues, regardless of the relations between them (e.g., studies focusing on the analysis of SMOs);
- c. sets of individuals sharing the same basic values and/or the same interests or priorities and/or the same willingness to engage in collective action, once again regardless of the direct and/or cultural connections between them (e.g., studies focusing on survey data).

In fairness, it is methodological constraints much more than theoretical naivety that push scholars working along those lines to operate some kind of reductionism when it comes to analyze concrete dynamics of collective action. Still, it is important to acknowledge that at least in analytical terms social movements should be treated as a specific social dynamic, different from related yet distinct coalitional and organizational dynamics. In my view (Diani, 1992, 2003a; Diani and Bison, 2004), such specificity rests on the coupling of the following elements:

- a. dense networks of informal exchanges between individuals and/or organizations,
- b. sharing some collective identity, and
- c. engaged in conflictual interactions with opponents.

The informal nature of the networks, which link movement actors to each other, separates analytically social movement processes and *formal organizational processes*. By this expression I mean stable, purposive interactions between

individuals and/or collective units, with some established membership criteria and some patterned mechanisms of coordination and internal regulation.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, in a social movement process, membership criteria are extremely unstable and ultimately dependent on mutual recognition between actors; coordination and regulation are also dependent on permanent negotiations between the individuals and organizations involved in collective action (Melucci, 1989 and 1996). It is far from rare that collective action on specific issues be largely conducted within the boundaries of specific organizations. In such cases, resource mobilization and campaigning activities will be shaped by the norms and procedures established within the organizations interested in certain issues. The actors legitimate to mobilize will be those who do so through organizations, and there will be few opportunities for individuals to play any role unless their participation is mediated by specific organizations. Here, rather than a 'social movement dynamic' in progress, we would more plausibly have the mobilization of a set of specific organizations, trying to acquire full control of their issue, or at least to secure a distinct niche. For example, the more action on global issues took the form of organizations with a clear division of labor between them and very little in terms of joint actions, the more the so-called 'no/new global movement' would actually come close to a set of independent organizations, and consist mostly of organizational processes.

The presence of collective identity, reflecting long term solidarity and recognition between actors mobilized on behalf of certain issues, qualifies social movements in relation to *coalitions*. In a coalitional process, resource mobilization and campaigning is conducted mainly through exchanges and pooling of resources between distinct groups and organizations. However, the latter rather than 'the movement' remain the main source of participants' identities and loyalties. The weakness of broader collective identities will hamper the weaving of collective activities, located at different points in time and space, into larger, more encompassing narratives; the 'local', *ad hoc* networks developed around specific issues will hardly concatenate in broader systems of solidarities and mutual obligations. For example, coalitions on global issues might fade away once the specific battle has been fought, with no longer term legacy as far as identity and solidarity is concerned, and little attempts to connect the specific campaign in a broader framework. In such contexts, there would be little analytical gain from labeling as a 'social movement' what is ultimately little more than sets of organizations, instrumentally pooling resources around specific, single-issue conflicts.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, conflictual interactions with specific opponents, defined in social or political terms, differentiate social movements from *consensus movements*. These are instances of collective action conducted by networks of actors who share solidarity and an interpretation of the world, enabling them to link specific acts and events in a longer time perspective, but who do not identify specific social actors as responsible for the deprivation or threats they are fighting.<sup>3</sup> For example, when environmental action takes the form of sustained collective efforts, involving a

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<sup>1</sup> This definition is closest to what Scott classically refers to as the rational system perspective, according to which "organizations are collectivities oriented to the pursuit of relatively specific goals and exhibiting relatively high formalized social structures (Scott, 1987, p.10).

<sup>2</sup> Of course, nothing prevents a coalitional dynamic from evolving into a social movement one, but it is still important to recognize the analytical difference between the two processes.

<sup>3</sup> For John Lofland (1989, p. 163) "Consensus movements are distinguished from conflict movements in terms of the degree to which each recognizes and acts on oppositions of objective social interests and seeks in direct and detailed fashion to change social policy". I prefer this definition as more analytical than others, simply stressing the proportion of people supporting a given cause as the defining element (McCarthy and Wolfson, 1992, p.274).

variety of groups and organizations, attempting to protect the environment through voluntary work, or to transform environmental consciousness through education, it approximates this profile. In that case, a broad collective identity may well bring together people, organizations, events, and initiatives in meaningful, long-term collective projects, transcending the boundaries of any specific organization or campaign, but there is no space for conflictual dynamics. In such a situation, speaking of 'social movements' may prove once again more confusing than illuminating.

Table 1 about here

As table 1 summarizes, we may have social and political challenges mainly conducted by organizations, with little space for loose networking and participation outside the opportunities provided by the organizations themselves; or network alliances which neither rely on, nor generate, collective identity and thus take up a largely instrumental role; or sustained collective efforts, carried on through networks of collaboration, which do not challenge specific authorities nor adversary social groups. Or, we may have an intersection of conflictual orientations, informal networking, and identity, which brings us closer to a social movement process (Diani, 2003: 301-303; Diani and Bison, 2004). There is no doubt that today we have plenty of organizations mobilizing on issues related to globalization, and innumerable instances of protest events or campaigns on those issues. Whether this translates into social movement dynamics is another matter, and represents the final part of my discussion (albeit one which I will only manage to sketch, due to space limitations).

### ***Citizens' organizations in Glasgow and Bristol***

As objects of study, Glasgow and Bristol are particularly interesting because of the differences in their social and political history. In Glasgow, one must take into account the strength of the 'Red Clyde' tradition of leftwing labor politics and the strong working class presence, the role of ethnic minorities – especially the Pakistanis – in the Labor political machine, as well as, more recently, the impact of devolution and the reshaping of center-periphery relations this has been prompting. Coupled with a struggling economy, and despite a fairly successful conversion of the city towards a more diversified and more service-driven economy, these traits have created a context, which by theoretical standards appears particularly conducive to the persistence of collective action addressing social inequality, including action from a specific class perspective. One should also take into account the persisting impact of religious sectarianism, in particular its contribution to an explicitly confrontational political style.

Despite city politics having also been dominated by Labour in the last decades (at least until the May 2003 local elections), the overall profile of Bristol is very different on all accounts. Historically, the city has switched between Labour and Tory control, yet in a context of political moderation. Since the closure of the docks back in the 1960s-1970s, working class presence in the city has been increasingly modest. While areas of relative deprivation undoubtedly exist – and some are included in this study – Bristol is a very affluent city with a strong presence of professional bourgeoisie and highly qualified white collars. Its main employers are high tech firms like those in the aeronautic industry, firms in the service sector, especially the financial sector, and big public employers such as the Ministry of Defense. Unemployment rates are extremely low (around 2.5-3%), in stark contrast to Glasgow where social

deprivation still represents a major issue. The ethnic scene is larger – with some neighborhoods approaching 20% of minority residents – and more diversified than in Glasgow, with a substantial presence of Indian, Pakistani, Asian, and Afro-Caribbean communities, and a legacy of minority activism which at times even took radical forms, most notably in the St Paul's riots of 1981.. Bristol has also been one of the main centers for cultural innovation, with a flourishing milieu of youth subcultures and alternative lifestyles, addressing issues of health, alternative food, body care, etc. This has corresponded – if not necessarily overlapped – with a lively presence of environmental organizations and activism, including environmental direct action in the 1990s (Rootes, 2000; Doherty, Plows, and Wall, 2001).

This study focuses on organizations mobilizing on environmental, ethnic and minority, community, and social exclusion issues. These organizations provide a particularly interesting unit for the analysis of coalition-building and interorganizational networking: they are distinct enough to work independently, yet have enough potential areas of convergence to render cross-sector alliances a feasible option (e.g., on issues such as North-South relations, peace, refugees, urban decay, racism, etc.). Between 2001 and 2002, face-to-face interviews took place with 124 representatives of organizations in Glasgow and 134 in Bristol. These included both local branches of UK-wide organizations (in Glasgow, also Scotland-wide), and independent local groups, with a varying degree of formalization and bureaucratization. All the organizations which played a city-wide role were contacted<sup>4</sup>; as for community organizations, rather than taking a small sample from across the city, efforts were concentrated on two areas, both relatively deprived.<sup>5</sup> References to umbrella bodies like the Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector-GCVS or the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organizations-SCVO in Glasgow, or the Voluntary Organisations Standing Conference on Urban Regeneration-VOSCUR and the Black Development Agency-BDA in Bristol were noted, but they are excluded from the present analysis. Their role as providers of services to the sector, rather than direct promoters – or opponents – of change on substantive issues, renders them very different from the other organizations contacted, when it comes to alliance building.

### ***Locating - and explaining - global issues***

Respondents in both cities were submitted a list of 49 issues and asked whether they would 'likely' or 'possibly' promote initiatives on any of them. The list of issues was not created with the intention of covering all the most important issues in contemporary British society, but rather to identify a set of themes, which could be central to at least some of the organizations we surveyed. Accordingly, many issues could obviously be related to urban inequality, environmental, or ethnic and minority issues. We also added some sparse questions on issues which none of the sectors of civil society, which our respondents came from, could be automatically linked with, for example, "Military installations", "Globalization", and North-South relations ("Third World debt" and "Third World poverty"). Principal component analysis generated ten rotated (Varimax solution) factors with

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<sup>4</sup> There are strong reasons to believe that all the most central organizations in both cities were contacted: while many other organizations, which were not among those interviewed, were mentioned by respondents, none received more than three nominations.

<sup>5</sup> These were the Southside in Glasgow, an area with massive historical presence of working class, including neighborhoods such as Govan, Govanhill, Gorbals and Pollokshields; and the area including the neighborhoods of Easton, Knowles, Withywood and Hartcliffe in Bristol, featuring a strong presence of ethnic minorities.

*eigenvalue* above 1. The first five are reported in Table 2 below, and constitute the focus of my analysis.

Unsurprisingly, given the way our list was constructed, the issues most directly related to global problems ("Globalization", "Third World debt" and "Third World poverty") attracted substantively less interest than others, with an average 20% of groups expressing interest. However, and this is much more interesting, they hold a distinct place in the issue space in the two cities. They are significantly correlated with other issues, related to peace ("Military installations"), international migrations and human rights ("Asylum seekers"), and the environment (more specifically, and interestingly, "Genetically modified food"). But they also stand out from more established sets of issues with which they might have been strongly associated, in particular those falling under the headings "Minority citizenship", "Environment", or even "Social exclusion". There are no significant differences in the level of interest paid to global issues in the two cities.

Tables 2 and 3 about here

One might wonder whether the distinctiveness of global issues renders them appealing to organizations with a distinctive profile. My data enable me to test at least four broad hypotheses, relating global issues to organizational properties:

a. an **organizational** explanation, positing that organizations less endowed with resources and less established will be more likely to develop an interest in less established issues like global issues. If organizations, as they develop, tend to secure control of specific issue domains (to acquire, in other words, 'issue ownership'), then recently formed and/or less structured organizations might be more attracted towards newly emerging issues than towards more established ones. For the emergence of global concerns would offer new and/or less established organizations an opportunity to secure new niches for themselves. This hypothesis is tested by looking at a factor summarizing the following variables (see Appendix 1): amount of budget; high dependence on public funds, i.e., whether an organization's two most income sources are both from public agencies); level of formalization (measured as the sum of nine dummy variables measuring the presence of formal organizational properties such as a statute, chief executive, formal board, etc.); years in existence;

b. a **political identity** explanation, according to which organizations who regard themselves as critical political actors, or anyway as actors willing to play an explicit political role, will be more likely to develop an interest in global issues, than organizations who think of themselves mainly as voluntary organizations, concerned with service delivery rather than political organizations. The rationale behind this hypothesis has to do with the low degree of institutionalization of global issues by comparison with other issues analyzed here. When issues get institutionalized they also tend to get broken down in sub-issues. Their controversial element is taken out and they are turned into 'technical' problems for specialists. This is both a reflection of, and an incentive to, growing division of labor among organizations, leading in turn to the specialization and issue-ownership tendencies I mentioned above. In contrast, newly emerged issues tend to be more multifaceted and encompassing, and boundaries between sub-issues are not well defined – there is not even a clear, shared understanding of what belongs in a certain issue domain and what does not. Accordingly, such issues may be more interesting to political organization, because their largely undefined nature leaves more room for attempts to turn them into genuine political issues – i.e., into issues which can be framed within a broader

political project – than is the case with issues, which have already been largely reduced to technical problems, objects of specialized action. The hypothesis that global issues be more appealing to political actors is tested here by means of two indicators: self-representation of organizations as a charity and as a political organization;<sup>6</sup>

c. an *action repertoire* explanation, suggesting that interest in global issues will be higher among organizations who are more prepared to experiment with unconventional forms of action. This for reasons similar to what has just been argued with reference to the identity model: groups prepared to engage with a more varied range of repertoires of action should feel more confident regarding their chances of attracting attention to their goals and causes even when they refer to issues which are relatively less institutionalized. Here, I differentiate between three types of repertoires, identified through principal component analysis (see Appendix 2): a *protest repertoire*, including demonstrations, sit-ins, blockades, etc.; a *pressure repertoire*, including classic lobbying strategies; and what I call a *consumerist and symbolic repertoire*, focusing on boycotts and fair trade strategies, and also including symbolic forms of protest.

d. an *issue linkage* explanation, suggesting that interest in global issues will be higher among actors who are also interested in other sets of issues that may be logically associated with global inequality. Consistently with the classification I have just generated, I will focus here on social exclusion, housing, ethnic and minority, and environmental issues. Globalization issues might turn out to be more strongly related with environmental issues, suggesting a stronger link with the new social movements tradition; with social inequality issues, consistently with the renewed emphasis on both inter- and intranational deprivation processes; or with ethnic and minority themes, implying a closer relation between globalization and multicultural citizenship issues.

How do these models fare when submitted to empirical test (table 3)? Organizational consolidation turns out to have the expected negative impact on mobilization potential (model 1): groups with a formal bureaucratic structure, a substantial budget, and who have been in existence for a longer time are less likely to express interest in global issues than less established groups with a looser structure. The contribution of these factors remains consistently significant even when other variables are introduced in the various models (models 2-4). All in all, less established organizations seem inclined to develop stronger interests in global issues. The explanatory capacity of the model, however, increases significantly when we bring in organizational identities. Self-identification as political organizations, interested in picking up salient and controversial topics and articulating them in political projects, greatly raises the chance of being interested in global issues.

The impact of political identity remains significant, even though its relative contribution decreases, when we introduce repertoires in the equation (model 3): in particular, interest in global themes seems to go along with a propensity to adopt innovative styles of action, such as product boycotts and fair trade practices, which go beyond conventional distinctions between pressure and protest. These try to address directly the weak spot in contemporary corporate strategies, their exposure to consumer pressure, either directly through boycotts or indirectly through the latter's support to alternative forms of production and commercialization. Finally,

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<sup>6</sup> Although the two should be mutually exclusive by British law, their correlation is only -.38: significant, but far from perfect.



interest in global issues appears to be related to environmental issues as well as – if to a smaller extent – to ethnic and minority ones. No correlation is found, in contrast, between global and social inequality issues (model 4).

### ***Locating – and explaining – global actions in local settings***

How does interest in global issues translate into collective action? In both cities we asked respondents to tell us about their organizations' involvement in events (sometimes, campaigns), which had taken place in recent years (26 events altogether in Glasgow, 17 in Bristol). Separate factor analyses led to the identification in both cases of three distinctive sets of events (table 4) with a similar profile, although the relative weight of the resulting factors is different. First we could identify strong links between a set of actions addressing several aspects of ethnic and minority issues, ranging from annual multicultural festivals with a largely symbolic character to militant actions on specific instances of racial hatred or discrimination. We then identified a set of actions sharing what could be called an 'environmental justice' frame, linking urban ecology events, from opposition to local motorways, incinerators, or quarries, to the fight for social services in the local communities or for better working conditions. Finally, one could identify initiatives which could be from different perspectives associated with 'global inequality,' from Global Resistance actions to support asylum seekers, to campaigns targeting specific brands such as Nestlé (the Baby Milk Action Campaign in Bristol) or Gap.

Table 4 and 5 about here

Here I present a series of logistic regression modeling the impact of several variables on organizations having taken part in at least one global inequality event over the last few years, or not. Once again, there seem to be no significant differences between the two cities in this regard. But there are some important differences in the explanations provided for interest in global issues (table 5). The impact of organizational consolidation and repertoires disappears altogether, and that of 'political organizational identity' is drastically reduced: all in all, organizational traits and know-how seem to matter very little when it comes to engaging in global actions. To the contrary, issue interests matter a lot, and not only because of the expected positive correlation between interest in, and action on, global issues. It is more interesting to notice that no correlation whatsoever can be found between interest in social exclusion topics and global inequality actions: domestic and transnational inequalities seem to belong in two non-communicating political agendas.

It is even more interesting, and somehow puzzling, to find out that the sign of the relationship between ethnic and minority issues, environmental issues, and globalization is now reversed. If interest in both sets of issues predicted interest in globalization issues, it predicts poor involvement in global actions on the ground (model 4). Of course, this might depend on an inadequate choice of the episodes included in our lists. If this is not the case, this finding suggests that organizations interested in issues that they perceive as close to global issues (hence the correlation when looking at issue linkages) are struggling to translate that interest into specific collective action. As if at this level strong interest in cognate issues discouraged action on themes perceived as compatible but alternative when it comes to the use of scarce mobilization resources. The negative relation between ethnic, environmental, and global issues persists even if we bring into the equation involvement in the other two types of local public events (model 5). For the latter there is, however, a positive correlation with global events, to suggest that once

organizations are strongly involved in local events, they tend to be so across the board. But unless such commitment exists, mere interest in cognate topics does seem alternative to action on global issues, more than conducive to it.

### ***Global issues between social movement, coalitional, and organizational logics of action***

Let us now refer back to the discussion of different logics of collective action, which differentiates between social movement dynamics, coalitional dynamics, and organizational dynamics. The question I want to address is whether attention to global issues characterize any specific dynamic, and in particular, given their relative novelty and lack of institutionalization, whether those issues may be associated more specifically with social movement dynamics. To this purpose I draw upon an analysis of alliance networks<sup>7</sup> in the two cities (Diani and Bison, 2004). A structural equivalence analysis of alliance networks in the two cities enabled me to identify three structurally equivalent positions in each network (organizations are structurally equivalent when they are engaged in alliances to similar partners). I then checked whether the organizations occupying each position were also linked by other ties, that might suggest bonds stretching beyond the single, short-time period for which alliances had been recorded (a couple of years). As such, alliances could be purely instrumental and limited to specific issues. Looking at whether organizations had participated in the same initiatives in the past years and whether they shared some key activists enabled me to estimate the strength of identity links which might or might not run underneath alliances. Three processes were thus identified:

- a. ***Social movement processes.*** In these processes (which were found to be particularly strong in one position in both the Glasgow and the Bristol network), dense inter-organizational networking mostly involved organizations with a conflictual identity. There were also stronger indications of identity links in the greater continuity of links over time: members of these networks were also more frequently linked by shared participation in past events, or by joint activists. The relational dimension stretched beyond collaborations between organizations, which might in themselves also be purely instrumental, to suggest bonds and shared identities, which secure continuity to the network.
- b. ***Coalitional processes.*** In one position in Glasgow and Bristol, a fairly dense web of alliances found little correspondence in ties, which more explicitly pointed at the presence of identity links. Networking was limited to collaboration on specific issues. Coalitional dynamics seemed to be operating there, but little could be found in the form of social movement

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<sup>7</sup> Respondents were asked to identify up to five most important partners in alliances. They were also invited to identify any additional important collaboration with groups belonging to any of the following categories: environmental organizations, ethnic organizations, community organizations, churches, political parties, unions and other economic interest groups, other voluntary organizations, other organizations. The resulting data on alliances should be treated not as a list of the groups with which our respondents exchanged most frequently or most intensely in objective terms, but of those they perceived as their most important allies at the time of the interview. Accordingly, the matrix of alliances which represents the basis of our analysis is best interpreted as an indicator of perceptions of closeness rather than objective intensity of exchange. It reflects, in other terms, how organizations perceive their social space and identify their most relevant contacts within it.

relational dynamics. The gap between organizational exchanges and those links, measuring continuity of commitment over time and activists' personal involvement, was particularly pronounced.

- c. **Organizational processes.** In two positions, one in each city, links between organizations were modest, however measured. The main focus for organizations in those positions seemed to be their own organizational activities rather than the development of links to other actors engaged in similar issues. They were not involved in distinctive sets of alliances, nor were they linked by connections implying some level of collective identity with other groups. These organizations acted mainly as independent organizations, without any particular involvement with other voluntary or grassroots groups. The relational dimension of social movement action was distinctly absent here.

If we look at the distribution of interest in issues across the different structural positions in the networks in the two cities, we come up with an interesting finding (table 6): with the only exception of environmental issues in Bristol, globalization issues are the only ones to be unevenly distributed across different structural positions in the two city networks. In particular, in both cities, interest in globalization issues is consistently and significantly higher among organizations involved in a social movement logic of networking. In contrast, organizations that either act on their own or only engage in instrumental coalition work seem less likely to pick up issues which have only recently achieved public visibility. Such issues may be subject to greater controversy and conflict than other, more established ones, where a division of labor is probably easier to achieve. This may discourage organizations with a clearer role in local civil society from developing an interest in them.

If we take actual involvement in global inequality events, then only in Glasgow the social movement sector stands out from organizations involved in other collective action processes (table 7). There, over 70% of organizations following a social movement logic of action have taken part in at least one global inequality event, whereas only 32% (less than the city average) have done so in Bristol. This points at substantive differences in the functioning of social movements in the two cities, that cannot unfortunately be addressed in the present paper (for a preliminary effort, see Purdue and Diani, 2003).

Tables 6 and 7 about here

### **Conclusions**

The analysis of two different local UK settings suggests that, far from being a mere addition to the new social movements milieu, or the mere revitalization of established agendas on social inequality, mobilizations on global issues be the focal point of specific alliances, based on long term links and solidarities within British civil society. We may attempt the following provisional conclusions regarding the role of global issues in local politics:

- a. global issues are distinctive, in that they are perceived by civil society organizations as an independent set of concerns, which are internally correlated and which cannot be reduced to any of the other major issues around which mobilization attempts in the two cities develop. They do not overlap, even though they are linked to them, either with 'new social

movement' issues like the environment, nor with ethnic and minority issues. They show no correlation at all to social exclusion issues. There is the potential for a distinctive agenda there;

- b. global issues are not equally appealing to the whole spectrum of civic organizations; instead, they attract disproportionate attention from organizations with a distinctive profile. Such a profile only partially includes low levels of formalization and consolidation: indicators of organizational consolidation predict attention to global issues but do not predict actual participation in them. The same applies to repertoires of action: while interest in global issues seems to be correlated with a distinctive strategy of action, emphasizing consumers' role – whether as boycotters of certain products or as promoters of fair trade practices, there is no link with participation in actual events. As for political identity, it also influences actual involvement in no/new global events, but only until data on issue interests and participation in other types of events are brought into the equation. It is a combination of the latter which actually predicts involvement in globalization-related local events;
- c. even more distinctively, global issues appear to be the preserve of social movement action. They are significantly associated with organizations who are more actively involved in networking strategies which rest on long established links and shared memberships, all pointing at pervasive identity links. The positive association between participation in no/new global events and participation in other local events also pints in the same direction. In that regard, the profile of the two cities partially differs, to suggest that the conversion of broad shared concerns into collective action be strongly mediated by the features of local civil societies and political systems.

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Table 1. A Typology of Collective Action Processes

Dense vs. Sparse Informal Networks		Network Identity vs. Organizational Identity		Conflictual vs. Consensual Action	
				Conflictual Action	Consensual Action
Dense Networks	Informal	Strong Identity	Network	<b>Social Movement</b>	<b>Consensus Movement</b>
Dense Networks	Informal	Weak Identity	Network	<b>Conflict Coalition</b>	<b>Consensus Coalition</b>
Sparse Networks	Informal	Weak Identity	Network	<b>Conflict Organization</b>	<b>Consensus Organization</b>