Observing Protest from a Place

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What can quantitative surveys tell us about GJM activists?

Isabelle Sommier

Abstract

Since the rise of the global justice movement (GJM), a number of surveys have been conducted, particularly on the composition of the social forums. This article examines the main surveys (Fisher, Ibase, Reese, Della Porta, Agrikoliansky and Sommier) and the possibility of their cumulative study, a task that curiously has not been undertaken until now. What do these surveys tell us about the activists’ socio-biological characteristics, political, and organizational affiliations and ideological beliefs? We will see that, despite their common scientific interests, any comparison is delicate because of the methodology used and the way the questions are formulated. The surveys nevertheless paint a homogeneous portrait of the attendees.

Since its inception, the global justice movement (GJM) has been the topic of numerous studies. Some of the research has made use of a relatively recent method in the social sciences, i.e. conducting surveys during demonstrations. This method has been consolidated and even become a routine procedure through regular use at protests over the past ten years. Known as INSURA (INdividual SUrveys during RAllies), it had been used only on rare occasions until it was given a methodological framework by Pierre Favre and his colleagues (Favre, Fillieule, and Mayer, 1997). Subsequently, the method came into systematic use with the emergence of the new movement opposing neoliberal globalization. It has accompanied this movement since the pioneering work of Della Porta et al. at the anti-G8 event in Genoa during the summer of 2001 (Andretta et al., 2002), followed by the quantitative surveys carried out at the European Social Forms (ESF) and the World Social Forums (WSF) up to and including the 2011 event in Dakar. Alter-global events are particularly well suited to this tool by their very configuration (usually

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1 Favre et al. cite three experiences prior to their 1994 survey: the first was at an antinuclear demonstration in Washington, D.C. on May 6, 1979, the second at a demonstration against Margaret Thatcher in Sheffield in April 1983, and the third at a demonstration in favor of public school education in France on January 16, 1994 (Favre et al., 1997: 16-17).
indoor meetings, protest camps or villages, and less frequently at marches where administering questionnaires is more delicate) and their audiences, which are usually willing to cooperate in answering survey questions. What is the real value of this research? What does it tell us about the activists’ socio-biological characteristics, political and organizational affiliations and ideological beliefs? These questions have already been raised in a comparison made by Fillieule and Blanchard (2008) of two surveys conducted in France in 2003. Our study and its conclusions are in line with theirs, but it differs in two respects: it is less ambitious from a theoretical standpoint: the earlier researchers were seeking to assess the benefits of a method one of them had helped to invent, after it had been applied elsewhere. On the other hand, our research is more ambitious in terms of the number of studies included in the comparison – 20 surveys from 2000 to 2011 (presented in Part I). As we shall see, the surveys paint a homogeneous sociographic portrait of the attendees, but we will also have occasion to point out how the formulation of the questions can make comparison a delicate process, thus weakening the results or sometimes making it impossible to draw a conclusion (Part II). Nevertheless, as Fillieule and Blanchard note (2008: 14), while “INSURA is certainly well suited to explore the demographics of alter-global events, as well as relational networks of individuals and multiple belongings (...) organization networks and the movement’s boundaries are far more difficult to explore through, a fact that seriously limits international cross comparisons of movements based on that tool.” Like any survey concerned, by definition, with individuals, it provides a realistic snapshot of them at a given time and is therefore necessarily ephemeral. As a result, it is not really designed to track the evolution of the multi-organizational field over time (Part III). We will conclude by looking at more heuristic research approaches that take advantage of INSURA’s contributions while at the same time allowing us to step back and grasp the connection between the micro-sociological level of the activist and the meso-sociological level of the organizations – something the automatic use of the INSURA method fails to bring out.

1.1 Data and methods

Contrary to the assertion of Reese et al. (2011: 64), many quantitative surveys have been conducted at alter-global events. One could sense this intuitively at social forums, for example, from the large number of researchers who were present or who were asking each other to fill out questionnaires.
For our assessment, we chose twenty surveys on the necessarily selective basis of their academic reach, i.e. the fact that the results were published in research works or in French- or English-speaking peer-review journals. This means a great deal of research has not been included, either due to the language or because they were intended for a very small audience, such as grey literature or student theses. Social scientists clearly supported the alter-global movement in its early stages (Alberoni, 1981) beginning in 2000. Without a doubt, they promoted it, along with media coverage, giving it visibility and often legitimacy by adopting an empathetic or even committed viewpoint. Like most journalists, they began to turn away from it from 2007, with some exceptions, as evidenced by the drying up of new publications on the subject (but not reissues like Sen and Waterman, 2012, Smith and Karides, 2014). Also, the book edited by Reese in 2011 (and reissued the following year) contains half of the articles already published in the mid-2000s on events prior to 2008. In short, this survey conducted in 2011 in Dakar is the first large project for seven years. This academic interest and its subsequent discontinuation can be explained in three ways: first, the Western background of the researchers – of the seven teams, only one was from the “South” (Brazil), three were from Europe, two from the United States, and one from Australia; second, the changing form of the Forum, which has obviously become more routine and therefore less attractive in recent years, particularly in Western countries; third, the circularity of the GJM (i.e. the ties that developed between alter-global activists and movement researchers may have initially led them to share their enthusiasm and later their disappointment).

Of the twenty studies (see Table 1), eight were conducted at WSFs (Ibase, 2005 and 2007, Reese et al., 2011, Pommerolle et Siméant 2008), seven at counter-forums (Fisher et al., 2005, Andretta et al., 2002, Fillieule et al., 2004), three at European Social Forums (Della Porta, 2009, Agrikoliansky and Sommier, 2005) and two at local social forums (Bramble in Australia, Reese et al. in the US). Though the questions were quite similar, as we will see in the next section, there was a perceptible difference in their sampling methods. With the help of WSF office support, the Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analyses (Ibase) built a stratified sample divided into four groups (Brazilian participants; Latin American participants; Participants from other countries; and Campers) according to the official

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2 In addition to Ibase (Instituto Brasileiro de Análises Sociais e Econômicas), which conducts research on the WSF and is one of its main promoters in Brazil, we might also mention Tom Bramble, a co-organizer of the Australian GJM events that he also studies.
registration database. The other surveys had no knowledge of the contours of the constellation of participants and either had to adopt a totally random selection method or weight their sample in varying ways. This could be done *a priori* by doubly saturating the sample, following very detailed survey preparation ahead of the event: first they studied the program to find the widest possible panel of lectures where survey team members would be present to distribute questionnaires, by comparing the discussion topics with the organizations represented on the platform; second, by setting up research teams to be present simultaneously at all the sites.\(^3\) The weighting could also be done *a posteriori* by adjusting the sample using the attendance figures provided by the main organizations at the anti-G8 in Genoa (Andretta, 2002: 221-222) or the regional and country-level registration data released by the WSF Organizing Committees in 2005 and 2007 (Reese 2008b, with sometimes surprising results as we will see later on). One final control technique, in keeping with the INSURA method (Favre et al., 1997: 21ff; Fillieule and Blanchard, 2008), consisted in giving very strict instructions on how to administer questionnaires.\(^4\)

The surveys also varied according to the number of languages used, which was obviously higher for WSFs and reduced to a single vernacular language for local events such as the anti-G8 mobilization in Genoa in 2001 or the Australian forums studied in 2004 by Bramble. Surveys differed above all in the number of questions asked, from the “lightest” version (e.g. the Fisher surveys contain only 6 short questions) to the longest: 56 questions at the last WSF in Dakar in 2011. It should be pointed out that only the latter survey distinguished between administered questionnaires (24% of the total number collected) and self-administered questionnaires (75%).

This article will focus primarily on surveys at the social forums for two main reasons. On the one hand, because they are the key innovation of the GJM and in a way symbolize it, even if they do not exhaust it. On the other hand, it is best to compare what is comparable; forums, counter-summits, and transnational campaigns do not mobilize exactly the same public insofar as the offer of commitment is not the same. The audience is more reflexive and expert in the forums, attracting a significantly older one with more institutional memberships, at least now (see later).

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\(^3\) For example, at the anti-G8 protest in Evian (“forum of alternatives,” alternative camps – cf. Fillieule et al., 2004: 18) and the second ESF (Agrikoliansky and Sommier, 2005: 15), hence the volume of samples.

\(^4\) For the Fisher survey, for example, every fifth person standing in line to enter a rally area, and at other events, choosing every fifth person in a line or row, as determined by the researcher working in a particular area.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GJM Event</th>
<th>Research Team*</th>
<th>Number of interviewees**</th>
<th>Languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-2002: 5 counter-summits (Netherlands, USA, Canada)5</td>
<td>Fisher</td>
<td>1514</td>
<td>English, French, Dutch, and German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2001: Anti-G8, Genoa, Italy</td>
<td>Della Porta</td>
<td>762 Italians</td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2001: First ESF, Florence, Italy</td>
<td>Della Porta</td>
<td>2384-2579</td>
<td>English, French, Italian, Spanish and German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2003: anti-G8, Evian, France</td>
<td>Sommier</td>
<td>2282</td>
<td>English, French, Italian, and German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2003: Second ESF, Paris, France</td>
<td>Sommier</td>
<td>2198</td>
<td>English, French, Italian, Spanish and German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May and September 2004: Brisbane and Sydney Social Forums</td>
<td>Bramble</td>
<td>210 Australians</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005: WSF, Porto Alegre, Brazil</td>
<td>Chase-Dunn</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>Portuguese, English and Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005: WSF, Porto Alegre, Brazil</td>
<td>Reese</td>
<td>639</td>
<td>Portuguese, English and Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006: fourth ESF, Athens, Greece</td>
<td>Della Porta</td>
<td>1058-1144</td>
<td>English, French, Italian, Spanish and German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007: WSF, Nairobi, Kenya</td>
<td>Reese</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>Portuguese, English and Spanish, French, Swahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007: USA Social Forum, Atlanta</td>
<td>Reese</td>
<td>582 Americans</td>
<td>English and Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011: WSF, Dakar, Senegal</td>
<td>Siméant</td>
<td>1069-1169</td>
<td>English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Wolof</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The research is obviously the work of more or less large teams; our decision here to use the name of the main initiator is intended to facilitate reading and certainly not to personalize the surveys.
** The possible variation in the number of surveys can be explained by the variable number of questionnaires analyzed depending on the team’s researchers and/or the time required for statistical processing.

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5  November 13-24, 2000: the “Human Dike” at the 2000 Conference of the Parties-6 (COP-6) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Hague, the Netherlands (interviews with 204 protest participants from 25 countries); 2) February 2, 2002: the “Another World Is Possible March” at the 2002 World Economic Forum, New York City (316 surveys with participants from four countries); 3) April 20, 2002: the “A20 Stop the War at Home and Abroad/ Mobilization for Global Justice” at the spring 2002 meetings of the World Bank/IMF, Washington, DC (177 participants from 28 of the 50 United States); 4) June 26-27 2002: the 2002 “G-6B Demonstration” during the G-8 meetings, Calgary, Canada (Eighty-six protesters from four countries); 5) September 28 and 29, 2002: the “Mobilization for Global Justice” at the fall 2002 meetings of the World Bank/IMF, Washington, DC (730 participants from 11 countries).
1.2  The seemingly convergent portrait of the alter-global activist

At first glance, the surveys would appear to be easy to compare, given the similarity in the questions asked by the researchers: basic demographic data (sex, age, diplomas, social position); membership in activist organizations (number and type of organizational affiliations); political orientation: degree of politicization through the individual’s environment and use of political information tools, particularly the Internet; classification on the left-right scale; degree of trust in institutions and organizations, from the most grassroots level such as Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) to supranational bodies (UN, regional organizations) and the various territorial authorities of the country of origin. The fact that the questions coincide can of course be explained by similar sociological backgrounds of the researchers and the routine academic propensity to ask standard questions regarding, for example, ideological or political self-positioning to make them comparable with official or traditional surveys, as well as the circulation and borrowing of questionnaires.6

Under closer scrutiny, however, these seemingly convergent questions produce results that are much less clear-cut and comparison ultimately proved more arduous than expected. In its broad strokes, the portrait that emerges of the alter-global activist remains homogeneous throughout a decade of surveys and corresponds to the usual depiction in that activists have more resources than the overall population average and these characteristics are even more accentuated in this specific case. GJM activists are in a situation of “biographical availability,” to borrow McAdam’s now classic notion (1986: 70), characterized by the absence of family responsibilities (e.g. 60% of the participants at the 2005 WSF had no children under 18 years of age) and youth, which reflects the era of classifications and the uncertainties noted in studies on generations. According to Reese’s surveys, 70% of the 2005 WSF respondents, 50% of the 2007 WSF respondents, and 59% of 2007 USSF respondents were 35 years old or younger. They made up 48% of attendees at the second ESF (but 35.2% of the activists who are very, regularly, and strongly involved in antiglobal mobilizations and have already participated in several no-global events are under 35 years of age) and 75% of attendees at the anti-G8 (see Table 2 for an overall demographic view).

6 The questionnaire used by the Della Porta team at the anti-G8 in Genoa and above all the first ESF provided the first model; it largely inspired the French surveys in 2003, which were in turn imported to Australia by Bramble.
Table 1.2  General socio-demographic data on social forum attendees (2002-2011) [in %]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>43.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>56.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 25 years of age</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>11.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College or university level</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>80.3</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>77.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alter-global activists possess a very high degree of cultural capital, which significantly distinguishes them from their non-activist compatriots. The survey shows that the activists also have a very high educational level: 51.6% of the participants in the second ESF had a post-graduate degree (more than 3 years of university) and 17.9% a graduate degree (2 or 3 years of university); 34% and 19%, respectively, among the 2003 No-G8 activists. This means that 53% of no-global activists and 69.5% of ESF attendees have college or university degrees. As a comparison, according to the European Social Survey, at the same period no more than 43% of French people had a comparable level of education. Two-thirds of the participants at Australian Social Forum meetings in 2002 had a graduate or postgraduate degree (Bramble, 2006). More than 50% of all respondents at the three meetings studied by Reese had 16 or more years of education. USSF Atlanta respondents were the most highly educated (69%). In contrast, the WVS (World Values Survey) found that only 12% of respondents in the general public reported having a university degree, while the GSS reports that only 28% of US respondents reported 16 or more years of education (Reese, 2008b). The number of university-educated participants grew from one forum to the next (with the exception of Nairobi in 2007), including the WSF held in Dakar. The conclusion is beyond dispute, but we should not lose sight of the effects of widely varying educational systems from country to country, or of subtleties in the wording of the questions – e.g. asking whether an individual has reached a given level of study or whether he/she has obtained the final diploma – that can yield quite different results. Thus, we can take the example of the surveys conducted in parallel at the WSF in 2005 and 2007: 77.7% of the participants in 2005 had “begun or completed a university education” in the Ibase survey, whereas 49% had an educational level of “16 or more years” according to the Reese survey. In 2007, the respective figures were 82% and 53%.
Unfortunately, the social position of activists is difficult to compare because the surveys, with the exception of the French questionnaires, either paid little attention to the question (Ibase) or did so in a highly impressionistic fashion (see Table 3). The surveys conducted by Reese et al. claim to grasp social position through a feeling of class identity (upper, upper middle, lower middle – the most frequently declared, working, lower class) and a catch-all category called “employment status,” aggregating full-time, part-time, temporary basis, self-employed, investments/savings, volunteer, unemployed, retired, student, and “dependent on family income,” with the total amply exceeding 100%. The Della Porta team included in the same “employment status” category: blue- and white-collar workers (26.5% of the attendees at the fourth ESF), upper class (professionals, managers, employers: 14.3%), teachers (9.2%), unemployed (5.5%), retirees (6.8%) and students (37.6%). We will therefore base our interpretation on the French surveys, as they deal with this subject more specifically by comparing different questions: one open question (“What is your profession?”) and two closed questions concerning the respondent’s current occupational situation and his/her main area of activity today (or in the past for retirees).

Attendees at the second ESF clearly held high social positions (Gobille and Uysal, 2005): among those with an occupation, 42% were executive managers or working in a high-level intellectual occupation and 44.1% a mid-level occupation. The main categories in these two groups were mid-level occupations in the healthcare and social work fields (20.7%), college or university professors and scientific occupations (14%), schoolteachers (9.8%) or jobs in information technology, communication, and the arts (11.4%). Low-level occupations were dramatically underrepresented: white-collar workers accounted for only 8.4% (40% from the public sector) and

There are several hypotheses that could explain the extreme variations in the amount of attention given to questions pertaining to socio-professional status: 1) the aims of the research undertaken, which may have little to do with this topic (e.g. Fisher’s interest in mobilizing organizations conveyed through six questions or Della Porta’s focus on the internal workings of SMOs and their relationship with institutions, in line with the European Union call for tenders on the contribution of social movements to democracy, or at the opposite extreme, the activist orientation of the surveys conducted by Ibase); 2) the different disciplines of the teams, not always sociology of social movements like Della Porta or the French researchers (e.g. Bramble is an economist and trade unionist, Reese a specialist on the Welfare State and women, Fisher on the environment, etc.); 3) the specificity of the professional nomenclatures used in France (the socio-professional “categories” since the post-war period, inspired by constructivism), a fortiori in a sociology inspired by Bourdieu, no doubt destined to disappear with the project to harmonize European Union socio-economic classifications (ESeC), inspired by the opposing Anglo-Saxon model.
blue-collar workers 2.2%. In France, these two categories represented 56.5% of the active population in 2002. This particular sociological profile was reinforced by the social origin and social position of the respondent's husband or wife. Half of the activists' spouses belonged to the public sector, 40% were managers or engaged in a high-level intellectual occupation, 34% were in mid-level occupations, 3% were blue-collar workers, and 10% white-collar workers. Among the parents of the activists in our sample, 53% of the mothers worked in the public sector (often as teachers – 10.5% in all) or mid-level healthcare and social workers (10.3%); 42% of the fathers worked in the public sector. Managers and high-level intellectual occupations are overrepresented – 34% of the fathers of our sample. White-collar workers (12% of the fathers) and blue-collar workers (15% of the fathers) are underrepresented, whereas these three categories represented, respectively, 10%, 15%, and 40% of the fathers of French people in their thirties at the same time.

This breakdown, which is the reverse social stratification of the general population, was (remarkably!) confirmed at the WSF in Dakar. In that case, too, executives and high-level intellectual occupations (43.3%) and mid-level professions (26.48%) were predominant; among those, teachers (19.47%), healthcare and social workers (12.81%) were the most numerous. Working class categories were very much underrepresented: 5.4% white-collar workers, 3% blue-collar workers, 1.45% farmers, and 5% artisans, shopkeepers and small businessmen (15.37% without job). Of course one might reasonably conclude that the method actually discourages those with the least cultural and social capital, who are probably less inclined to agree to fill out a questionnaire, but this bias is not enough to explain such a strong contrast nor does it invalidate the observation that the alter-global population is well integrated in the workplace. These trends can be explained in two ways. On the one hand, the effects of the form of action itself: a forum is similar to an academic conference where people come to learn and discuss – and already, one must know its existence, contrary to a demonstration, for example, which one can cross by chance. It can be intimidating to those without (rightly or wrongly) political or intellectual competence, a fortiori if it stands in a place dedicated to knowledge, such as a university as was the case in Dakar. On the other hand, this strong social selectivity induced by the “forum form” has probably increased over the 10 years of experience, as we shall see later.

The activists' social circles also appear to be very socially committed. Less than 20% of participants at the second ESF and the Evian No-G8 declared that neither their colleagues nor their family or friends were “rather active
activists”; 34% of them declared that two or three of these three social circles were (Fillieule and Blanchard, 2008). Furthermore, 54% of the respondents talked about politics often or very often with their colleagues at work, 65% at home with their families, and 80% with their friends. Among their social relations, 36% were active and 12% very active in the alter-global movement (Fillieule et al., 2004). The osmosis appeared even stronger in 2011: 66.8% of the friends of WSF participants, 71.51% of their colleagues, and 31.62% of their families were either very or rather active.

The “middle class radicalism” (Cosgrove and Duff, 1980) of alter-global activists can be explained by their interest in politics and a feeling of political competence nurtured by their very high level of education and highly qualified jobs, often linked to professions involving social control (healthcare, teaching, social work). They have a very critical attitude towards institutions: 70% of the attendees at the second ESF did not trust regional authorities, 82% national ones, 72% political parties, 76% European authorities, 62% the UN. They were less suspicious of municipal authorities (50% trust them) and the degree of confidence increased with the proximity of the institution: 54.5% trust trade unions, 77% NGOs, 90% grassroots associations (Gobille and Uysal, 2005: 115). The degree of distrust

Table 1.3 Change in the participants’ occupational situation (2002-2011) [in %]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ESF 2002*</th>
<th>WSF 2005* (Reese)</th>
<th>ESF 2006*</th>
<th>WSF 2007</th>
<th>WSF 2011**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>16.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>9.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>6.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working population</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>87.5***</td>
<td>66.7****</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>124.7</td>
<td>100.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid cases</td>
<td>2429</td>
<td>2120</td>
<td>1144</td>
<td></td>
<td>1069</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Andretta & Sommier 2009: 116; in comparison, at the same period students represented 6.6% of the European population and retirees 21.5%  
** For 2011, calculated using a binary method (yes/no) in which some respondents checked several categories, therefore no total %  
*** Aggregation of full time (34%), part time (9.5), temporary basis 5.5), self-employed (19), investments/savings (1.7), volunteer (17.8%); unweighted data  
**** Aggregation of 47% who said they worked full time, 11.69% part time and 8% unstable employment
was higher at the 2005 WSF: 82.1% distrusted banks and 81.6% international companies, but 35% trusted trade unions, 58.3% NGOs, and 70.6% social movements (Ibase). These results are, to say the least, as expected within an activist arena like the GJM and therefore have little to teach us.

The widespread distrust of institutions and their representatives does not, however, lead to a loss of interest in politics or a withdrawal from public life; on the contrary, 76% of the participants at the second ESF declared they systematically voted in elections and 11% often did so (respectively 65.1% and 15.5% of attendees in Dakar). 18% currently belonged to a party and 16.2% had done so in the past, but the percentage was higher among more active activists (respectively 31% and 19.8%). 78% positioned themselves on the left (31% of them on the far left), only 3.4% of them in the center or on the right. 18% refused to declare their position. The tendency was the same among participants at the 2005 WSF, although the categories were different: 60.1% left; 19.8% center-left; 4.5% center; 0.6% center-right; 1.6% right, and 13.4% No position (source: Ibase). Here, too, the question itself and the comparison are of only limited interest, as the meaning of the terms “left,” “far left,” “right,” etc. varies from one country to the next.

The high degree of social integration and political participation of alter-global activists validates the theory of Sidney Tarrow (2001), who describes them as “rooted cosmopolitans.” Indeed, the ability to project oneself into transnational issues and events presupposes solid resources and national roots. The French researchers developed Tarrow’s idea by assessing these cosmopolitan aptitudes using three indicators: multilingual skills, experience of living abroad and the number and type of ties kept up with foreigners. From all of these points of view, the participants in the second ESF are very specific about their relationships with the world: 76% speak one or more foreign languages besides French (33% one, 30% two, 9% three).8 To the question “Do you have ties in other countries?” 34% gave a positive answer for professional reasons, 45% gave a positive answer for family reasons, and 76% gave a positive answer for friendship reasons. 37% of them had lived abroad, 19% for a year or less, 18% for two or more years, 72% for professional reasons, 14% for personal reasons, 6% due to exile or emigration, and 4% to travel. 23% went to other countries to engage in political activism: 17.7% sometimes and 5% often, 70% to Europe (Gobille and Uysal, 2005: 115ff).

From a sociographic standpoint, certain changes can be discerned over the long term: the ratio of male to female activists has grown consistently

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8 In 1996, only 37% of French people declared they could speak a foreign language.
higher, the average age of activists is higher and there are correlative fewer student activists. The median age was 25 in Florence, 35 in Paris, 31 in Athens, and 40 in Dakar, and the percentage of student attendees dropped from 53% in 2002 to 12.5% in 2011. This overall evolution was particularly pronounced at the last WSF, whereas the 2005 WSF was an exception to the rule – young people and students were particularly overrepresented and far more numerous than at previous forums: 31% of attendees were under age 25 in 2003 and 37.4% in 2004. The absence of quantitative surveys between 2008 and 2011 makes it difficult to interpret the shift: was the last forum unusual or did it merely accentuate earlier trends? Although the indicators of membership in professions and organizations are few and far between and hence hard to compare, they may perhaps provide a key to interpretation or at the very least a plausible hypothesis. But interpreting them makes the problem of survey comparability even more acute.

1.3 The evolution of the multi-organizational field of alter-globalism: a delicate comparison

Knowing that activist groups attract different audiences, one might think that these sociographic changes partly reflect the evolution of the multi-organizational field (Curtis and Zurcher, 1973). Monitoring at three ESFs from 2002 to 2006 already revealed the increased professionalization of alter-global activists, along with a higher percentage of males from one event to the next. As we noted earlier (Andretta and Sommier, 2009: 119), “while the gender of professional activists was very balanced in 2003, the number of males in positions of responsibility had jumped significantly four years later, bringing the ESF back to the usual unequal division of political labor between genders (60% men versus 40% women).” The same trend was found at the WSFs: unsurprisingly, the farther the activists had to travel from home to attend the Forum and therefore the higher the cost of their activism, the more pronounced the gender gap became. Activist employment in the private sector has clearly declined, whereas there has been a spectacular increase in jobs in NGOs, which rose from 1.2% in 2002 to

9 When we consider the country of permanent residence of the professional activists, we notice a great disparity between countries, ranging from 48.5% of men in Greece (the only country where professional activists are predominantly feminine) to 71% in Italy, 63.6% in Germany, 58% in Belgium, France, and Spain, and 55% in Great Britain.
30% in 2011 (see Table 4). Does the growth of employment in NGOs indicate professionalization of the GJM? It is difficult to determine the number of employees of organizations due to variations in the formulation of survey questions (when they are known, which is not the case for the Reese surveys). At the second ESF, 21% (420 people) of organization members declared they were paid-staff members or members of the leadership; the figure was 38% (326 people) at the fourth ESF, an increase of 17%. “Ordinary” activists without responsibilities or mandates represented respectively 79% and 62% of the sample (Andretta and Sommier, 2009: 118-119). Leaders and paid-staff members accounted for 48.1% at the 2007 WSF and 66.1% at the 2007 USSF (Reese, 2011: 69) – sizable figures that can perhaps be explained by the number of participants who came as representatives of their organization (77.4% and 68%, respectively). At the last WSF, 21.35% stated they were currently paid staff members of an organization and 13.31% had been previously.

Table 1.4 Attendees’ employment sectors (2002-2011) [in %]

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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>25.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assoeiative sector</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>30.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed professionals</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>11.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>7.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Total of people in employment only N = 1,215
N.B. For 2011, the binary method (yes/no) was used to calculate the numbers for each sector and some respondents checked several choices, hence no total in terms of %.

For the 2003 WSF, the question was formulated as follows: “Are you, or have you ever been, a permanent and/or paid staff member of an organization?” For the 2011 WSF: “Are you or have you ever been a paid staff member of an organization?” (Note that the question is more restrictive than the previous ones because it excludes leaders who are not necessarily paid.) But for the 2006 WSF: “What is your position in this group?” with 5 possible choices: member of the leadership, paid staff member, voluntary activist/campaigner, ordinary member, not actively involved in the group.
Over the 10-year period under study, a cluster of indicators appears to confirm the growing presence of seasoned participants increasingly supervised by their organizations. Over the long term, aside from 2007 (80.4%), the percentage of first-time participants dropped by half, from 60.7% in 2005 to 33% in 2011. All of the audiences declared in steadily larger numbers that they were members of a group, even in 2007: 78% in 2003, 80.4% in 2005, 85.1% in 2007 and 94% in 2011. At the 2011 WSF, nearly 70% even declared they had come on behalf of an organization, which paid the travel expenses of 44% of them.

To examine further the hypothesis of a changing organizational balance, which would explain the professionalization or even the gradual “NGOization” of the alter-global movement glimpsed at the fourth ESF, it would be necessary to reconstruct in minute detail the multi-organizational field from one event to the next. On the crucial question regarding membership in an activist organization, however, the possibilities for comparison are discouragingly limited. The fourth ESF survey, directed by D. Della Porta, framed one question differently from the way it was asked in other inquiries (“Have you ever been involved in any of the following kinds of voluntary/campaign groups?”). As a result, it cannot be compared because taking part in an event in no way signifies belonging to a group.11 Reese and Ibase show little interest in this problem and base their approach on a typology that notably contrasts NGOs with SMOs (social movement organizations). The interest of this opposition in the case of GJM would deserve a thorough discussion that this chapter does not allow (a social movement is often composed of formal organizations such as NGOs, interactions, and networks of individuals)12. At this point we will just mention that the interpretation is difficult insofar as the authors give no explanation of the principles that have guided their typology (see Table 5).

Consequently, there is little benefit to be gained from this comparison, except to point out the decline in the participation of trade unions and unaffiliated individuals, on the one hand, and the increased number of political parties and religious groups on the other. A valuable comparison would require working from strictly identical empirical protocols. For now, to chart the evolution of the GJM “multi-organizational field,” we will once again use the comparable surveys conducted by the French teams (see Table 6). They reveal notable changes. The alter-global groups in the true sense

11 Unsurprisingly, the results are consistently much higher than when the question pertains to activist affiliations.
12 On this discussion, see for example Diani, 1992.
What can quantitative surveys tell us about GJM activists? Quantitative surveys appear to have diminished considerably, as their membership has fallen from 1st place in 2003 to 4th place in 2011. Human rights organizations are now in first place, having nearly doubled from 16% to 28.6%. Four other groups show significant increases: peasant groups, with five times more members; feminists were three times more present in 2011 and even more when they are aggregated with the “women’s associations” category (16.4%), which was added to neutralize the negative effect feminist activism sometimes has; neighborhood associations and religious groups, with twice as many participants. Keeping in mind the growth of the NGO sector and the number of paid organizational staff members mentioned earlier, there are indeed convergent signs of a gradual “NGOization” of the GJM, perhaps accentuated by the effect of the location of the 2011 WSF, with the preponderance of human rights associations acting as a source of job creation as much as of activism in Africa. The rise of transnational aid organizations and human rights defense organizations, however, had already been noted by Byrd et al. (2010) over the period 2003-05. Further investigations are necessary to confirm this NGOization and to see if it refers to the same phenomena as those studied by Lang (2013): professionalization, institutionalization, and bureaucratization.

Even if those surveys had followed an identical protocol, the comparison would have soon revealed the limits of the INSURA method. Indeed, alter-global events primarily mobilize a local population and hence take place in a given socio-cultural space and a particular political and historical context.
For example, 80% of the respondents at the 2005 WSF came from Brazil and 8.8% from the rest of Latin America;\textsuperscript{13} 83% of those at the second ESF were French, which no doubt explains the overrepresentation of attendees from the public sector (46% of the participants were public sector employees), the choice of “defending public services” as a mobilizing topic and the presence of trade unions and the French Communist Party. The data collected at the WSF in Dakar shows more balanced results with 50% of the participants

\textsuperscript{13} The interpretation of the results is therefore quite different when they are broken down into sub-populations. For example, the overall percentage of participants with a master’s degree or a PhD is 9.8%, but 9.9% among Latin Americans, 10% among Brazilians, and 29.4% among the individuals from other countries.
from Africa (28% from Senegal), 32% from Europe (20% from France), and 12.5% from the American continent.

The fact that the participants at so-called “global” events mainly come from the host country is clearly reflected in the affiliations claimed at the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre (Ibase data). The affiliations refer in large part to specifically Brazilian issues: 23.9% belonged to groups from “areas of action” including education (21.9%), social aid (19.5%), anti-discrimination (18.7%), arts and culture (18%), public organization/participation (17.3%), HESCER (human, economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights) (15.7%), environment (15.2%), agriculture and land issues (14.5%), defending and promoting rights (advocacy), and 14.1% public policies/public budget. And no doubt researchers show sensitivity to the local prism by focusing on what appear to be key issues, a fortiori when they are citizens of the country hosting the event, or by totally ignoring others. Thus ethnic composition is totally absent from European surveys but central to Anglo-Saxon questionnaires, whereas some contain special items such as the categories of “arts and culture” (18.7% of the organizations) or “Public policies/Public budget” (14.1%) shown by Ibase in its study on the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre; or those of “cooperatives and tontines” and “right to education” adopted by the researchers who went to Dakar in 2011.

It is therefore a delicate matter to infer any change at all in the overall GJM from the comparison of events that take place, under the same label, in extremely different locations, and therefore do not imply the same costs or the same issues, depending on the group. Does the increase in the number of members of religious groups attending the last two World Social Forums express their growing involvement in the GJM or simply a greater degree of religious affiliation among African participants than Europeans? Is the increase in peasant organizations more than a mere artifact masking varying degrees of mobilization depending on the continent? Indeed, it is quite possible that some participating groups use GJM events to put forward national demands through the “boomerang effect” described by M. Keck and K. Sikkink (1998). A transnational activist event like the WSF necessarily gives rise to intense strategies on the part of associations to ensure their legitimacy in the eyes of their sponsors as well as their competitors; “naturally international” NGOs will come in search of local grassroots

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14 Religious beliefs have not always been surveyed in the questionnaires, and when they have been, it was through noticeably different questions. At the 2003 WSF, 75% of participants declared they were unbelievers and 54.6% of those at the USSF in 2007, but 28% at the WSF held the same year and 30% at the last WSF.
constituencies, “as close to the field as possible,” whereas the ability for national groups to attend is an appreciable opportunity to stand out and “rise above” the others.

1.4 Conclusion

Finally, the absence thus far of any analytical assessment of the various surveys is perhaps due to modesty. The portion of common questions that are worth comparing (and above all likely to be compared) is essentially limited to the most basic data: sex, age, diplomas, and the overall volume of organizational affiliations. Others (political self-positioning, degree of trust in institutions or “solutions” recommended to achieve the goals of the cause such as “reform” or “abolish” capitalism) yield anticipated results. Hence there is not much to say about them,\(^\text{15}\) except to emphasize the aspect of self-presentation and playing the activist role expected at mobilization events, which the method and the situation necessarily generate. Only in-depth, face-to-face interviews outside the context of such events would provide a clear picture of the activists’ world of values. On the other hand, the comparison clearly fails on two essential points: professional affiliations and the type of organizational memberships, which seemed to interest only the French teams.

Beyond what the INSURA method can (or cannot) say, these problems of comparison (and hence the low degree of cumulative survey results) also testify to the assumptions made by many researchers when conducting their studies that create an enchanted vision of this “new” cause shared with the activists. These assumptions fall into two categories: \(^\text{16}\) first, that the GJM is unified, therefore authorizing discussion of a single alter-global movement as a homogenous whole, regardless of the type of event or where it is held; second, that the GJM is truly “global,” i.e. freed from “cumbersome” national features to express an “international civil society.” Such assumptions are implicit in surveys providing only aggregated data that does not distinguish varying results according to the national origins of the attendees or fail to take the precaution of pointing out method biases. They are obviously less frequent in research such as surveys at local forums (like Bramble

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\(^{15}\) That is the reason why we did not use them, or the questions on Internet.

\(^{16}\) In fact three categories, when we add the assumption about the “radically new” nature of the GJM, which we will not discuss here. Regarding these three assumptions and their implications for the research undertaken, cf. the introduction to Sommier et al., 2008.
in Australia) or the anti-summit in Genoa with only Italian respondents (Andretta et al., 2002). Should the survey focus therefore be strictly local? We think not.

In addition to taking traditional methodological precautions, there are three ways to employ the INSURA method in working with data from the “global” mobilizations of the GJM that do justice to the extreme heterogeneity of the audiences and how the cause is used. They also indicate avenues for future research if the surveys are used again or even systematized. One of them (Sommier, forthcoming) consists in monitoring the morphology of a national delegation over time, from one mobilization episode to another, thereby confronting the transnational assumption head-on. This approach notes the specificities of a particular population (e.g. the rooted cosmopolitans) and maps the changes in the transnational involvement of movement families in a given country. The two dimensions – individual and organizational – are interwoven. Indeed, it would seem that the increased age and feminization of French participants at WSFs reflect a shift in the center of gravity of the multi-organizational field from the original social issue to growing advocacy.17 Two other interpretations of the survey results at “global” events have already succeeded in making a genuine contribution to our knowledge. They both emphasize the plurality of WSF audiences. The first breaks down attendees into sub-samples, based either on the geographical distance separating the participant’s country of origin from the event location,18 or on his/her degree of involvement,19 thus linking the individual to the collective or the micro- and meso-sociological levels.

17 If this hypothesis were to be confirmed, it would indicate rampant “NGOization” of the global justice movement in France, in line with the overall changes in “forum”-type events, notably expressed in the change of name from altermondialisme to GJM. On this point, cf. Sommier et al., 2008.

18 Connections with an organization are obviously more frequent among the non-local protest participants, as the surveys conducted by Fisher (2005) clearly show: 47.4% of them heard about the event from an organization (versus 30.5% for the local ones); 51.8% came to the protest with an organization (versus 22.8%), and about 31% received organizational support to attend the protest events (versus 5.2%). This was also true at the Anti-G8 event in Evian: 49% of the foreign activists belonged to one of the groups organizing the event, compared with 39% of the Swiss and French. “59% of the foreigners asserted that an organization was behind their decision to participate, compared with only 39% of the Swiss and French activists; moreover 42% of them came directly with their organizations, versus 24% of the French and the Swiss” (Agrikoliansky and Gobille, 2009: 152). Cf. the chapter devoted to Latin Americans in the present volume.

19 Fillieule et al. (2004) divide the anti-G8 population into four groups: the uncommitted (23%); the mono-committed (98%), particularly present in young, politicized GJM organizations; those involved in 2-6 organizations (49%) and those involved in 7 or more organizations (9%), with a broader range of commitments among the 21 types proposed.
second gauges the effects of the repertoire of available actions on the form of activist involvement. It is thus care to avoid considering different WSF episodes as equivalent, by measuring the impact of “forum”-type events on the form of activism. The article by Agrikoliansky and Gobille (2009) is noteworthy in that it compares two events held close together in time and space based on similar survey protocols. On the one hand, the social forums give priority to “forms of actions combined with intellectual know-how” and encourage “aptitudes for consultation and dialog with public authorities, especially the municipalities” that host the events; on the other hand, the more confrontational forms such as anti-summits attract “young, macho activists” (2009: 164). The authors offer an interesting hypothesis to explain the evolution of WSFs: after initially contributing to the emergence of the GJM, the counter-summits declined under the effects of police repression in favor of more controlled and controllable social forums which attract a less confrontational public; in the process, they lost the support of the younger, more radical elements (who perhaps turned to other types of struggle such as the indignados and Occupy movements). Clearly, these approaches do not invalidate the INSURA method itself but merely its routine use and they invite researchers to show some sociological imagination (Wright-Mills, 1959) and depart from the method’s fetish for scientism.

20 On this question, cf. Chapter 3 by J. Siméant in the present work.