

# Social Movements and Current Network Research

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# Goals

- Describe the anti-globalisation movement and its proposed relationship with the Internet
- Explain how the notion of networks is involved in it
- Describe different approaches to network theory
- Attempt to link elements from different approaches and understand their implications for my object of research



# The anti-globalization movement & the internet

## Characteristics:

- global in its scope and nature
- ideologically diverse
- organized in a flexible and non-hierarchical way

## Role of the Internet:

- considered as an internet-based movement
- the internet affects all of the above characteristics



# The anti-globalisation movement & the network metaphor

The network concept is by far the most common metaphor used to explain the movement

- Organizing: organized as a network of networks
- Ideological Diversity: “activist networks function more often as pragmatic information exchanges and mobilization, instead of pushing towards ideological commonalities” (Bennett, 2001)
- Used to bind the anti-globalization movement and the Internet in the same theoretical argument as both can be labeled as networks of networks

# Social Network Analysis

- More of a paradigm than a predictive social theory
- ‘Anti-categorical imperative’
- Social behavior and processes can be explained with reference to networks of social relations and the position of the actor within them
- Bridges the micro-macro gap by investigating both the individual and the group level
- Extensive use of mathematics and graph theory

# Applications in Social Movement Research

- Offers a more concrete theoretical basis which respects the dynamic and fluid nature of social movements
- Social Movements are defined as:  
*“a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity”* (Diani)

## Limitations:

- Structural Determinism
- Lack of dialogue with other social theorists because of abstruse terminology and methods

# RAND Corporation

“the network form of organization is on the rise, deeply affecting all realms of society” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1996)

## Characteristics:

- Purpose: social equity and accountability
- Demand for communication

➔ Networks have a larger impact on civil society actors

## Levels of analysis of network actors:

1. Organizational
2. Narrative
3. Doctrinal
4. Technological
5. Social

# Actor-Network Theory

- More post-modern approach
- Concerned with “*how actors and organisations mobilise, juxtapose and hold together the bits and pieces out of which they are composed*” (Law 1999)
- Social Structure is treated as a verb and not a noun, as a fluid process and not as an easily determinable outcome
- Bridging the ‘micro-macro gap’:  
“*Big does not mean ‘really’ big or ‘overall’, or ‘overarching’, but connected, blind, local, mediated, related*” (Latour 1999)

# Meshworks & Hierarchies

(Deleuze and Guattari)

- Metaphor of the rhizome

*“a subterranean plant growth process involving propagation through the horizontal development of the plant stem”* (Cleaver 1999)

- Meshworks and Hierarchies underlie two alternative philosophies of life

- They do not exist in pure form but in degrees

# Complexity & Self-Organization

- Notion of Emergence

*“the actions of multiple agents interacting dynamically and following local rules rather than top-down commands result in some kind of visible macro-behavior or structure”* (Escobar 2003)

- Tend to become more intelligent, flexible and adaptive

## **Principles of Self-Organization:**

- ‘More is different’
- ‘Ignorance is useful’
- Random encounters should be encouraged
- ‘Look for patterns in the signs’
- ‘Local information can lead to global wisdom’

(Johnson 2001)

# An Integrated Approach

## **Common characteristics of network approaches:**

- Anti-essentialist view: power, role or character are understood in relational terms
  - Ideology and structure are understood as dynamic and fluid processes
  - Conceptualization of micro and macro
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- We should distinguish between networks as a form of organization and networks as a research tool

# Studying Processes...

- By focusing on local actors – specific organizations
- By studying their relationships and interactions with other organizations within the movement
- By examining three major levels:
  - The micro – the actor:
    - ➔ levels of analysis of netwar actors proposed by RAND
  - The relationships and interactions with other actors:
    - ➔ the principles of self-organization
  - The event organized (different points in time)
- Methods of data collection
  - Web content analysis
  - In-depth interviews