

*Power Democracy,  
Protest and Social  
Movements in  
Digital Societies.  
Occupy Wall Street*

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Leocadia Díaz Romero, Conference 21, Sheffield (UK),  
September 13-14 2012

# Researching Framework.

## Subject and Goals

- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: Examine the **concept of democracy**, (dimension: of direct, participatory democracy),
- through EMPIRICAL CASE-STUDY: the study of protest movements in recent times;
- “Work in Progress”: research I am conducting as visiting scholar in NY;

# Theoretical Background

## *Political Participation. Transformation and Development*

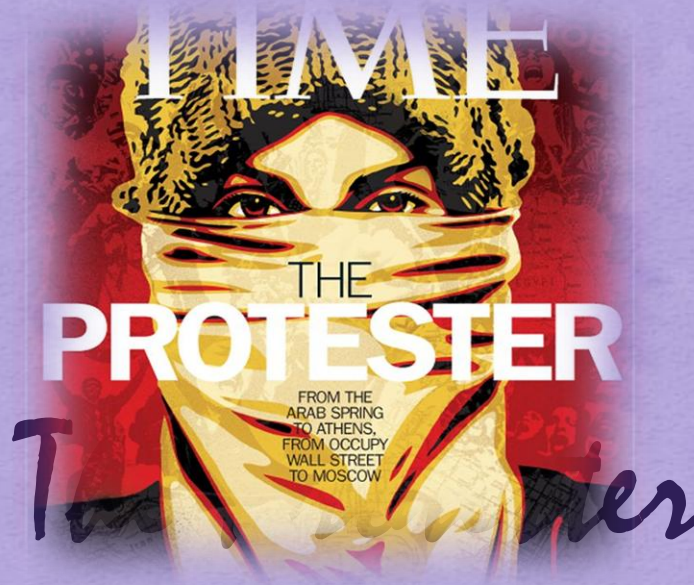
- **Verba, Nie and Kim** identify four basic forms of political participation: voting, campaign activism, community organizations, individual outreach activities;
- They define political participation as “**those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take**”. (New York, 1978)

# New Waves of Civic Engagement

- **"apathy" or decline of traditional forms of political participation** in the late twentieth century in post-industrial societies: **electoral turnout** –mainly in the US-, **party membership** –mainly in Western Europe- (**Norris, 2002**),
- = **new modes of participation have emerged and flowered since the 70's** – demonstrations, consumer boycotts, signing petitions-; today: **new wave of social movements, transnational policy networks, internet activism**,
- **civic compromise is not dead, it has transformed and reinvented itself** in terms of the *who* –the agents or collective organizations-, *what* –the range of strategies implemented- and *where* –the targets or goals focused- (**INGLEHART, 1997**),
- today the **socio-political arena** in which these movements operate is a combination of **local, national and supranational elements** product of a globalized society (Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

# Direct Democracy

- **roots** in the Ancient Greek *polis*, gathering and assembly in the *agora*,
- nowadays, direct democracy mechanisms need to adapt to larger countries with high population; thus, “contemporary” forms of direct democracy are **the legislative initiative and referendums**,
- **the rise of direct democracy/ the decline of the legislatures**, since the 60´**s** in America, in Europe and some Asian countries –i.e., Taiwan- (Matsusaka, 2005). In Europe, **the Treaty of Lisbon** incorporates both the initiative and the referendum, and more than thirty referendums have been held on European integration issues,
- **WHY? citizens today are more prepared to participate in politics** thanks to the greater access to knowledge and information,
- the devastating effects of the **financial crisis** have led to citizens **"political alienation"** from their representatives –the wear of representative democracy; “PRESENTIST DEMOCRACY”/REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY (Isabell LOREY, 2011)-, through virulent **activism** and the resurgence of direct **democracy channels**, tools (Oskarson, 2010),



# Person of the Year

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The Protester, person of the year 2011, Time Magazine

# Protest and Social Movements

A **protest group** is collective action of individuals aimed at achieving a set of common goals through influencing the decisions of a target/ A **social movement** is a form of protest group that has some degree of **formal organization** + a **higher number of members**;

**social movement, elements:** the **goals or objectives** to accomplish, the **organizational dimension**, a degree of **temporal continuity**, development of **institutional activity** -"lobbying", political and extra institutional, i.e., demonstrations- (Snow and Olliver, 1995);

**social protests**, such as petitions, demonstrations, consumer-boycotts, have attained sharp significance in the 80's **nowadays** they represent an **important mechanism of political mobilization**.

Barnes and Kaase, **five criteria** to identify **protest activism**: signing **petitions**, attending legal **demonstrations**, exercise the right to go on **strike** and **occupy** factories or buildings (California, 1979).

**WHO PROTESTS:** In post-industrial societies protests occur among professional people with a university degree/ In the **90's** they also reach **middle-age segments of population, beyond students and younger generations**.

# DIGITAL SOCIETIES

- **Online news outlets** *The Huffington Post* and *Politico* both won their first **Pulitzer Prizes**, a sign of the changing media landscape. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/17/business/media/2012-pulitzer-prize-winners-announced.html?\\_r=1&emc=na](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/17/business/media/2012-pulitzer-prize-winners-announced.html?_r=1&emc=na)
- **WHAT´S NEW: global + virtual DIMENSION OF CLASSIC PROTEST** (i.e.: May 68); digital technologies favor the strengthening of the "public sphere" in its virtual or cyber dimension: **“virtual public sphere”, “cyber-democracy”**.
- **information and networks are essential elements of mobilization**, strong impact on the dynamics of social movements and protest. Indeed, digital technologies offer new forms of horizontal and vertical communication that **promote civic engagement and deliberative democracy** (Norris, 2001),
- **Internet = a revolution for democracy (global dimension, immediate effects in real time)**, the "web" offers unexpected opportunities in the areas of information, communication, and political mobilization: through the network, you can **become a member** of pressure groups, **join organizations**, contribute with **funds**, receive **emails**, make **proposals** to the authorities, intervene in "online" **discussions**, **circulate** electronic petitions, pass on **announcements** or activities, **call for** demonstrations.



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**Occupy**, by NOAM CHOMSKY,  
May 1st 2012

# OCCUPY WALL STREET

## OCCUPYING... TO CHANGE THE WORLD

- **BEGAN** in New York, **September 17 2011**, through **gathering and pacific occupation** of a number of spaces very close to the economic heart of the world, Wall Street,
- “to create a process to **address** the **problems** we face, and *generate solutions* accessible to everyone” (Declaration of the Occupation of New York City, September 29<sup>TH</sup> 2011), the Declaration makes a call to **take action** and **form groups** in the “**spirit of direct democracy**”,
- **popular nature:** Occupy Wall Street is a **people’s movement**. It is **party-less, leaderless, by the people and for the people**. It is not a business, a political party, an advertising campaign or a brand (*Statement of Autonomy*),
- **principles and values:** collective resources, dignity, integrity, solidarity and autonomy ,
- it attempts to build a **socio-economic and political alternative model** resulting in greater equality levels,

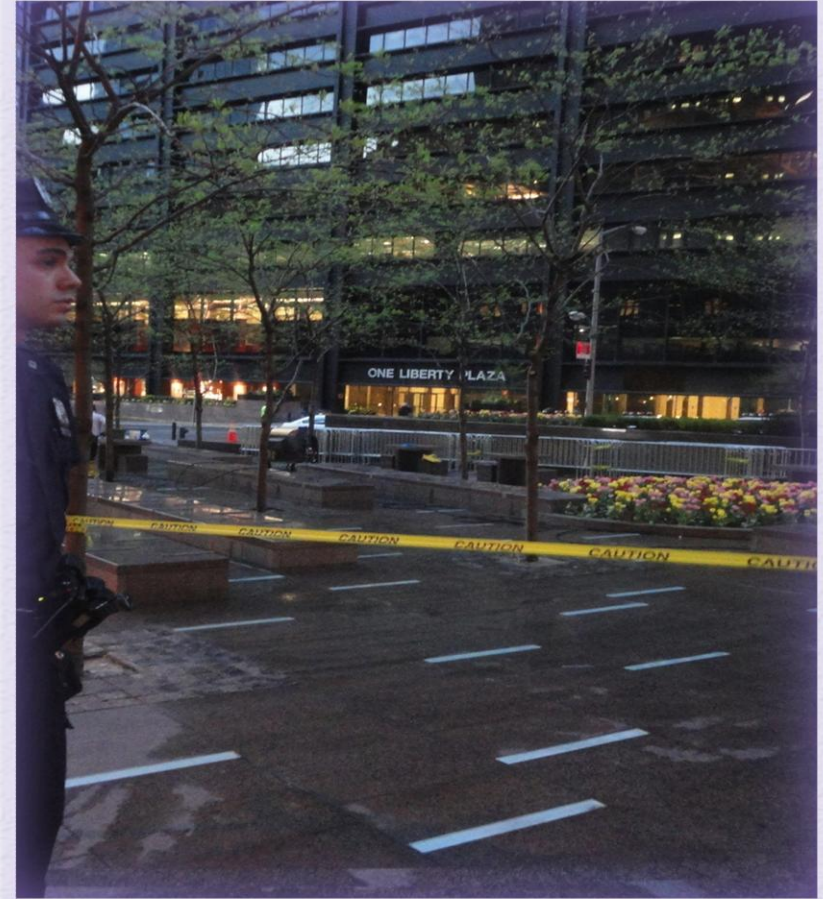
**WAYS OF OPERATION AND ORGANIZATION:**  
"General Assembly of the City of New York",  
of open, participatory and horizontal nature.  
It consists of dozens of groups working  
together,  
<http://www.nycga.net/>

Today the Movement, which has left the  
occupation, is still **alive, active, organized -**  
**involved in numerous initiatives-**. The **digital**  
**tools** have facilitated its designs,

From Occupation –Zucotti Park- to  
Global, Organized Activism

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CRTJF57LwA>

<http://www.charlesmeacham.com/>



# Demonstrations and Gatherings

in Union Square, Wall Street, Central Park



ARTS & LABOR,

<http://artsandlabor.org/>

**FIVE WAYS  
WE CAN ACT**

# My Experience with ARTS & LABOR

- **"Arts & Labor"** is an affinity group founded with the **Assembly for "Occupy Wall Street"** in New York. It is composed of artists, trainees, writers, educators, art dealers, designers, curators, administrators, students, etc., among other professions;
- efforts to **correct economic inequalities, labor exploitation**, in their **struggle for fair working conditions**. Also in favor of a more **equitable distribution of wealth** (99%). These goals are accomplished through **direct action** and **educational initiatives**, **forging coalitions and redefining structures and institutions**;

# My experience with ARTS & LABOR



**working groups:** “Alternative Economies”, “Intern Labor Rights”, “Organized Labor Research”, “Radical Arts”, “Spatial Politics & Anti-Gentrification”

<http://artsandlabor.org/working-groups/>

**solidarity networks, contacts and allies in the USA and internationally,** (Copenhaguen Seminar, Discussion with Haben und Brauchen in Berlin); welcome in NY affinity movements all over the globe (Reception of Quebec Student Movement in Brooklyn, NY),

(<http://artsandlabor.org/category/news/>)

**SOLIDARITY FROM ASIA TO OWS IN ITS FIRST ANNIVERSARY, 17 SEPTEMBER,**  
<http://occupywallst.org/>

# ARTS & LABOR ACTIONS

- **Educational activities or "teach-ins":** lectures, conferences and seminars
- **"Cultural mapping & real estate development":** to sketch a map that reflects the relationship between cultural institutions, the world of business and government in the city of New York;
- **Book club,** to encourage knowledge and expertise and discuss current issues;
- **Public Awareness:** promotion and support for many initiatives, special concern for **unpaid internships**;

## *In the XXI Century, citizen participation become intense*

- Anti-globalization movements, the Arab Spring, "Occupy Wall Street" or the Indignados show that: 1) We are witnessing **significant shift** in the structure and operation of **world politics** (Cobbett, 2012), 2) **representative democracies** are shaken by a serious **crisis**; 3) Chance to reshape the world order through **assembly and dialogue** (Braudel),
- "Occupy Wall Street" embodies an **element of change for our civilization** (Cox),
- "Occupy Wall Street" exemplifies a most **important democratic paradigm**,

# For research and dialog

GLOBAL DIMENSION OF MOVEMENTS –INDIGNADOS, OWS, ARAB SPRING, etc.-/PARTICULARITIES in each geographical area;

ARE WE ASSISTING TO THE FAILURE OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY?

DO WE HAVE TO ARBITRATE/ENCOURAGE OTHER MECHANISMS SO THAT CITIZENS PARTICIPATE BEYOND PROTEST?

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PROTEST MOVEMENTS, IMPACT AND FUTURE OF PROTEST MOVEMENTS, i.e. OCCUPY, WE NEED TIME TO ASSESS EFFECTS,

WHAT ECONOMIC AND POLITICL MODEL?

CONSENSUS-DECISION MAKING, ORGANIZATION WITHIN,

POLICE, RESTRICTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, LABOR LAW,

# Webs y Blogs

- [www.occupiytheory.info](http://www.occupiytheory.info)
- <http://www.alternet.org/>