

International Workshop

CONTEMPORARY ANTI-WAR MOBILIZATIONS Agonistic Engagement Within Social Movement Networks

November 6-7, 2003

Corfu, Greece

Ionion Conference Centre (Faliraki)

ABSTRACT

Anastasia Kavada

University of Westminster (UK)

Social Movements and Current Network Research

A closer look at current academic research suggests a deep paradigm shift towards network thinking. This is true for a variety of fields ranging from traditional hard science, such as physics or biology, to social sciences and literary theory. Social movement research is not an exception to this trend. Influenced particularly by the analysis of social networks, current research in social movements uses network concepts and tools to define, map and understand the behavior of social movements. This involves the extensive use of mathematics and statistics combined with elaborate maps to provide an accurate understanding of social movement networks.

This paper is an attempt to survey the current literature on networks and social movements, in order to summarize and appraise the latest developments in network thinking. This analysis is going to include network developments in a variety of fields and disciplines, including complexity and self-organization theories. In that respect, latest developments can contribute in enriching the research framework currently proposed by social network theory. This paper will further attempt to translate those developments into concrete and operational suggestions for social movement research. How do these developments affect the data sought and the questions asked by the researcher?

It will be argued that, while mapping and calculating social movement networks is certainly an important endeavor, current network thinking is more interested in understanding the processes which underlie the birth and evolution of these networks. In other words, the focus is less on producing static maps of networks and more on understanding the dynamic processes through which they evolve. It will be further argued that network theories can be applied in order to understand not only the actual formation of a movement, but also the way its ideology or mission is shaped through the interaction of its participants. Examples from the anti-globalization movement are going to be used in order to illustrate this analysis and vividly demonstrate the arguments under discussion.