



Network social capital as an outcome of social movement mobilization: Using the position generator as an indicator of social network diversity[☆]

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ABSTRACT

In the social mobility literature, the position generator (PG) has been used to examine the relationship between the structural location of individuals, and outcomes such as obtaining a high status job. Diversity of occupational ties (as measured by the PG) is also a significant predictor of an individual's cultural capital. A great deal of work has also been done in the field of social movements examining the relationship between networks and mobilization. However, only limited attention has been given to the position generator in this literature. Also, while past research has demonstrated that prior network ties to activists is one of the most important predictors of current activism, relatively little research has been devoted to examining network structure as an outcome of activism. The present paper builds upon these insights by utilizing data collected with the position generator on a sample of environmental movement members, and examining the relationship between individual activism (as an independent variable) and diversity of occupational ties (as a dependent variable). The result of key theoretical significance is that those who are more active in the environmental movement develop a greater diversity of occupational ties to other environmentalists. Results suggest that this process occurs over time. These findings provide evidence that social capital (as indicated by network diversity) is one outcome of social movement mobilization.

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1. Introduction

Several years of analysis on the outcomes of social movements now permit a largely affirmative response to the question: "Do social movements matter?" However, a supplementary question, namely, "How do social movements matter?" requires still greater theoretical and empirical elaboration. We know that movements matter in a variety of intended and unintended ways. While there are many difficulties to what may be called "outcome studies" (see Giugni, 1999), it is now commonly understood that movements can have at least three major types of change impact: political, biographical and cultural. The exploratory research presented here is an effort to extend the theoretical and empirical boundaries

of possible social movement outcomes. In other words, we wish to add to the political and policy successes of a movement, the biographical impacts movements have on individuals, and the large-scale cultural and values shifts that result from social movement activity, a fourth category of outcomes: social capital outcomes (Diani, 1997). More specifically, we examine the relationship between individual activism, and ties to environmental organization members from diverse occupational backgrounds. The latter measure, network diversity, has been identified as a significant form of social capital (Erickson, 2003).

We conduct an analysis of previously collected survey data obtained from members of three formal environmental organizations that make up part of the Wilderness Preservation movement in British Columbia, Canada. Using the position-generator technique developed by Lin et al. (2001b), we examine the relationship between level of social movement activism and the diversity of the occupational ties that respondents have to other environmental organization members. We argue that having a greater number of ties to a diversity of others produces social capital benefits for the individual movement member, and potentially for the movement more generally.

The analysis proceeds in the following manner. First we review the literature on the three common categories of social movement outcomes that have emerged to date. This is followed by

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a discussion of a possible fourth category, namely social capital benefits that result from movement activism. We outline a series of six expectations about the relationship between activism and the production of social capital outcomes. We then describe our measures, focusing on a description of the position-generator. We present our results, compare them with a supplementary study, and conclude with a discussion of the individual, organizational and community level social benefits to social movement activity.

2. Broadening movement impacts

Three distinct trends emerge from current work on the impact of social movements. Broadly speaking, researchers have focused either on the individual-level biographical impacts of participating in movement activity (McAdam, 1989), the changes and shifts in large-scale society-wide cultural values (Rochon, 1998), or the changes that take place politically, usually in terms of public policy (cf., Giugni et al., 1999; Meyer, 1999). Granted, this neat tripartite division belies a much more nuanced and messy empirical reality. Untangling the causal threads between movement actions and outcomes is not easy, and arguably poses the greatest challenge to research into movement outcomes (Giugni, 1999; Diani, 1997). Yet outlining these research foci as if they composed discrete outcomes brings into relief those areas that deserve greater attention.

The first two areas – the impact on individuals and the impact on cultural values – have received significantly less attention than have political orientated outcomes (Giugni, 1999). McAdam (1989) has been forefront in looking at the biographical effects that participation has on individuals. He shows that participation in the Civil Rights movement (McAdam, 1988) and the New Left movement (McAdam, 1999) had enormous impacts at both the individual and aggregate level. A second set of outcomes is related to the ways social movements impact broad cultural values. Rochon (1998) argues that new cultural values enter public debate through first the formation of what he calls “critical communities”: groups of thinkers, intellectuals, etc., who develop innovative ways of looking at otherwise familiar issues. Rochon maintains that cultural changes happen when movements latch onto and succeed in diffusing the ideas of a critical community. Cultural change includes both a change in mentalities as well as a change in public policy (Rochon, 1998:9).

Much more attention has been devoted to what are commonly grouped as political impacts (Giugni, 1999). While political outcomes are in most instances broadly defined (cf., Andrews, 1997, 2004) they usually include either some kind of push for or later implementation of public policy (Burstein, 1999). These studies attempt to connect some element or combination of elements of the movement – organizational structure, framing of issues, and political opportunities – with a specific legislative or policy outcome (McCammon et al., 2001; Soule and Olzak, 2004; Amenta et al., 1992).

There are two fundamental critiques of impact studies. The most often expressed which encompasses individual biographical, cultural or political change is the difficulty in drawing a direct causal link between the movement’s actions and a particular outcome (Andrews, 2004; Giugni, 1999; Diani, 1997). It is possible, that the individual, cultural or political change is the result of some other cause – in which case we have a spurious relationship – or would have happened anyway, despite the actions of the movement. This latter counterfactual is difficult to establish because the mere fact we are looking at a movement impact means the movement has already been present. (But historical and/or cross-cultural comparisons of similar cases can sometimes be helpful.) Second, movement

and organizational goals are never homogeneous. Well understood is the fact that organizations tend to spend an inordinate amount of time and effort discussing what the movement’s goals are. Complicating matters still is the fact that movement goals often change over time.

Faced with this chaos and complexity researchers have usually tended towards reductionism: freeze the movement’s goals at one particular time while reading goals back from a clearly stated policy achievement. Such simplification eliminates some of the distracting background created by the multifarious activities of the movement, thereby allowing researchers to focus on what they take as the direct link between movement action and impact. While initially attractive because of its apparent parsimony, this strategy distracts from greater exploration into the diversity of influences and impacts that social movements contribute to social life.

Another strategy, the one that we pursue here, is to broaden the relationship between movement and movement activity and outcomes (Andrews, 2004; Diani, 1997), by including among possible outcomes what we call “social benefits” of movement activity.

3. Social capital outcomes as a social benefit

The present study is rooted in a research tradition that treats social network ties as an “independent variable” that produces activism (the dependent variable). A number of scholars have examined the effect of networks on activism (e.g., McAdam, 1986; Gould, 1993; Diani, 1995; Kitts, 1999; Tindall, 2002; Diani and McAdam, 2003). A variety of arguments have been made about the effect of network ties on individual activism. It is generally argued that the greater the number of ties one has, the more active s/he will be. A subset of the processes involved include increased communication and diffusion of information, social influence, and social support. While linked to this approach, our study intentionally sets out to distinguish itself from this tradition. In the present research, in order to fully explore the social consequences of social movement activity, we argue that it might be useful to consider a reverse causal logic between social networks and movement mobilization, and treat *social networks and network ties as outcomes of movement mobilization*, rather than as facilitators of the latter (cf., McAdam, 2003). Diani (1997) in particular points to four such possible social network consequences for movements and movement organizations: increased mobilization capacity for future action, the development of subcultures and countercultures, increased personal networks with those outside the movement, and the production, dissemination and diffusion of novel ideas. In short, Diani suggests we view “networks as a product as well as a precondition of action” thereby expanding the range of possible movement outcomes (Diani, 1997:143).

Recent research on networks and social capital (Lin et al., 2001a; Lin and Erickson, 2008) and networks and social movements (Diani and McAdam, 2003) help orient our present analysis. Key is the notion that social capital is generated by and through social networks (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001b; Lin et al., 2001a). Individuals’ social ties to one another allow for the exchange of valuable social resources. Four such assets can be discerned (cf., Lin, 2001b). First, movement information often flows between individuals who have regular contact with each other within the context of activism (Oliver and Myers, 2003). Power and political influence can be obtained by having key social ties to agents such as movement leaders or political elites (Diani, 2003). Legitimacy and certification of the movement organization as a whole or individual activist may come through network ties. Finally, social capital resources such as sense of identity, solidarity and emotional support help activists through the often exhausting demands of social activism (Passy, 2003).

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