# New media, new movements?

The role of the Internet in shaping the 'anti-globalisation' movement

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Peter Van Aelst

Stefaan Walgrave

**Abstract :**

*Collective action and social movement protest has become commonplace in our 'demonstration-democracy' and no longer surprises the media or the public. However, as will be shown, this was not the case with the recent anti-globalisation protests that attracted demonstrators from countries all over the world. The battles of Seattle, Washington, Prague and Genoa, with an unforeseen mixture of nationalities and movements, became world news. Interestingly, the new media seemed to play a crucial role in the organisation of these global-protests. This article maps this movement-in-progress via an analysis of the websites of anti-globalisation, or more specifically anti-neoliberal globalisation organisations. It examines the contribution of these sites to three different conditions that establish movement formation; collective identity; actual mobilisation and a network of organisations. This, ongoing, explorative research indicates signs of an integration of different organizations involved and attributes an important role to the Internet. However, while both our methodology and subject are evolving rapidly, conclusions, as our initial results show, must be tempered.*

**Key words**: ICT's, social movements, anti-globalisation, websites

# 1. Introduction

The enormous growth of the internet since the mid-nineties has placed debate about the potential consequences of this new media on the political process, on the top of the research-agenda (Johnson and Kaye 1999; Bimber 1998; Barnett 1997; Hague and Loader 1999; Lax 2000; Norris 2001, Castells 2001). Most observers of the 'digital democracy' are quite subtle about the impact of this evolution. They don't believe it will radically transform democracy in either a positive or negative way. While both political insiders and outsiders can use these new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the balance of power and the existing political structure is not likely to change. Research shows that people who are politically active on the web were already 'political junkies' (Johnson and Kaye 1999, Norris 2002). However, we expect that participation in politics has been facilitated. Political action is made easier, faster and more universal by the new developments. ICTs lower the costs and obstacles of organizing collective action significantly. Bimber (1998) argues that this will be particularly beneficial for those groups outside the boundaries of traditional public institutions or political organizations. These new, more citizen-based groups, that cannot depend on formal support or funding, will benefit relatively more from the internet than for instance political parties or labour movements.

Social-movement watchers agree that the new media offer new opportunities for international collective action, but are more sceptical on the development of stable, long lasting movements in the future. According to McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (1996), the expanded capacity for transnational communication will not automatically lead to international social movements. They believe that indispensable interpersonal networks cannot simply be replaced by new virtual contacts created by the internet. Van de Donk and Foederer (2000) also doubt that virtual demonstrators can do without the emotions and thrills of participating in real direct action. Etzioni and Etzioni (1998) address the same problem: Can virtual contacts be as real as face-to-face contacts for building a community? On the basis of their exploratory research they conclude that a combination of both is best to create and maintain some sort of community. In the formation of a (transnational) social movement this would mean that when groups of people meet in person, like at a protest meeting, and have some shared values, they can maintain or even improve bonding by what the Etzionis call 'computer mediated communication'. Interaction solely based on internet communications usually lacks the necessary 'basis of trust' for building permanent relations (Diani 2001).

In this article (paper) we focus on the impact these new media have and will have on the success of the recent anti-globalisation protests and the plausible formation of a new social movement. To speak of a social movement generally four elements should be present: (1) a network of organizations, (2) on the basis of a shared collective identity, (3)

mobilising people to join, mostly unconventional[1] actions (4) to obtain social or political goals (Duyvendak and Koopmans 1992; Diani and Eyerman 1992). In this case we would broaden the concept of social movement to that of a 'transnational social movement organization' (TSMO) (Smith et al. 1997; della Porta and Kriesi 1999) or even further to a 'global social movement' (GSM) (O'Brien et al. 2000). This concept refers to a network of organizations that isn't bound by state barriers and that connects people and places 'that were formerly seen as distant or separate' (O'Brien et al. 2000: 13). Tarrow, who uses a typology to indicate different forms of transnational collective action, argues that the conditions for a sustained transnational social movement *that is, at once, integrated within several societies, unified in its goals and organization, and capable of mounting contention against a variety of targets*' are hard to fulfil (Tarrow 1998: 185).

It is not our intention to find out whether the anti-globalisation coalition is a true movement or rather a temporary (international) outburst of dissatisfaction with global economic and political governance. Our research is too limited and the actions too recent to go into this discussion. We confined ourselves, by means of an analysis of websites, to the contribution of the internet to three different elements or conditions that establish movement formation: a shared definition of the problem as a basis for collective identity, actual mobilisation of participants, and a network of different organizations. These three dimensions of social movements constitute the theoretical framework of our study. The fourth element of the definition has been less a focus of this research and will only be treated occasionally.

Before elaborating these research questions (see 3.1), we will give a brief overview of the transnational protest actions against globalisation. Special attention will be devoted to the role of the internet.

## 2. Global protest against globalisation

Globalisation means different things for different people. In the business community it refers to a 'free world' for trade, commerce and money, for political scholars and politicians the disappearing or at least challenging of state borders is central, while globalisation for the average man or woman means he or she can eat the same food, wear the same shoes or watch the same television programmes as someone living on the other side of the planet (Dodds 2000). It would be wrong to state that, what are called anti-globalisation protesters are against 'globalisation' per se. In that case they wouldn't try to create a global network of organizations, or use a tool for global communication like the internet. It is rather the neo-liberal way the globalisation is shaped and the negative (side)effects it has on human beings and the environment that are contested (Ayres 2001). Especially the international economic institutions that are created to regulate the

globalisation process, like the WTO and IMF, are in the protesters' spotlight. Both their form (structure, decision-making procedures) and the content of their policies (free-market, deregulation of trade, environmental degradation, …) are fiercely challenged (O'Brien et al. 2000). The discussion about a better name to label the movement is ongoing, and important because the movement has regularly been attacked on the basis of its anti-globalisation label (Smith, 2001a). Other names are spreading, such as 'anti neo-liberal', 'anti-corporate' or 'democratic globalisation', but since their use is, as yet, not widely spread, we will keep with the the traditional 'anti-globalisation' label, despite its shortcomings.

The demonstrations at the WTO congress in Seattle at the end of 1999 have become a major symbol of the anti-globalisation struggle (Van Aelst 2000; Smith 2001b). However, it would be incorrect to reduce the protests to the 'battle of Seattle'. Seattle was neither the beginning nor the end of this (plausible) movement.

## 2.1 Before Seattle: the MAI and the first signs of virtual resistance

Protest against certain aspects of globalisation isn't new. Third world organizations have been posing questions on the unequal distribution of wealth and the dubious role of international organizations like the IMF and the World Bank for several decades[2]. But their concerns received a new, more international élan with the protest against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in 1998. From May 1995, trade ministers and economists from the leading industrialized world had secretly worked on the MAI. These talks should have led to a treaty by the end of 1998. But they didn't. The internet campaign of an international network of organizations (600 in the end) from 70 countries was the villain in this play. The protest they created by informing and mobilizing people against these new plans in favour of free trade, led to the end of the negotiations and the failure of the agreement. Although traditional protest means like demonstrations and petitions were not absent, the internet 'provided the glue to bind the opposition that had begun simultaneously in a variety of developed countries' (Ayres 1999: 140).

It is difficult to prove that without the internet opposition, the MAI would be in use today but there are indications hereof. Peter Smith and Elizabeth Smythe (2001) studied the role of the internet in this case and although they point to political delays and disagreements as important factors, they conclude that it were the social groups, armed with internet technology, that successfully exploited these political opportunities. According to Ayres (1999) the fact that similar campaigns ten years earlier, using more costly and time-consuming methods, didn't have the same result show the net's crucial role.

## 2.2 The battle of Seattle: 'We Win'

Encouraged by this success the global coalition started preparing for a bigger event: The ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) scheduled for the beginning of December 1999 in Seattle. The hometown of Boeing and Microsoft was eager to show itself as a successful example of free trade to the representatives of 135 countries. The outcome was not exactly what the representatives of the city and the WTO had expected. A mixture of established NGOs and direct action groups engaged in colourful marches, road blockings and confrontation with the police. The media let a worldwide public enjoy, what has become known as, the battle of Seattle. The almost complete obstruction of the opening day of the conference and the fact that their concerns were global news left the demonstrators with a feeling of victory. A feeling that was best indicated by one of the graffiti slogans that was left behind: WE WIN (Newsweek 13-12-'99). There were of course multiple causes for the failure of the meeting, like the North-South divide and the agricultural conflict between the USA and Europe, but like Jackie Smith stated: 'It would be hard to argue that the Seattle Ministerial would have failed as miserably as it did without the tens of thousand of protesters surrounding the meeting site' (2001b: 3). In Seattle activists took part in the conference, even if they weren't invited.

Although this wasn't a virtual action in cyberspace -ask any inhabitant of Seattle- the internet yet again played a vital role in the anti-globalisation protest. Throughout 1999, thanks mainly to the internet, people got plenty of chances to join the anti-WTO campaign. A main rallying point was the StopWTORound distribution list. This list enabled many to receive detailed information on different aspects of the WTO (George 2000). The communication was facilitated even more by various sites on the internet, the umbrella website of the anti-WTO coalition being the most famous. The new media contributed to an international division of work between different organizations both prior to (George 2000) and during the protests (Smith 2001b). While groups with local ties concentrated on mobilization and direct action, more transnational-based groups provided information and frames to feed the action.

Not only activist and movement scholars but also Western governments are impressed by the internet as a mobilization facilitator. As we can read in an official report on the website of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service devoted to the anti-globalisation protests: 'The internet has breathed new life into the anarchist philosophy, permitting communication and coordination without the need for a central source of command, and facilitating coordinated actions with minimal resources and bureaucracy.' (CSIS Report 2000/08)

Besides a mobilization tool the internet and other new means of communication in Seattle were used as means of action on their own. This virtual activism is intended to 'attack' the opponent from the inside, rather than on the streets. Those who couldn't make it to Seattle, could therefore engage in a virtual 'sit-in', blocking access to official sites, or send

collectively an email or fax to disrupt the target's information flow (Smith 2001b). However, these forms of electronic activism were not used massively and were far less important to the movement's success.

## 2.3 After Seattle: from WTO to IMF, EU, G8, …

Since the WTO debacle in Seattle almost every summit of a transnational (economic) organization has led to street mobilizations. This was also the case for the meeting of two other symbols of globalisation: the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in Washington[3]. Again the internet was used for mobilising 'anti-globalisation' activists to join the protests, and again a heterogeneous mixture of activist from over 200 groups and 55 nations (USA-today 17/04/00) tried to prevent the world's finance ministers from gathering. They failed, mainly because of better police organization, and the members of the IMF achieved a major breakthrough: They met (New York Times 17/04/00). But at the same time the impact of this embryonic movement was acknowledged. In a communiqué both institutions admitted that their role had become a subject 'of growing public debate' and that the benefits of free trade and international capital markets are not reaching everyone. Similar sounds could be heard half a year later in Prague when both institutions met again: talks on 'debt relief' and 'the fight against poverty' were more prominent than before. However, the protests in Prague didn't leave the activists in a victorious mood. There were fewer participants than expected and media reports focused on the violence and the damaging of property by anarchists, leaving the public a rather negative image of the movement. In Prague, the media platform that the 'anti-globalisation' coalition received in Seattle and that brought worldwide attention to their cause, did not work in their favour and certainly obscured their main message.

Discussion on the peaceful versus more obstructive strategy was still hot half a year later (A20), when the same organizations joined forces once more, this time against the summit of the FTAA[4]. In Quebec, leaders of countries from across the Americas negotiated on setting up the world's largest free trade zone by 2005. Information and calls for action on the internet were again numerous, like for example 'The Field Guide to the FTAA Protest in Quebec City' provided a mass of detailed suggestions for joining different actions. This 27 page, alternative 'travel guide' with links to all the relevant allies and opponents, leaves very little room for improvisation.

Not only the WTO and the IMF meetings, but top gatherings of the European Union (Nice Göteborg, Brussels) and the G8 (Genoa) too have witnessed outbursts of protest that are linked with the globalisation issue. Besides their subject all these actions have in common that they are mainly 'orchestrated' via the internet. An action that is also linked to this issue but which followed a different strategy was the 'World Social Forum' held for the second time in Porto Alegre. Parallel with the World Economic Forum, members of

different social organizations met in Brazil to discuss the effects and alternatives for neo-liberal free trade and globalisation. Porte Alegre was not chosen at random. The city has become a 'social laboratory' for civic engagement in politics. People are informed, can make suggestions or complaints, and can vote on local issues using … the internet (Le Monde interactif 7/02/2001).

In addition to extensive use of the internet, these actions have something else in common: they are 'summit-related'. Probably unwillingly, the advocates for globalisation have created with their conferences and meetings a (media) platform for its opponents. According to Ayres (2001) these international summits have stimulated new political opportunities for transnational activism. It is therefore hardly surprising that the last WTO meeting has taken place in the Oil-state Quatar, where protest opportunities were reduced to an absolute minimum. And that after the tragedy in Genoa the next G-8 summit will take place in a remote venue in the Rocky mountains.

## 3. Research on the internet: limitations and opportunities

### 3.1 Data reduction: from ICTs to Websites

The decision to confine our study to an analysis of websites has to led to tempered conclusions on the role of new Information and Communication Technologies for social movements. Perhaps email or mobile phones are more important for activists and insight into their users would perhaps teach us more about transnational networks. But this type of research would cause problems even for Sherlock Homes. However, websites are an interesting starting point for several reasons. (1) First of all they contain lots of information on the actual organization(s). How are they organized? What do they stand for? What issues do they stress? A content analysis should point out whether the different organizations are on the same track, or in movement terms: whether they share the same frame of reference. (2) Secondly, we also wanted to examine to what extent these sites are used also as a means for mobilisation. Do they actively motivate people to engage in unconventional actions? How detailed is the information on these actions? Is the internet used as a mean for action on its own? (3) But perhaps most importantly, by analysing their 'links' to other groups and organizations we can learn something about their network function. Is there one big virtual network among organizations involved in the anti-globalisation struggle? Or are there still geographical or other kinds of barriers that prevent a global movement from evolving?

Like stated in the introduction, the enormous growth of the internet has made this subject, also for social scientists, a more essential and preferred research subject. However, research strategy and methodology are almost unexplored (Wakeford 2000) and to the best of our knowledge only a few pioneers have studied websites. Van de Donk and Foederer (2000) made a quick scan of some environmental-organization websites without using a research instrument. Hill and Hughes (1998), who sampled a hundred political oriented websites in the States, 'quantified' their study a bit more. They did so by using more objective parameters like the number of web pages, graphical elements and hyperlinks that where found. Chandler (1998) developed a sort of coding scheme for his study on personal homepages. More useful for our analysis, are the examples of research on political websites. Pippa Norris (2001) made a list of criteria to classify websites on their information and communication function. Similar, but more elaborate, is the work performed by scholars of the Amsterdam School of Communication Research (De Landtsheer et al. 1999; 2000). They created a coding scheme to study political websites in terms of political participation. In other words, to determine whether political websites are 'participation-beneficial' characteristics like information, interactivity, user-friendliness and aesthetics were quantified. This scheme was used as a source of inspiration for our own study, but needed, in view of the different research subject and question, serious rethinking. Especially a part on the mobilisation function of the sites had to be added.

Before explaining our coding scheme and the results that were found, we need to go in to the data selection and analysis. This part of the research process faced numerous difficulties and pitfalls.

## 3.2 Data selection: 17 web sites

Probably the trickiest part of this study, are the criteria for the selection of the websites. First of all, there is no such thing as one master list of all the organizations involved in the anti-globalisation struggle. It is even unclear how many organizations or sites that can be linked to this subject. Moreover, search engines on the net didn't give a good overview[5]. Hill and Hughes (1998) used the subcategories (politics and interest groups) made by search engines to reduce their population: however, anti-globalisation is not focused upon and relevant sites are spread among numerous categories (anti-corporation, environment, labour, Free Trade Area of the Americas, etc.). A normal sampling procedure therefore wasn't possible. Another option was to use external links from the sites of the most important organizations to other organizations. But this would have manipulated the results strongly because the network function of these sites is a primal research question.

Finally, we chose to select the sites of organizations that were mentioned in the different national and international news reports on the major anti-globalisation protests. In this way we ensured that we would analyse the actors that played some kind of role in the effective actions that took place. Among these organizations a minor selection was made because an analysis of both the content and structure of sites is rather time-consuming. The number of sites was therefore further reduced on the basis of practical reasons like language (only English and French speaking) or because the site was no longer operational. This was the case with some sites that were created especially for one protest event. The fact that the actual research took place in the months March till May 2001 therefore influenced our selection. Especially the summit of the Americas in April, has contributed to the fact that 15 of the 17 selected websites have a North-American hometown. If for example Prague or Genoa had been the centre of these protests, some more European sites would have been part of our study. Despite these careful considerations we can hardly state that this limited selection of websites is truly representative for all the organisations involved.

The 17 websites that were finally selected can roughly be ordered in three different subgroups: The first group of sites are devoted to one event, in this case it concerns the FTAA meeting in Quebec and the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. The second group are social organizations or action groups that are fully or partly engaged in the anti-globalisation struggle. Some of them like *WTOaction.org* or *50 years is enough* were founded as a direct reaction against globalisation, while others like *Friends of the Earth* were active

long before globalisation led to contention. A last group are labelled as 'supportive organizations', because they deliver a service to others that can facilitate their actions.

**Table 1: Websites of organizations linked to the anti-globalisation protests**

Each site was accurately analysed by two graduate students, who made this their 'homepage' for a month (29/03 – 3/05). They received careful instructions, especially on the interpretation of the coding scheme. Elaborate justification of the codes made it possible to compare and adjust their fieldwork afterwards[6].

## 4. Mapping anti-globalisation on the Web

The analysis of the sites focuses on three diverse parts of the discussion on social movement theory and ICTs. First of all we will try to find out whether the seventeen organizations give a similar interpretation of the anti-globalisation theme. Secondly, attention will be given to the mobilisation function these sites fulfil. And finally, the links between the organizations will be looked at in detail. On the basis of these three elements the '*movementisation*' of the anti-globalisation protests and the role of the internet in this process should become somewhat clearer.

### 4.1.  Content analysis: what is anti-globalisation for different organizations?

We stated in the introduction that an important pre-condition for a movement is some fom of collective identity. As the concept of identity, including feelings of identification and solidarity (Diani 2001), is broad and difficult to quantify, we restrict ourself to a study of the shared 'frames of reference' of the different organizations. Without collective frames or 'shared meanings and definitions that people bring to their situation', it is unlikely that people form a collective identity and will permanently join forces (McAdam et al. 1996). This does not mean that all activist have identical opinions or ideas regarding specific facts or persons but rather that they use the same references or interpretations. The concept of frames in the context of social movements was introduced by Snow et al. (1986) and further applied and developed by many others (Gamson and Meyer, 1996; Gerhards and Rucht, 1992, Walgrave and Manssens, 2000). A 'master frame' consists of different elements or dimensions. In this contribution, we focus on the first dimension of diagnostic framing, which is the identification of problems and causes (Snow and Benford, 1988; Gerhards and Rucht, 1992). To this end, we looked at how the websites conceive and define globalisation. Do they hold a common view on the problem?  Or, as critics assume, do all organizations focus on different aspects of a complex phenomenon?

Websites could possibly sustain the formation of such a shared (diagnostic) frame by giving information (a), stressing the same elements of the issue (b) and organise discussion and interaction on the subject (c).

A. Like mentioned earlier, we developed a coding scheme to map different functions of the websites. Codes varying from 0 to 2 were attributed to various aspects of information. In appendix 1 the scheme and the motivations for the codes is presented in detail. In general, code 1 refers to a minimal presence of the characteristic while code 2 represents a more extensive one. Table 2 gives an overview of the codes and a standardised 100-point sum score of the seventeen sites.

**Table 2: Codes and standardised scores of 17 websites on their information function**

Like one could expect, most sites are coded highly on their information function. It is quite normal for a website to say who its '(web)master' is and what it stands for. It is notable that while all organizations gave some information on their own organizations, in half of the cases this was done in a minimal or insufficient manner. Often they remain vague on their precise composition or structure[7]. Although this could be a deliberate strategy, it raises questions on the representativity of some of them. Their views and opinions were generally clearer. Perhaps more remarkable than the high scores on internal information are these for external info. Especially the number of websites with links to other organizations is significant. This is not always the case among movements, like for instance Van De Donk and Foederer (2000) who found an absence of external links among environmental organizations. In our selection there is only one organization that doesn't refer to others … the environmental organization *Friends of the Earth*[8].

B. To further explore the content of each site a 'checklist' of twelve subjects related to the 'anti-globalisation' protests was used. If it concerned a main subject on the site it received code 2, a minor subject was coded 1 and if the subject wasn't mentioned at all code 0 was attributed[9]. With an average of 8 of the 11 subjects coded as minor or main subject, most of the sites were very broad in their view on (anti) globalisation. An exception is the *Ruckus Society*, which supports other organizations in using non-violent action techniques and hardly gave any information on globalisation or themes linked to it. The fact that most organisations have a frame that defines a multitude of problems is not necessarily problematic. Gerhards and Rucht (1992) too found that the coalition behind an anti-IMF demonstration in Berlin addressed a very wide range of issues and still managed to connect them to each other.

As table 3 shows, most important are the economic aspects of globalisation that are contested. Free trade and to a lesser degree economic dominance are given full attention on most websites. Although this outcome is probably influenced by the research period (April 2001) being in the run up to the summit of the Americas on free trade (FTAA), it shows consensus on globalisation as a primary economic matter. This confirms Cecilia Lynch earlier finding that among progressive contemporary social movements economic globalisation is seen as 'the primary obstacle to the fulfilment of their goals' (1998: 149). Further, most organizations state that this economic matter has important side effects on other aspects like the environment (sustainable development), the unequal distribution of wealth between the North and the South, human rights, and the labour conditions of many.

**Table 3: Codes and standardised sum scores of 17 sites on themes linked to the anti-globalisation issue**

Besides being regarded as an economic problem, globalisation is also seen as a political one. Especially the problem of an international government led by 'undemocratic' international institutions is discussed on several websites. Many of them refer to a stronger civil society and a more participative democracy as plausible solutions. Decentralisation as such is less explicitly mentioned.

The cultural aspect of globalisation is clearly the least important. Only the more intellectual *International Forum on Globalisation* sees it as a main part of the issue[10]. However, it is not unthinkable that for organizations in the south this is a more crucial part of their struggle.

C. Finally, the views and ideas on the globalisation issue might be further elaborated by an extensive discussion. When a medium like the Internet is used by 'citizen-based' organizations one would assume that is in a highly interactive manner. However this is not truly the case. Most sites offer the 'basics' like a feedback possibility or a newsletter, mostly via email. More sophisticated ways of interaction and debate, like forums or chat groups, are limited. Only four sites host some kind of online debate[11]. The opportunity for members or visitors to have a personal contribution on the site, for instance by reactions on articles, is more widespread.

**Table 4: Codes and standardised scores of 17 websites on their interactivity function**

We can conclude that most of the organizations inform about different causes and consequences of globalisation, which is defined in general as being primarily an economic problem that has created a problem of democratic governance. While the information is elaborate, the possibilities for debating that information are rather limited. We must also point out that the consensus on issues says little about the way this global economy should be altered. This study did not allow for more than a surface study of the second, 'prognostic' dimension of framing. Prognostic framing implies the formulations of solutions for the earlier defined problems (Snow and Benford 1988). At first sight, most sites leave big questions on the ideal strategy unanswered. For instance, the site of the World Social Forum asks: 'Is it necessary to abolish the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO or can they be reformed?' At this moment, it seems to be a NO-consensus: most organisations know what they are against but little is said about what they are actually in favour of. At the same time we can see how the final statement of the second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (2002) remains awfully vague when it comes to formulating

13

alternatives. Yet, a strong prognostic frame is something most movements lack. But since, unlike political parties, they are not immediately expected to offer clear solutions, this shortcoming is not too problematic (Gerhards and Rucht 1992). The anti-globalisation movement first needs to delegitimise the dominant views on globalisation before it can legitimise others (Lynch 1998). Further research on the variation in goals and strategy should improve our view on the master frames of these organisations.

## 4.2. Websites: a new means for real or virtual mobilization?

We made it clear that the selected websites assist the process of informing their members or participants. They can learn about the organisation and what it (does not) stand(s) for. More crucial for a social movement is that these websites could facilitate the actual mobilisation of activists. The mobilisation process, getting people on the street, has always been a difficult and unpredictable element in the movements' success (Klandermans 1984). In the literature different manners for mobilizing people are distinguished, varying from direct mail, mass media, and formal organizations, to more informal networks of friends and relatives, or what McAdam calls 'micromobilization contexts' (Klandermans and Oegema 1987; McAdam 1988; McCarthy 1996; Walgrave and Manssens 2000). It is clear that after the recent 'anti-globalisation' protest, ICTs should be added to this list.

Without predicting how many people actually showed up in Seattle or Prague thanks to the internet, we take a look at the way these websites are 'action mobilizators'. In the WWW area the concept of mobilisation should perhaps be extended from (former) 'unconventional' street actions like demonstrations and sit-ins, to new virtual actions varying from an online petition to pinning down the enemy's server.

Like mentioned earlier we use a coding scheme that is explained in detail in appendix 1.

## Table 5: Codes and standardised scores of 17 websites on their mobilisation function

A first, more passive way, of mobilising people for the good cause, is to give them the opportunity to join or to support the organisation. Two-thirds of the sites offer such online registration forms to become a member, donate money or buy promotional goods. With a bit of creativity organisations like *Corporate Watch* are even willing to support 'a small fundraising party that will be fun for all and help CorpWatch gain new supporters'.

The more active elements in table 5 confirm the role of the internet as medium for promoting and organising protest activities. Only two organizations do not host a calendar with the upcoming activities to contest globalisation. Visitors are mostly

encouraged to participate and are given detailed information to do so. Some sites give actually practical information (on transport, sleeping accommodation, hours, places, …), while others refer to external links or email addresses. Earlier we gave the example of 'The Field Guide to the FTAA Protest in Quebec City' as a document that takes the activist by the hand and guides him alongside all the obstacles for effective participation. To make a friendly impression on the inhabitants of Quebec even some words of French are learned to the English-speaking participants. So, after reading they know that 'prison' and 'police', mean the same in French as in English.

On seven websites activists have the possibility to add protest activities and on a more specialised site like *Prostest.net* you can ask to be sent an email reminder. And finally for the ones who weren't able to join the actions, fifteen sites also report on previous events.

Most sites give some information on how to use or improve certain actions techniques, or refer to manuals or other organizations for more activist 'training'. The advice given is quite diverse and varies from techniques to climb a building (*Ruckus Society*) to dealing with media attention (*Global Trade Watch*). The *Association for Progressive Communication* even devotes a great deal of their website to improving ICT skills for other organizations and activists (using email effectively, website development).

The websites are clearly a means of support in the mobilisation process for all sorts of 'real' protest actions, but are far less used as an action tool on their own. Hardly half of the organizations use some form of online action, for the most part online petitions. Only *Protest.net*, promoting a 'netstrike', and *Friends of the Earth*, offering all kinds of protest emails to politicians, take a step further in the virtual direction.

### 4.3 Linking websites: one network?

Social movements are often conceived as social networks of informal and formal organisations (Diani and Eyerman 1992; Diani 1997). Certainly in a transnational context the network perspective seems most applicable. A network of different social organisations or action groups is, like Tarrow (1998) states, not necessarily a social movement but it can become the basis of it.

Earlier it was shown that globalisation is a very complex and diverse issue that attracts different organizations for different reasons. Besides the ideological 'nuances' (greens, labour unions, anarchists, third world movements…), there are strong geographical differences that have to be bridged. Can the World Wide Web overcome all those cleavages? The mobilisation successes of Seattle and co prove of course some kind of collaboration. But it is hard to say how far this network reaches and how stable it is. We have taken a look at the connections between the seventeen selected organizations by

analysing their links to other sites. Hypertext links set the Web apart from other media channels like television, newspapers or magazines. Virtual links are used in other research too, like a study on the relations between U.S. congress members (Cha 2001), as a way of exploring networks. For activists and social organizations it is a unique facility for referring to like-minded groups or to sites of the opponent[12]. Smith and Smythe (2001) too, found that most of the anti-MAI websites linked to the website of the OECD, the organisation responsible for the secret trade negotiations they opposed. The reason behind this was that the draft text of the MAI that was released on the OECD site was considered a major source of information.   Therefore, A link does not necessarily  prove a relationship but can be seen here as a basic form of alliance, certainly when it is a link to a like-minded group or organisation. The more 'missing links' there are, the weaker the social movement network becomes.

Most of the 17 websites are strong advocates of hyperlinks. When we compare with the study of Hill and Hughes (1998) on political oriented websites, who found an average of 28, our average of 126 is relatively high[13]. Still, in the hasty life of the internet it remains hard to evaluate data from 2001 with a study dated from August 1997.

**Table 6: Number of external links on and to 17 websites**


Rather remarkable is that this high number of links does not automatically imply a connection between the selected websites engaged in the anti-globalisation struggle. An average of five links out of sixteen prevents us from speaking of a close-knit network. The practice of linking is clearly not always a reciprocal one, which means that not all relations are as strong. Whilst the Canadians of *WTOaction.org* are for example the most 'bonding' organization with no less than 14 links, but are referred to by only two others. Conversely *Friends of the Earth*, which has only one link to its umbrella organization, is referred to by half of the other sites.

If we don't focus on the missing links between some organisations, but look instead at the visualisation of the network (Figure 1), we could interpret the results in a different way. All websites are in fact indirectly linked to one another. So if an activist starts intensively surfing the Web, he or she can visit all 17 websites (and probably a few hundred like-minded more). Central in the network are *WTOaction.org (4), Corporate Watch (8), Global Exchange (10), 50years is enough (5)* and *Indymedia (16).* With ten incoming- and eight outgoing links, the latter especially appears to be the most crucial for the coherence of the network. This independent medium is, since its foundation for the Seattle protests, a fast growing network of its own with almost 60 centers in twenty countries. If these 'local' divisions of *Indymedia* were to be added to the analysis of links the central role would be even more outspoken[14].

16

**Figure 1: A network[15] of 17 websites on the basis of external hyperlinks** (the numbers correspond with the organisations in Table 6)

Only the *World Social Forum* (3) and the *Association for Progressive Communication* (17) fall a bit out of the centre. For the WSF this could be due to the fact that the conference took place more than a month before our research started and that some temporary links might have disappeared. The link from *Corporate Watch* to the *WSF* was found in their article archive. Sites that don't keep information stored on their site, like *Protset.Net*, are therefore less connected to others. Another explanation involves also the only other non-North American organisation in our study, the French organisation *ATTAC*. Both have beside their mutual connection, only one or two other incoming links. This means that they are a bit isolated from the organisations located in the US and Canada. Does this suggest a geographical, linguistic gap? We must refer to the finding that 'local' divisions of, for instance, *Indymedia* do have links to *ATTAC* and the *WSF*, so a gap is probably too strong. Further research seems necessary to answer this question properly. On the other hand, there seems to be no cleavage on issues ore strategy. No separate subgroups or clusters could be identified. An anarchistic site like *Infoshop* (13) is only 'two-steps' away from more moderate organisations like *FOE* (11) or *Global Trade Watch (7)*. Perhaps recent violent clashes between militant globofoobs and the police at summits in Göteborg and Genoa will lead to a clearer division in the movement.

We can conclude that although the network on the basis of external links is not complete, it is highly integrated. On the basis of figure 1, the social movement condition 'a network of organisations' seems to be no problem in this case. However, the arrows in the figure suggest a real connection, but don't guarantee it. You can easily link to other organisations without having real contact. What does a hyperlink exactly mean? Is it a way of providing more information, irrespective of approval, or just a way to show that others are fighting for the same cause? At the moment we know little on the network value that can be attributed to the use of hyperlinks. Is a temporary link, for instance in an article, as important as a permanent one in a separate 'links' page? On the other hand, some organisations have worked together or have intensive contacts, but for unknown reasons have no mutual hyperlink on their websites. Are these contacts, as some assume, mainly sustained by email and mailing lists (Smith and Smythe 2001)? Do they wish to keep the visitors on their own site and fear losing members to other similar organizations? Is there a kind of thematic or territorial competition for website visitors and potential donators? It could be an explanation why established environmental organizations weren't linking to each other (van de Donk and Foederer 2000). Other aspects like the individual role of the webmaster(s) too can explain the presence or absence of certain links. It is clear that further research is needed but for the time being the value of hyperlinks to construct a

network of organisations is questionable, particularly in this case when sites refer to hundreds of others.

## 5. **Conclusion: Globalisation, Social movements, and the Internet**

Since the already legendary 'Battle of Seattle' at the end of the 20th century protest against the creation of one global economic market is hot news. The international and ideological mix of protesters was soon labelled as the 'anti-globalisation' coalition. Their lack of means and central authority was compensated by the extensive use of new forms of communication. They also eagerly exploited the new political opportunities offered by transnational meetings and the free media-attention that was generated.

In this paper we tried to evaluate three social movement conditions of the coalition against neo-liberal globalisation by analysing a limited selection of 17 relevant websites in March-Mai 2001. On all three relatively positive conclusions can be drawn. First of all, there is a sort of consensus on the globalisation issue they contest, by framing it primarily as an economic problem that has negative consequences on human beings and the environment. Also the political aspect of globalisation, the lack of democratic legitimacy of the international organisations, is usually contested. Besides general information on the issue, the sites actively mobilise people to demonstrate against the symbols of economic globalisation. By giving detailed guidelines all supporters can easily become real participants. And finally, all 17 websites are directly or indirectly 'hyperlinked' to each other, creating a kind of network of related organisations.

This positive judgement of the anti-globalisation coalition becoming a social movement and the contribution of the internet, has to be tempered as both movement and medium are in full evolution and hard to quantify. In the fight to alter the process of economic globalisation, new events take place, new organisations join the protest, new coalitions arise while others disappear, and few can tell what will happen next. We enviously look at the lab technicians in the opposite building who control all elements that affect their research object. Therefore, at this point in time, it is difficult to categorically state that this mix of 'anti-globalisation' protesters is evolving towards a transnational social movement. However, it is clear that they, like other protest movements (Castells, 2001), prove that globalisation is contestable and that the protest is becoming 'as transnational as capital' (Smith and Smythe 2001).

And is this all due thanks to the technological evolution? Have, in this case, the new forms of communication changed the 'logic of collective action' or just the speed of protest diffusion? We are not sure. The internet brings new opportunities for everyone, but at the moment international activists are benefiting relatively more than their opponents. It seems that the fluid, non-hierarchical structure of the internet and that of the international protest coalition prove to be a good match  and that it no coincidence

that both can be labelled as a 'network of networks' (Scott and Street 2001). On the other hand, the role of the internet is often exaggerated. For instance during the 'Carnival against Capitalism' that took place in cities around the world in 1999, The Guardian reported that the demonstration in London was entirely dependent on the Web. According to Stephen Lax (2001), who found a range of posters, leaflets and graffiti advertisement, the internet was used alongside other mobilising means. There is, like this and others studies confirm, little evidence that the internet is becoming a substitute for traditional forms of protest (Smith and Smythe 2001; Pickerill 2001).

Also within the movement the role and importance of the internet is regarded in a different way. This was revealed when we interviewed two Belgian representatives of involved organisations. Han Soete, of *Indymedia Belgium*, is convinced that the movement couldn't exist in its actual state without the internet, while the net has made the necessary exchange of information and creations of contacts in a global context easy and cheap. Nico Verhaegen of *Via Campesina*, an international organisation of small farmers, has a more modest view on the new media: 'If the same globalisation would have occurred without the existence of the Web or email, the same transnational protest movement would have founded. Perhaps with a bit more tension, and not that fast, but the movement would have come there for sure'.

Again it is difficult to say who has the most accurate vision on the contribution of the new technology in this case. Our explorative research can perhaps inspire others to improve our knowledge on this increasingly more important aspect of social movement industry. At this moment we can't say it better than the Canadian Security Intelligence Service: 'The Internet will continue to play a large role in the success or failure of globalisation protests and demonstrations. Groups will use the Internet to identify and publicize targets, solicit and encourage support, organize and communicate information and instructions, recruit, raise funds, and as a means of promoting their various individual and collective aims.' (CSIS Report 2000/08)

[1] Although peaceful forms of protest have become a rather normal or conventional form of politics, the term 'unconventional' is still used to define all sort of protest action varying from petitions to violent demonstrations (Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2001).

[2] As an example we can refer to a heterogeneous coalition of 133 groups that organized a demonstration against the IMF and World Bank meeting in Berlin in 1988, which attracted up to 80.000 people (Gerhards and Rucht, 1992).

[3] See for example the website devoted to this event: www.a16.org.

[4] The Canadian police lowered the opportunities for activists to disturb the meeting by building a 6 kilometre chain link and concrete wall around the conference centre. The 1000 protesters who tried to 'breakdown the wall' received much more media-attention than the 25000 others that took to the streets peacefully.

[5] Just typing the word 'anti-globalisation' in the search engine Google resulted in 8300 web pages in no useful order.

[6] After careful comparison of the codes, only a handful of justifications seemed necessary. This was the case when the students gave similar explanations but different codes.

[7] For instance the Canadian site *WTOaction.org* claims to present The Common Front on the World Trade Organization (CFWTO), which brings together over 50 national organizations and regional networks, but fails to name members.

[8] We should be careful to generalise the absence of links on environmental sites, while we found hundreds on the site of the UK department of *Friends Of the Earth*.

[9] A main subject is mentioned several times or as a priority of the organization, while a minor subject is only mentioned occasionally.

[10] In their words: '*Worldwide homogenisation of diverse, local and indigenous cultures, social and economic forms, as well as values and living patterns that reflect the efficiency needs of the new global monoculture*' (www.ifg.org)

[11] Also Pippa Norris (2001) found in her analysis of political websites limited debate opportunities for visitors. Only 35% of the websites hosted some kind of online debate.

[12] Many of the organizations referred also to the websites of the WTO, IMF or World Bank.

[13] This average is probably an underestimation, because the links are spread all over the site and easily looked over. We only counted the links on this website and not on separate sites of divisions in other cities or countries.

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[14] Divisions of *Indymedia* referred to *Attac, The World Social Forum* and the *50years is enough* network. And the website of the *Ant-Capitalist Convergence* only linked to a Canadian department of *Indymedia*.

[15] The network was drawn using Pajek, a program for social network analysis. (http://vlado.fmf.uni-lj.si/pub/networks/pajek/)

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## Table 1: Websites of organizations linked to the anti-globalisation protests

ANTI-GLOBALISATION EVENT SITES

| | |
|---|---|
| **A20**<br>http://www.a20.org/ | is an "Umbrella site" against the last meeting of the FTAA (April 2001) |
| **Anti-Capitalist Convergence (CLAC)**<br>http://www.quebec2001.net/ | gives information about organizing activities against Summit of the FTAA in Quebec City (April 2001). |
| **World Social Forum**<br>http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/ | Site of the 'alternative Davos' in Porto Alegré |

SOCIAL ORG. - ACTION GROUPS

| | |
|---|---|
| **WTOAction.Org**<br>http://wtoaction.org/ | continues to engage people in opposing trade agreements, such as the WTO & FTAA. |
| **50 years is enough**<br>http://www.50years.org/index.html | activates for economic justice + profound transformation of the World Bank and IMF |
| **ATTAC**<br>http://www.attac.org/ | **A**ssociation for the **T**axation of financial **T**ransactions for the **A**id of **C**itizens |
| **The International Forum on Globalisation**<br>http://www.ifg.org/index.html | IFG is an alliance of sixty leading activists, scholars, economists, researchers and writers |
| **Global Trade Watch**<br>http://www.tradewatch.org/ | a part of Public Citizen that focuses on action against free trade. |
| **Corporate Watch**<br>http://www.corpwatch.org/ | provides news, analysis, and action resources to respond to corporate activity around the globe |
| **Global Exchange**<br>http://www.globalexchange.org/ | is a human rights organization dedicated to promoting environmental and social justice around the world. |
| **Friends of the Earth**<br>http://www.foe.org/ | is a national environmental organization + part of an international environmental network |
| **Infoshop.org**<br>http://www.infoshop.org/Welcome.html | has lots of information of interest to anarchists, anti-authoritarians, and other activists |
| **The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy**<br>http://www.iatp.org/ | promotes resilient family farms, rural communities and ecosystems around the world |

SUPPORTIVE ORGANIZATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| **Protest.Net**<br>http://www.protest.net/ | is a collective of activists who are working together to create a public record of protest actions on the web |
| **Ruckus Society**<br>http://www.ruckus.org/ | provides training on the skills of non-violent civil disobedience to help environmental and human rights organizations achieve their goals. |
| **Indymedia**<br>http://www.indymedia.org/ | is a collective of independent media organizations and hundreds of journalists offering grassroots, non-corporate coverage |
| **The Association for Progressive Communications**<br>http://www.apc.org/english/index.htm | advocates for and facilitates the use of ICTs by civil society in a variety of ways |

**Table 2: Codes and standardised scores of 17 websites on their information function**

|  | Code 0 | Code 1 | Code 2 | Stand. score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Self-presentation | 0 | 8 | 9 | 76 |
| Views of the organization | 1 | 4 | 12 | 82 |
| External information (links) | 1 | 0 | 16 | 91 |
| Background information | 2 | 11 | 4 | 56 |
| *Subtotal* |  |  |  | **76** |

**Table 3: Codes and standardised sum scores of 17 sites on themes linked to the anti-globalisation issue**

|  | Code 0 | Code 1 | Code 2 | Sum score (../100) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Free Trade** (against the liberalisation of trade, against the WTO, pro fair trade, …) | 1 | 2 | 14 | 88 |
| **2. Economic domination** (the market dominates political and social live) | 4 | 1 | 12 | 73 |
| **3. International democracy** (undemocratic internat. institutions) | 3 | 5 | 9 | 68 |
| **4. Unequal North-South distribution** (third world debt relief, IMF programs, Tobin tax, …) | 5 | 2 | 10 | 65 |
| **5. Sustainable development** (environmental problems, animal rights, respect for the planet; …) | 1 | 10 | 6 | 65 |
| **6. Human rights** (protection of minorities, poverty reduction, …) | 2 | 8 | 7 | 65 |
| **7. Labour** (employee-rights, wages, …) | 3 | 7 | 7 | 62 |
| **8. Civil Society** (cooperation between NGOs, movements, action groups, …) | 3 | 7 | 7 | 62 |
| **9. Participative democracy** (improving the participation of citizens on policy in general) | 5 | 7 | 5 | 50 |
| **10. Decentralisation** (taking decisions on a lower level, smaller communities, …) | 9 | 6 | 2 | 29 |
| **11. Cultural homogenisation** (against Americanisation, pro cultural autonomy, …) | 8 | 8 | 1 | 29 |

**Table 4: Codes and standardised scores of 17 websites on their interactivity function**

|  | Code 0 | Code 1 | Code 2 | Stand. score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Feedback opportunities | 0 | 9 | 8 | 73 |
| Electronic correspondence | 2 | 3 | 12 | 79 |
| Online Debate | 13 | 3 | 1 | 15 |
| Personal contribution | 5 | 7 | 5 | 50 |
| *Subtotal* |  |  |  | *56* |

**Table 5: Codes and standardised scores of 17 websites on their mobilisation function**

|  | Code 0 | Code 1 | Code 2 | Stand. score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Support/ Membership | 6 | 11 | -[15] | 64 |
| Action Calendar | 2 | 3 | 5 – 7[15] | 66 |
| Online actions | 9 | 6 | 2 | 29 |
| Training | 4 | 9 | 4 | 50 |
| *Subtotal* |  |  |  | *52* |

**Table 6: Number of external links on and to 17 websites**

| | Number of external links | Number of links to anti-globo sites (max. 16) | Referred to by anti-globo site (max. 16) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. A20 | 66 | 6 | 5 |
| 2. CLAC (Quebec 2001) | 26 | 2 | 5 |
| 3. World Social Forum | 41 | 1 | 2 |
| 4. WTOaction.orq | 260 | 13 | 2 |
| 5. 50years is enough | 83 | 7 | 5 |
| 6. ATTAC | 88 | 6 | 3 |
| 7. Global Trade Watch | 63 | 4 | 7 |
| 8. Corporate watch | 249 | 7 | 7 |
| 9. IFG | 40 | 5 | 5 |
| 10. Global exchange | 393 | 9 | 7 |
| 11. FOE | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| 12. IATP | 48 | 0 | 6 |
| 13. Infoshop | 400 | 9 | 3 |
| 14. Protest.net | 126 | 3 | 3 |
| 15. Ruckus Society | 46 | 2 | 3 |
| 16. Indymedia | 194 | 8 | 10 |
| 17. APC | 29 | 1 | 2 |
| | | | |
| Average | 126 | 5 | 5 |

**Figure 1: A network of 17 websites on the basis of external hyperlinks** (the numbers correspond with the organisations in Table 6)
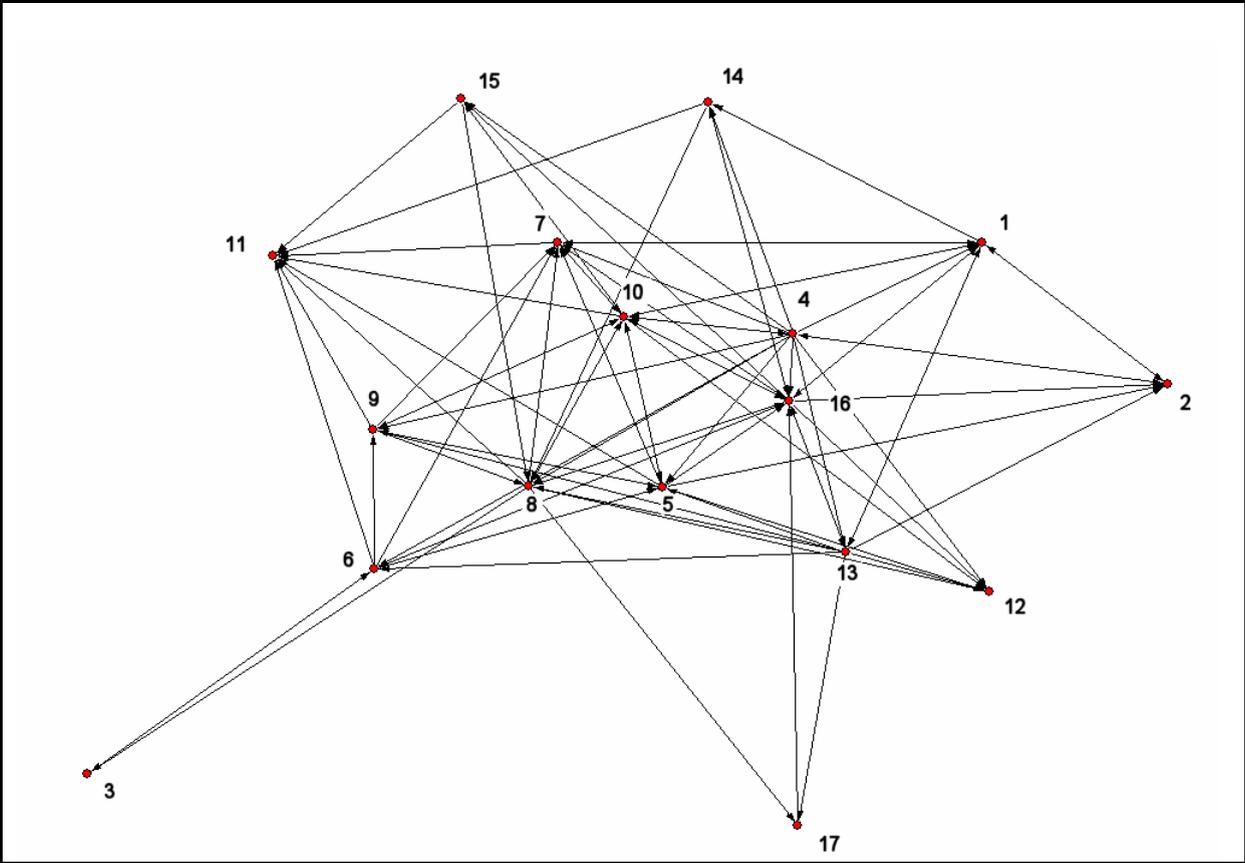
## Appendix 1: Coding scheme for the information, interactivity and mobilisation function of websites

| Information | Score |
|---|---|
| 1. Self-presentation<br>(1= minimal information on the organization; 2= extensive info on the history, goals, structure, members, …)<br>2. Views of the organization (concerning social and political issues)<br>(1=minimal ore unclear info on the views of the organization; 2=extensive explanations of views and opinions, certain info can be downloaded, …)<br>3. External information (links)<br>(1= minimal info on other organizations and no links; 2= extensive info or several links to other organizations)<br>4. Background information<br>(1= the issue is briefly placed in its context, other ideas and arguments are referred to concisely;<br> 2= an extensive overview is given of the debate with attention for different views (Newspaper articles, scientific studies, reports of organizations, … …) | |
| **Interactivity** | |
| 1. Feedback opportunities<br>(1=there is an email-address for further info, suggestions or complaints; 2= visitors are encouraged to react by email, the email button is not only placed on the homepage)<br>2. Electronic correspondence<br>(1= occasional info via email ; 2=regularly info via an electronic newsletter)<br>3. Online Debate<br>(1=one general forum or chat group where visitors can join the discussion; 2= numerous debate opportunities on different issues)<br>4. Personal contribution<br>(1= visitor can react to specific info on the site (for example on an columnist); 2= visitor can make his own contribution on the site) | |
| **Mobilisation** | |
| 1. Support/Membership<br>(1= possibility to become a member, to donate money, ore to buy supportive products<br>2. Action Calendar<br>(1=Calendar with an overview of activities; 2=accompanied by a call for participation, or more detailed info (further link / contact address); 3=2+ opportunity to put your action online)<br>3. Online actions<br>(1= (sort of) online petition; 2= extensive computer actions (a call to pin down servers, … )<br>4. Training<br>(1= limited info on how to organise actions or referees made to other organisations/sites; 2= detailed, concrete info –manuals- on different action techniques (e.g. How to bloc roads, how to influence the media, …) | |