Empowering Community Setting and Community Mobilization

Empowering community settings and community mobilization: Findings from a case study

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Abstract

Empowering community settings exist in many community domains. One domain includes groups and organizations that empower oppressed citizens to challenge societal culture and institutions, and take action to change them. To be considered empowering, a community setting must have both an empowering process, and lead to an empowered outcome. Our study tried to answer the following question: Does the empowering community setting model provide a potentially useful framework for analysis of community movements? Based on qualitative analysis of data related to the characteristics of the anti High Speed Railway movement (Susa Valley, Italy) and to its effects on the larger community, the findings support the view that at least some types of community movements are usefully regarded as empowering community settings. Discussion focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of applying this conceptual framework to community movements, and highlights directions for future research.

Key words: Empowering community settings; Protest; Collective action; Community movements; Citizen participation

The purpose of this paper is to consider the usefulness of a specific framework for the analysis of community movements. This framework is represented by the concept of empowering community settings (Maton, 2008; Maton & Salem, 1995), a model that takes into account the impact of the empowering features of community movements both for their members and the larger community. As proposed by Maton (2008), empowering community settings (henceforth ECS) exist in four community domains: settings that empower adults to overcome personal difficulties (mutual help groups, congregations); settings that empower youth growing up in adverse circumstances (youth development organizations, educational settings); settings that empower citizens in impoverished communities to take action to improve the locality in which they live (civic engagement organizations, social action settings); and settings that empower citizens to resist and challenge larger societal culture and institutions, and take action to change them (social movement organizations). The protest case focused on here is a locality based collective empowerment setting, and thus serves as an example of the third category above. However, since it incorporates a larger, ongoing movement agenda as well, it also contains some elements consistent with groups in the final category. Social action and social movement organizations like the one studied have the potential to empower community groups, promoting citizen mobilization (Davis, McAdam, Scott, & Zald, 2005; Drury, & Reicher, 1999; 2005; Drury, Cocking, Beale, Hanson, & Rapley, 2005; Prilleltensky, 2003; Van Til**,** Hegyesi, & Eschweiler, 2007; Watts & Serrano-Garcia, 2003).

By presenting a community protest case study we will argue that the ECS model is able to capture aspects and connections between the individual and the social level that other theoretical frameworks developed for the explanation of collective action—mainly derived from the social movement literature—have not, to the same extent, jointly considered.

No studies were located that examined the usefulness of the ECS model in the context of a community protest movement (or in related areas); this first formal attempt to do so thus holds promise to advance knowledge of the model's potential in this important area. In the first section of the paper we will describe the characteristics of empowering community settings and the processes through which they influence individual development and community change. In the second section we will highlight the characteristics of the model that make it a valuable tool for understanding the outcomes of community-based movements. In the third section we will then apply the ECS model to the analysis of a case study, and finally we will discuss the findings and their implications.

Processes and pathways through which ECS influence individual development and community change

The pathways and processes through which ECS influence individual development, community betterment, and social change will be briefly described. Firstly, we will present a common set of organizational characteristics through which ECS empower their members. Secondly, we will describe several common pathways through which ECS and their empowered members can contribute to community betterment and social change.

Individual Empowerment. Based on a wide-ranging review of the literature, a set of six organizational characteristics were proposed as important for member empowerment within community settings (Maton, 2008). These characteristics include aspects of a setting's group-based belief system, core activities, leadership, opportunity role structure, relational environment, and mechanisms for setting maintenance and change (see figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 here

A *group-based belief system* refers to a setting's ideology or values that specify patterns of behavior intended to produce desired outcomes, and encompass a view of setting members and how they can work within the setting to achieve personal and setting goals. Belief systems help shape setting structures, norms and practices, providing opportunities for and contributing to member development and change. The settings identified as empowering share in common a belief system that is inspiring of change, strengths-based, and focused beyond the self (Maton, 2008).

Core activities refer to the basic instrumental techniques used to accomplish the central mission of a setting. Important features of core activities include their engaging nature, active learning process, and high quality. Engaging activities are meaningful to the members in terms of their personal goals, and congruent with their cultural and personal background. Furthermore, they involve active learning and their quality is reflected in both the content of the activity (e.g., state-of-the-art; innovative) and the instrumental and interpersonal capacity of those facilitating or supervising the activity.

Leadership refers to the qualities of the key individuals with formal and/or informal responsibility for a setting, and can contribute to empowerment through two different pathways. One is the direct, empowering influence that key leaders can have on members. The second is the indirect effect through leaders' capacity to motivate and influence those (e.g., staff, small group leaders) who interact regularly with most setting members. Extant research, across domains, indicates that leadership in empowering settings is inspirational, talented, shared, committed, and empowered.

Opportunity role structure refers to the availability and configuration of roles within a setting. A viable opportunity role structure provides meaningful opportunities for participation, learning and development for a range of individuals who vary in background, interests, skills, and prior

experience. The settings found in the literature to be empowering shared in common an opportunity role structure that can be described as pervasive, highly accessible, and multifunctional.

Relational environment encompasses the quality and nature of interpersonal and intergroup relationships in a setting. A high quality relational environment provides the relationships and interpersonal resources necessary for substantially increasing an individual's control over their life and environment. Important features of the relational environment include an encompassing support system, caring relationships, and a sense of community.

Setting maintenance and change refers to the organizational mechanisms used to help the setting adapt both to internal and external challenges and changes (e.g., Moos, 2002). It contributes to effective functioning of a setting, and is critical to setting sustainability and survival. Key features include an organizational learning focus, presence of bridging mechanisms, and external linkages.

Community empowerment. To address the issue of the external impact of empowering community settings we will discuss their pathways of influence on community betterment and social change. Across the studies on empowering settings reviewed, three pathways of influence can be identified: (1) increased numbers of empowered citizens; (2) empowered member radiating influence; and (3) external organizational activities. In terms of the pathway of *increased numbers of empowered citizens,* empowered individuals can be expected to experience enhanced individual well-being on various dimensions (Hasso, 2001). In the locality development and social movement domains, these dimensions include gains in self-value and political efficacy (Drury et al., 2005). A second, related pathway of external impact is the *radiating influence of empowered members* (Rochon, 1998; Van Til et al., 2007). The levels of influence range from family and social network, to institutional attitudes and program

development in organizations, to state and national policy. Concerning the third pathway of external influence, the literature revealed an array of *external organizational activities* pursued by empowering settings to directly influence the community or larger society. These include member recruitment, public education, model dissemination, community actions, community services, resource mobilization and policy advocacy (Brodsky, 2003; Campbell, 2005; Davis et al., 2005; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Sirianni & Friedland, 2001; Smith, 2000; Speer & Hughey, 1995; Wandersman and Florin, 2000).

LULU mobilization and the ECS model

The ECS framework represents a multi-level model, which seems specifically fruitful in the analysis of cases of citizen mobilization commonly referred to as LULU (Locally Unwanted Land Uses) (Freudenberg & Pastor, 1992). LULU conflicts typically arise in restricted geographical areas to oppose the situating of installations such as nuclear stations, incinerators, or transport infrastructures, and of services for stigmatized groups such as those with HIV or serious mental illness (Gordon & Jaspers, 1996). At present, these recent forms of LULU political participation—considered a specific manifestation of social movement dynamics—are considered as forms of grass-roots mobilization, often based on post-materialist values, aimed at defending the quality of life in disadvantaged communities (Gould, Schnaiberg, & Weinberg, 1996).

Most of the indicators included in the organizational characteristics of ECS model (group-based belief system, core activities, leadership, opportunity role structure, relational environment, and mechanisms for setting maintenance and change) can to some extent be traced back to the sociological literature on social movements: In the resource mobilization perspective (McCarthy, 1996; McCarthy & Zald, 1973; McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996), leadership and mechanisms for setting maintenance and change are essential factors. Moreover, group-based belief system is

similar to Melucci's (1996) collective identity, while opportunity role structure and relational environment can be easily linked to the important role of social networks and interpersonal relationships in starting and growing a social movement (Diani, 1992 McCarthy, 1996; McCarthy & Zald, 1973; Passy & Giugni, 2000; 2001).

Nevertheless, the ECS framework brings an added value to the understanding of citizen mobilization in that it integrates the sociological variables with the psychological processes. At the same time, the concept of ECS offers the opportunity to integrate the psychological approach to collective action—based on psycho-social factors such as collective identity, sense of injustice and efficacy (Klandermans, 1997)—with organization-level analysis.

The pathways to community empowerment considered in the ECS model provide a conceptual guide for considering the relationships between a community movement and the community itself. Although social movement scholars have emphasized movements' potential for change at a societal level (Melucci, 1996), the patterns of influence have been described in very general terms, as cultural changes that occur because of the spreading of new standpoints and life styles. The ECS perspective, placing mobilizations in the context of local communities, suggests that the impact of citizen mobilization on the surrounding social environment occurs according to defined pathways, based on the behaviors of empowered individuals and organizational activities intentionally aimed at influencing community members and policies.

The case study

The primary purpose of this paper is to examine the value of the ECS perspective in the study of collective action. In order to do so, we will use the analytical ECS framework to present and discuss a specific case of LULU mobilization. We will focus on the organizational level,

reviewing findings related to the six indicators prescribed by the model and on the pathways of influence on the community.

The case study we will present is based on the analysis of a protest movement against the construction of a high-speed railroad (henceforth HSR) in Susa Valley, near Turin, North-Western Italy. Although similar to other LULU conflicts, the anti-HSR mobilization was chosen because of its very high and unusual levels of citizen participation. A brief description of the circumstances in which the movement arose follows.

HSR is an infrastructural program funded by the European Commission, intended to link the western with the eastern, and the northern with the southern parts of the continent. Some of the railroad links have already been completed, while others are under construction or are still to begin, as in Susa Valley, which is supposed to be crossed by the line connecting Turin, in Italy, to Lyon, in France.

In this geographical area, containing 37 villages with a total population of 75,000 residents, a protest movement against the HSR initially developed in the early 1990s, but greatly gained momentum in the last two months of 2005, when the Italian Government permitted the construction work to begin. At that point, local residents tried to impede the digging, and clashes with the police occurred. At present, the construction work remains blocked.

The anti-HSR movement can be described as a community movement, a network of individual citizens, groups and associations, with some participants coming from outside the Valley.
In each village of the Valley a local citizens' committee was established. Each committee provides delegates to a valley-wide, overarching "coordination board" composed of technical experts (e.g., engineers, geologists…) and politicians, but also of common people and embodying the organizational core of the movement.

The reasons for protesting can be traced back to three main issues: environmental and health concerns (fear of landscape degradation, including ground water table and atmospheric pollution, as well as dangerous amounts of asbestos and uranium in the mountains that would be released as a result of tunnelling) (Mannarini, Bonomelli, & Caruso, 2008), and democracy concerns (no involvement of local communities in the decisional process) (Fedi, Rovere, & Lana, 2008). At the end of 2006, 62.7% of Susa Valley residents were against the construction of the new high-speed railroad, and 48.0% had taken part in protest activities during the prior 12 months (Campana, Dallago, & Roccato, 2007).

Method

The research team was made up of three principal investigators—social and community psychologists— and three research assistants.

The study aimed at understanding the viewpoints that people involved and not involved in the protest had about what was happening in the Susa Valley, in terms of the general frame of the protest (reasons for the protest, the actors involved, experience of the collective grievance, outcomes of the mobilization, and so on), ingroup/outgroup dynamics, relationships with the Valley, and the impact of the mobilization on the larger community (Fedi & Mannarini, 2008).

In order to explore these topics, we first conducted exploratory focus groups to generate a general and collective frame. Two members of the research team, who took turns acting as moderator and note-taker, conducted three focus groups aimed at exploring the meanings and perceptions citizens had of the anti-HSR protest in Susa Valley. The focus group discussions took place between April and May 2006 in a meeting room in Bussoleno (Susa Valley). Background information on the participants was collected including name, age, occupation and past experiences of participation. The focus group discussions explored the following topics: a)

motivations to get involved in the movement; b) opinions about the different actors involved (anti-HSR activists, pro-HSR residents, the Valley community as a whole); c) perceived costs and benefits of participation; d) organizational and relational characteristics of the protest movement; e) perceptions of the outcomes of the protest, for members and the community; and f) expectations concerning the future of the HSR, of the anti-HSR movement and of the Susa Valley as a whole.

Subsequently, in the period between June and December 2006, in order to more thoroughly examine people's perceptions, we conducted twenty-four individual face-to-face interviews. Participants were interviewed by one member of the research team in their homes or in public places (e.g., library, pub, public garden). On average, the interviews took one hour each. The interview explored the same topics probed in the focus group discussions. Questions were intentionally phrased in general terms, so that respondents were able to generate their own narratives about their involvement or lack of it.

In the present study we re-examined the qualitative data in order to examine the fit and usefulness of the ECS model as it related to our case study.

Participants

Focus group participants included eighteen anti-HSR activists recruited during episodes of mobilization. The individual interviews were conducted with twenty-four residents in Susa Valley, fifteen of whom were personally contacted, and nine selected through a snow-ball sampling procedure. Twelve were active members of the anti-HSR movement. Among them, seven had been previously involved in political groups (such as political parties, radical movements, and feminist groups), environmental associations, and civic or religious

organizations. Five were at their first mobilization experience. The remaining twelve interviewees had not taken part in anti-HSR mobilization.

Insert table 1 here

Analyses

Focus group discussions and individual interviews—conducted in Italian—were tape-recorded with the permission of the interviewees, transcribed, and successively merged into a single text. The text was subjected to a thematic analysis by means of the Atlas.Ti software (Muhr, 1997).

For the purpose of the current study, we re-coded and re-analyzed the previously collected data focusing on the organizational and relational characteristics of the protest movement, and on the perceptions of the outcomes of the protest for members and community. The codes we used corresponded to the indicators included in the ECS model (Maton, 2008). For the six organizational characteristics, respectively, we employed the following codes: group-based belief system, core activities, leadership, opportunity role structure, relational environment, and setting maintenance and change. For the pathways to community empowerment, we used the following codes: increased numbers of empowered citizens, empowered member radiating influence, and external organizational activities.

Results

Organizational Characteristics Important for Individual Empowerment

We first present findings of our analysis for each of the six organizational characteristics identified in the ECS model as central to member empowerment. Specific subdimensions identified as important for each organizational characteristic are indicated in italics. Excerpts from the interviews and focus groups are the primary evidence used to delineate and describe the organizational characteristics and subdimensions.[1]

Group-based belief system

The anti-HSR movement appears to have created a viable group-based belief system, with distinctive values and meanings. First of all, many participants underscored the importance of protest participation as an important means to bring about personal change in citizens. Thus, members described their belonging to the anti-HSR movement as a "worthwhile experience" (FG 2). According to this shared perspective, participation is of value because, in and of itself, it leads to changes in people's beliefs and behaviors. Participants saw themselves as more conscious, more informed, and more embedded in social and political affairs. Together with other organizational features, this aspect of the groups' belief system helped transform Valley citizens from "ordinary people" into "active social actors" (*inspiring of change*).

Results in terms of citizen empowerment were a deeper consciousness, a more critical way of thinking and increased self-efficacy. In participants' perceptions, these changes occurred because of their involvement in protest, and because of the values they share in the movement.

One of the most evident setting-based values is the belief that every citizen can be a resource, and, subsequently, the belief everyone has the responsibility of contributing to the protest by taking part (*strengths-based*). That is, it was no longer possible to delegate important decisions about their future to somebody else. So, the protest spread "the idea that my vote, my presence or my opinion are important […] Now people are more aware and eager to voice and to be heard" (11, W, A, P).

A further property of the group-based belief system refers to its going *beyond self*: The anti-HSR movement, or more accurately, some of its subgroups, elaborated a general vision of the major issues at stake, extending their claims and arguments beyond the fight against the new railway ("Now it is necessary to save environment and the peace"; FG 2).

Some interviewees declared that the decision of taking part in the protest was for reasons beyond their personal benefits:

"All of us learned to give up something of ourselves in favor of collective good. It hasn't been easy!" (FG 1).

To summarize, activists were inspired to fight not just for themselves but for a collective good or aim (the environment, a better use of public money, collective health, etc.).

Core activities

Many movement activities were developed by activists in Susa Valley, with others initiated by those outside its boundaries. The activities generally served two different functions. On the one hand, they were aimed at spreading information and shaping "framing processes" in a multidisciplinary perspective (the multifaceted impact of HSR on health, environment, democracy, etc.). On the other hand, activities were directed to build relationships between people, and helping the protest movement become a "family" or a "community".

More specifically, inside the anti-HSR movement an important *active learning process* took place, opening opportunities for new practices, mutual feedback and shared reflection. As an interviewee stated:

"Tonight there are four different meetings on the high-speed issue. This makes people go out, people who had always stayed at home in the evening…" (FG 1, *active learning*).

Besides these kinds of actions, there were also social and symbolic activities undertaken by activists, as reported by some of our interviewees:

"We revived practices that used to be important in the past, such as sticking up posters at night… Those are collective actions that are beneficial to everybody" (FG 1, *engaging activities).*

"Sometimes you go and enjoy yourself, you dance, sing, and eat… It's fabulous!" (FG 1, *engaging activities; quality activities*).

Some of these actions, and specifically non violent gestures such as placing flowers before the drills, or taking care of people involved in the rallies by preparing meals, had important symbolic value. All the actions mentioned show the properties assigned to core activities in the ECS model. Specifically, they include *quality* (in terms of relevant content and functionality), *active learning* (feedback and reflection), and personal *engagement* (by means of meaningful and congruent actions). By virtue of these properties, the core activities strengthen members' identity, knowledge, and efficacy, that is to say, the activities contribute to member empowerment.

Leadership

The anti-HSR movement is described by participants as a loosely-structured organization lacking formal leadership. Many participants referred to the absence of formal leadership; nevertheless they acknowledged that particular subgroups or social actors inside the movement played distinctive and significant roles, giving rise to an inspirational, talented and shared leadership.

Mayors and local representatives acted as important actors of the movement, as a community leader told us:

"I wouldn't say 'institutions *and* movement'. Local institutions are an effective part of the anti-HSR movement. The movement protects and strengthens institutions in the struggle against the national power centre" (10, M, A, P).

But, besides politicians, it is possible to identify a small group of people sharing a leadership role in terms of planning next steps of the movement, leading the popular mobilization, organizing activities or the spread of technical information, communicating with mass media, and serving as informal spokespersons of the movement.

Our interviewees recognized the *inspirational* but above all the *shared* nature of the movement's leadership that can have political, communicative or motivational aims and that passes from one person (or more) to another:

"There's nobody leading, nobody commanding… Someone suggests and, if you agree, you can follow him or her" (FG 2).

The suggestions can come from community leaders, from those activists with particular skills in communication or technical competencies, and from those who demonstrated particular abilities in networking people and groups or in organizing events. The nature of informal leadership seems to be connected to the circumstances in which particular skills are needed.

Some of our participants emphasized the strategic role of a shared, flexible leadership, which can be a useful weapon against enemies "who want to destroy the movement, unravelling the threads" (FG 3):

"There is no head. Perhaps, this is a positive feature of the movement, nobody is identifiable as the leader… Someone can be better in speaking, someone else can be more charismatic, but they all count… This is a problem for the enemies who want to dismantle such a loose structure" (FG 3).

Thus, the absence of a formal organization and unique, shared leadership represented a protection against the attempts to bridle the movement.

Opportunity role structure

The anti-HSR movement's opportunity role structure provided meaningful opportunities for participation, learning and development for its activists. As noted above, the loosely-structured nature of the movement's organization is considered a point of strength, providing ongoing opportunities for meaningful citizen involvement.

Specifically, the opportunity role structure proved to be *highly accessible*, *multi-functional* and *pervasive*. Each individual's competence was taken into consideration and used. As one participant stated "everybody can contribute, bringing in their ideas and arguments" (FG 2). There were members whose task was to prepare food for their fellow members; some others, acting as the movement's technical experts, had the task of planning the information activities. Moreover, individuals who had practical skills built the movement's posts ("presidi"), in the places where the railroad construction was to be initiated.

The multiplicity, accessibility and multi-functionality of roles are well described in quotations such as the following:

"The movement is not only made up of those who actually take part in rallies, the movement is all the people who cook or write protest songs, there are artists, writers, teachers, factory workers… The movement is really multifaceted" (FG 3).

"[Inside the movement] there are artists who give away their paintings, people who write songs, others teaching how to cook, individuals from Africa or the Amazon forest explaining to the others how they live… Academics too, sharing their knowledge with the activists… The movement is a sort of a great collective university!" (10, M, A, P).

To summarize, it seems that the long duration of the mobilization, the variety of actions undertaken, and the loose structure of the movement enabled many participants to assume highly responsible roles and express and/or develop their skills in a variety of domains.

Relational environment

The importance of relationships inside the anti-HSR movement was often stated by participants, both in order to achieve the aims of the protest, and as a natural by-product of the mobilization. As a participant stated: "By means of the movement we built deeper relationships, and healthier friendships" (FG 3).

Even though some members had been involved in the past in other forms of protest and can be considered mentors in some senses, equality, horizontality and peer-to-peer relationships seemed to characterize the relational environment of the movement:

"All members are equal, the factory worker matters as the housewife, or the student… When somebody speaks on behalf of our community, in that very moment they become part of the movement" (10, M, A, P).

In particular, the relational environment of the anti-HSR movement is characterized by the presence of a strong *sense of community* (based both on the shared territory and the interdependence of destiny), an explicit *support system* and, to a lesser extent, of *caring relationships*, as revealed in the following quotations:

"Parochialism doesn't exist any longer... Nowadays Susa Valley is one village, there's a socialization process going on outside the rallies" (FG 3, *sense of community*).

"I believe that we took possession of our territory again […]. Here, we all are a family" (FG 1, *sense of community*).

"The mass makes you feel stronger… There's reciprocal support, you are no longer afraid…" (FG 2, *sense of community*, *support system*).

"During those days [of the clashes with the police] we had piles of things, everyone joining us carried something. I remember a very old man walking with two pieces of firewood… You are not a man, or a woman, you are not from a political party, you are an anti-HSR movement member; if you need something you just ask, and you'll get it" (FG 2, *support system*).

Thus, participants' perceptions of the relational environment were likely to emphasize the supportive and cohesive nature of the community movement.

Setting maintenance and change

Over time, the anti-HSR movement adapted to many internal and external changes and addressed many challenges. Sometimes the movement just worked to pave the way for the struggle or to spread information and generate consensus; other times the main aim was to build a collective identity. To adapt to the changes and challenges, *bridging mechanisms* and *external linkages* were the most evident organizational mechanisms the movement informally and effectively used.

Because of the spontaneous origin of the movement, no formal bridging mechanisms had been planned previously. Nonetheless, several processes connected to the anti-HSR movement's core activities and opportunity role structure served to bridge differences. Particularly, the movement's democratic concerns were oriented toward the consensus rule, by means of dialogue and collective decision making processes. Together with the unifying function of a shared aim (sometimes depicted as being under the same external threat, or as a shared grievance), these processes appeared to serve as the main bridging mechanisms enabling people of different ages, social classes, political ideas, and with different roles in society to fight together.

In fact, even though participants tended to emphasize the positive aspects of the movement, its heterogeneity was sometimes perceived as a threat to cohesion and identity. The internal differences resulting from diversity and the coexistence of subgroups necessitated the use of integrative *bridging mechanisms*. This was the case, for example, with the anarchical groups coming from the outside to join the movement and support its cause. Whereas some participants were skeptical about their role (e.g. "What do they share with the movement? What do they know about our problems? They come here [in Susa Valley] only because they want to clash with the police", 2, W, A, P), others considered them a resource, since they were the evidence that "the movement was not isolated and alone in its fight" (3, W, A, P).

Thus, a participant noted that the anti-HSR movement "has been able to join different generations" and that heterogeneity is a valuable resource because, during the fights with the police, "finding people praying while others were singing the partisans' songs disoriented the enemies" (10, M, A, P).

The *external linkages* the movement built were directed to different groups of people and served different functions. Some linkages were established with people living in the Valley or organizations not directly involved in the protest but supporting the cause of the activists (for example, owners of food shops providing food to activists). Other linkages were established with outside experts (generally from a university) willing to write needed documents, take part in the protest, or participate in the public debates. Finally, some external linkages were created with national or international movements and political, social, and environmental groups supporting struggles against unwanted installations or infrastructures. Thus, the capability of the anti-HSR movement to sustain itself and evolve over time was due in part to its capacity for rich and useful exchanges of resources (including people, information, and communication channels) with external groups.

Pathways to Community Empowerment

Following Maton's (2008) model, we found in the participants' discourses a number of insights and observations about the empowering nature of the mobilization, its impact on the community, and the planning of activities aimed at generating cultural and social changes in Susa Valley.

Increased number of empowered citizens

One important impact on the community concerns the perception that a number of citizens increased their awareness, positive relationships, control over the environment and events, and

civic skills. Although these skills were initially more developed in some individuals than in others, there appears to have been an overall increase in the number of empowered citizens and the levels of empowerment across citizens in the community. Some of the interviewees reported "becoming visible", others reported a reawakening of the individual and collective conscience, and still others emphasized increased levels of citizen efficacy, asserting that "if we don't want, they can't do it!" (FG 2).

Mobilization, participants reported, also enabled people to rediscover forgotten values and to become more fully aware of community needs and assets. Of note, local government officials affirmed the possibility of influencing the local context by means of collaboration with citizens.

Radiating influence of empowered members

According to the ECS model, the radiating influence of empowered members refers to "spin-off" activities run by members outside of and apart from the empowering community setting. Encompassed are member's influence on their family and social networks, the external community, and on larger institutional attitudes and norms.

Indeed, the increased empowerment of members not only led to successful actions against the HSR project, but further manifested itself as members transferred their skills and knowledge to other contexts, creating new groups and multiplying social activities in a variety of domains that changed the community profile and structure. For example, some of the interviewees declared that they became engaged in political campaigns and community actions in support of peace, public schools, and employment. Some respondents indicated that, in some regards, a new meaning and practice of citizenship, and of democracy emerged.

Furthermore, the growing empowerment produced changes at the institutional level. The movement created a link between administrations of different villages and highlighted the need to cooperate.

External organizational activities

The most direct means of community influence by empowering settings is the outward-focused, external activities that such settings engage in while attempting to achieve their organizational goals. In the case of the anti-HSR movement, major efforts were made by activists to spread knowledge and information. The majority of the activities were oriented to building and maintaining networks with experts, informing the Susa Valley community about the likely negative impacts of the new railway, and creating a counter-culture. Many public meetings and information campaigns were organized, and a variety of instruments were used (flyers, kiosks, posters, websites, books, etc.). As an interviewee summarized:

"Our meetings are political discussions, we discuss, and debate; each committee tries to organize some activities on its territory, such as distributing leaflets, sticking posters on the walls, hanging flags… Meetings aimed at spreading relevant information are organized by people who have technical knowledge" (1, M, Y, P).

The informational activity is emphasized even by external witnesses:

"The most striking thing is the result in terms of cultural production… You may agree or disagree but when ideas and data are produced, we can call it culture!" (8, M, A, NP).

"The new, interesting aspect of this movement is the ability to face the game of the media at a national level, its ability to argue on an objective level with precise data about the topic" (20, M, A, NP).

The relationships established with other groups and associations outside the Valley and the cultural and social activities organized during the periods that active protest was in abeyance increased over time. For example, the anti-HSR movement promoted the Italian Network for Reciprocal Help and Solidarity that organized a low-speed 800 kilometres march along Italy (summer 2006) and other initiatives aimed at supporting other similar movements all over Italy.

Discussion

The analysis conducted supports the idea that the anti-HSR movement case study could be fruitfully examined through the lens provided by the ECS model. Indeed, the thematic analysis of the discourse of protesters and non protesters suggested that the anti-HSR movement possesses all the organizational characteristics provided for by the ECS model, and also has an empowering impact on the wider community. Specifically, the anti-HSR movement was seen to be characterized by a *group-based belief system*, that is a set of core values shared by members that constitute the basis for the emergence of collective action frames and collective identity. As highlighted by several social movement studies (e. g., Benford & Snow, 2000; Simon & Klandermans, 2001), not only are identity and frames the bonding agents that keep individuals together, they also contribute to the improvement of a sense of collective efficacy and help the members of the setting to think and act according to a collective purpose rather than personal benefit. Like all social action groups, the anti-HSR movement was based on *core activities* vital to the successful pursuit of the main aim of the setting. Those activities proved to be meaningful to members, but above all they offered them the opportunity for practice, feedback, and reflection. The process of active learning stood out as one of the most visible dynamics across the setting, improving both individual and collective skills. *Leadership* was particularly effective in motivating members and providing inspiration, and was shared rather than resting solely with one person. The loose organizational structure of the protest movement promoted the emergence of multiple leaders, who acted not as antagonists but as co-protagonists. The setting's *opportunity role structure* proved to be viable, allowing many and diverse members to participate, assuming meaningful roles, responsibility and initiative. Different individual skills, knowledge and experiences were employed on behalf of the setting. What is more, the variety and

interdependence of activities required by the setting promoted the presence of a large number of roles for members, and the above mentioned loose structure made almost all positions accessible to members.

As for the quality and nature of interpersonal relationships, the setting analyzed can be defined as a high quality *relational environment*, with support shared among members and a definite sense of community existing within the boundaries of the physical setting, and to some extent also beyond the setting. Nevertheless, caring relationships were less easily identified, which suggests that in the area of social action the caring feature may not be as important as in the community domain of individual development and wellness. In addition, it is worth noticing that inter-group relationships were highly conflictual, so that the definition of relational environment applies mostly within the boundaries of the setting. Finally, the HSR movement adopted organizational mechanisms for *setting maintenance and change*. The movement established external linkages with members of the wider community, experts, and a variety of social action groups throughout Italy and abroad. These linkages created new partnerships, increased the visibility of protest and strengthened the impact on public opinion. Less easy to identify were the bridging mechanisms, which were not defined at a formal level; to deal with internal conflict and interpersonal challenges, members appealed to the shared norm of dialogue. Issues of diversity and divergences were managed using the implicit norm of consensus, according to which individual and subgroup differences were to be put aside on behalf of the unity and cohesion of the movement. In social capital terms, the movement was able to generate a strong internal sense of community (bonding social capital), as well as external linkages to other groups (bridging social capital; Putnam, 2000).

Concerning impact on the larger community, our analysis identified the presence of all three external pathways of influence comprised in the ECS model. The rise of the protest movement

increased the *number of empowered citizens*, who, experiencing activism, developed many different skills (cognitive, social, relational, political, and practical skills) and enhanced their personal well-being. The *radiating influence of empowered members* manifested in two patterns: firstly, members started to transfer their protest experience to other life domains, so that they became more socially engaged and started activities, groups and organizations that globally modified the structure and the internal dynamics of the community. Secondly, their influence produced a shift in the relationships between institution and citizens, resulting in the increase of cooperative behaviors and affecting governmental policies. Finally, an array of *external activities* was pursued by the anti-HSR movement to influence the community and generate social change; this included recruitment activities, for instance, and also initiatives for public education and community actions.

Based on the considerations set forth above, we can conclude that the ECS perspective represents a useful framework for the analysis of community movements. On the one hand, this framework systematizes concepts drawn from theory and research in social movements, and specifically from resource mobilization theorists (McCarthy, 1996; McCarthy & Zald, 1973; McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996), who privileged organizational structures and processes, claiming that social movements require some form of organization, such as leadership, administrative structures, and means for acquiring resources (McAdam & Scott, 2005). On the other hand, the ECS perspective provides a more comprehensive, multi-level basis for the analysis of collective action since it integrates the organizational level with the psychological and the community levels. Individuals, organizations and community are, indeed, the three dimensions that are affected by empowerment processes. The emphasis on the notion of empowerment, both in terms of outcomes and processes, has been to some extent introduced in the social movement literature by the works of Drury and Reicher (Drury et al., 2005; Drury &

Reicher, 2005); nevertheless, these studies referred only to the empowerment of the actors of protest, disregarding the impact of protest on the community and the linkages connecting individuals to group or collective empowerment. For these reasons, the multi-level ECS approach, though perhaps more challenging to apply in empirical studies, represents a framework more complete and complex than those provided in the extant literature.

However, since this model considers only the empowering features of a community setting, it overlooks the costs, or even the unintended negative effects, that can result from collective action and that ideally should be encompassed in a thorough examination. Although this issue has not been addressed in the current paper, settings such as protest movements entail risks for participants and may be divisive for communities. For instance, in the Susa Valley's case, at the individual level, activists reported having to deal with costs of participation, in terms of time, money and relational conflicts. At the organizational level, as the movement grew and established linkages with groups and associations outside the Valley, it also became more politicized, more heterogeneous, and at the same time less "authentic". At the community level, the movement's rise enhanced the perception in the public that there was a dominant majority group supporting the protest, and created a spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1984) and conformism that hampered the emergence of a plurality of views.

On the whole, our study provides an initial basis for supporting the value of an ECS perspective in the study of collective action**,** though the examination of one case is certainly not enough to draw any definitive conclusions. The analysis conducted was post-hoc in nature, and does not allow an empirical test that can directly confirm or disconfirm the validity of the ECS model as it applies to the case studied. In addition, the current study had as a further limitation the gap between the nature of data used and the level of analysis proposed: Though the focus of

the analyses concerned organizational dynamics, data were gathered mostly at the individual level.

Given the limitations mentioned above, future research should, on the one hand, integrate in a general model the unexpected (negative) effects of protest, and on the other hand, be more focused on organizational level constructs and data collection methods (along with individual and community levels), to appropriately examine the multi-level processes embedded in the ECS model and local protest movements. Moreover, longitudinal studies monitoring over time the development and maintenance of community settings along with citizen and community empowerment could strengthen the validity of the model. Finally, comparative studies of the usefulness of the ECS model versus other extant models of community movements (e.g., resource mobilization, McCarthy, 1996; culture, Rochon, 1998; political process, Meyer, 2004) would further advance theoretical and practical knowledge in this important domain.

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Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Focus group participants (N=18)	
Role	18 activists
Gender	7 men; 11 women
Age	Range 19-63 (average age: 41)
Recruitment method	Direct contact during episodes of mobilization
Individual interview participants (N=24)	
Role	12 activists (7 with past participation experiences; 5 at their first mobilization experience); 12 non-activists
Gender	14 men; 10 women
Age	Range 19-66 (average age: 47)
Recruitment method	15 personally contacted; 9 selected by a snow ball procedure

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Empowering Community Settings: Organizational Characteristics (Adapted version of Figure 2, Maton, 2008, p. 9).