Professionalisation and precariousness: perspectives on the sustainability of activism in everyday life

Silke Roth

Abstract[1]

Sustainable activism requires both elasticity and rigor, the ability to learn and compromise as well as the willingness to stick to values and convictions. In this article I argue that activism and professionalisation are not necessarily mutually exclusive but that the ability to move from one to another form of activism is important for the sustainability of activism at the individual, organisational and movement levels. Acknowledging the diversity of activism also highlights that activism and everyday life can be intertwined and that family, community and work can in fact motivate and be sites of activism. The shift from one sphere and form of activism to another is important at the individual level in order to prevent burnout. Furthermore such shifts allow for different tactics, a division of labour and coalition building at the organisational and movement levels. I introduce some key figures in social movements who represent different forms of activism and professionalism. They connect different spheres of activism, take on different roles in and provide access to various resources to social movements. These key figures illustrate biographical consequences of activism as well as boundary crossing between different spheres and activities. Finally, I introduce the case study of a women's cooperative to show how activism and professionalism intersect.

Keywords: activism, burn-out, career, cooperative, feminism, key figures, professionalisation, real utopia, social change organisations, *WeiberWirtschaft*

Introduction

My article addresses the relationship between professionalisation of social change organisations[2] and activism. Rather than considering activism and professionalisation as mutually exclusive, I argue that a more nuanced perspective is necessary in order to better understand how activism can be sustained at personal, organisational and movement levels. This includes acknowledging the diversity of activisms as well as the shifts from one form to another form of activism across the life-course of activists and in the development of social change organisations and social movements. In this

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[1] I greatly appreciate the insightful comments by Laurence Cox and two anonymous reviewers. I thank Clare Saunders and Milena Büchs for comments on much earlier versions of this paper.

[2] For the sake of brevity, but also to highlight similarities (despite significant differences) I will refer to social movement organisations, non-governmental organisations and third sector organisations as "social change organisations".

article, I will first discuss professionalisation in the context of social change organisations, then I turn to concepts of activism and burn-out, followed by introducing some key figures in social movements who represent different forms of activism and bridge different spheres. I finally discuss the case study of a women's cooperative to illustrate the contribution of these key figures and to explore the relationship between professionalisation, professionalism and activism.

Professionalisation and its discontents

Literatures on third sector organisations (TSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social movement organisations (SMOs) demonstrate ambivalence regarding professionalisation processes. Positive evaluations of professionalisation processes in social change organisations are associated with the resource mobilisation approach (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Edwards and McCarthy 2007) that sees little difference between SMOs and interest groups. In addition, studies that evaluate the impact of social change organisations on legislation and support for anti-discrimination, development, humanitarianism and human rights tend to associate success with professionalisation (Keck and Sikkink 199; Martens 2006; Barnett 2011; Watkins et al. 2012). Formalisation and professional leadership contribute to the continuity of SMOs and thus to the sustainability of social movements (Staggenborg 1988). Public and private funding allows professionalised third sector organisations to hire staff to devote themselves full-time to the cause.

Whether such organisations have any members and whether the involvement of members goes beyond paying membership fees and having the option to participate in annual members meetings varies. Some large membership organisations – for example Oxfam or Amnesty International – combine staff-led professionalised national offices with volunteer run shops, groups and projects at the local level. Hensby et al. (2012) refer to this involvement as *bureaucratic activism* due to the fact that these organisations offer limited and bureaucratised forms of activism for volunteers. However, bureaucratised SMOs which function as "protest businesses" provide knowledge and expertise and are able to generate loyalty and trust among members (Hensby et al. 2012). Critical perspectives on the professionalisation of social change organisations highlight the consequences of upward accountability – that is accountability to donors, rather than constituencies – which results in a growing distance between NGOs and grassroots activists (Dauvergne and LeBaron 2014; Choudry 2015). According to Smith (2015), the "process of professionalisation, institutionalisation and bureaucratisation – known as "NGO-isation" is associated with the institutionalisation and de-radicalisation of movement demands" (p. 612). What positive and critical perspectives on professionalisation processes share is that they rarely define professionalisation and that the terms "professionalisation and professionalism remain ambiguous and multidimensional" (Ganesh and McAllum 2012: 153).

So what do professionalisation or professionalism comprise and what consequences do they have for activism and activists? Although related, the two concepts refer to different aspects. Professionalisation concerns organisational form and processes (bureaucratisation, rationalisation, marketisation) whereas professionalism concerns practice and (occupational) identity (Ganesh and McAllum 2012: 153). Professionalisation transforms voluntary organisations and social movement organisations into "formalised, knowledge intensive and professionally staffed organisations" (Andreassen et al. 2014: 336). These transformations are related to gaining access, legitimacy and resources from governments, intergovernmental organisation and private donors. NGOisation involves access to government agencies and transnational organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and its agencies as well as the European Union (EU). Such access includes representing constituencies at the local, national and international levels as well as access to (limited) funding. Smith (2015) compares the contemporary incorporation of civil society organisations into the political process with colonial strategies of indirect rule, i.e. the inclusion of local elites into the colonial administration in order to prevent mass resistance.

So far, only a few studies focus on those working in such professionalised social change organisations (but see Frantz 2005; Hopgood 2006; Rodgers 2010; Eltanani 2016). These studies highlight the motivations of paid staff and their career opportunities as well as their working conditions which include precariousness and burnout. In addition, the working lives of humanitarian and development workers have recently received more attention (Fechter 2012; Harrison 2013; Roth 2015a; Visser et al. 2016). This research addresses the tensions, strains and contradictions experienced by paid staff members who have chosen highly demanding and potentially dangerous work (Fast 2014; Roth 2015b). The commitment and devotion of paid staff in social change organisations challenges a strict distinction between activism and professionalisation processes. I will return to the working conditions in NGOs below. First, I discuss different forms of activism.

Doing activism, being activist

Who counts as an activist varies widely in the literature on social movements as well as among those engaged in them. Bobel (2007) notes that movement participants distinguish between "doing activism" and "being activist", which might overlap – or not. Based on her case-study of (mostly) women involved in menstrual activism, she found that regardless of similar patterns of involvement not all of those whom she interviewed identified as activists. Some felt that they did not meet the "perfect standard" because "being activist" required being "super-active" and engaged in "tireless commitment, selfless sacrifice, unparalleled devotion" (Bobel 2007: 154). Thus, an activist identity was grounded in core values of rigour and humility rather than in involvement in specific actions. Brown and Pickerill (2009: 27) point out that this "perfect standard" draws on gendered assumptions even though they stress that macho

heroism related to daring acts during the participation of social action is not restricted to men (see also Hopgood 2006).

Based on a comparison of participants in four different social movement organisations (SMO), Corrigall-Brown (2012) also found that the involvement in activism did not predict whether someone identified or as activist or not. She found that SMO members who were leftist in ideology and had previously been involved in social movement activism were more likely to identify as activists and to stay involved. In contrast, those who had a negative view of activism rejected an activist identity despite engaging in exactly the same behaviour. Thus, while Bobel (2007) found that the label "activist" was rejected because participants felt they did not deserve it, Corrigall-Brown (2012) observed that participants distanced themselves from it because they resented it.

Still another perspective is offered by Cortese (2015) who, on the basis of interviews with LBGTQ movement participants, identified three types of activist identity: emphatics, demarcators and reconcilers. *Emphatics* identified with an activist ideal-type, were deeply involved and often movement leaders setting the standard of activism in the organisation. *Demarcators* engaged in boundary-setting and distinguished between "good activists" (themselves engaging in polite activism) and "bad activists" (others engaging in radical, in-your-face activism). *Reconcilers* identified as activists although they did not meet the criteria of the "perfect standard" of high-level involvement. They had either only recently joined the movement or their activism had decreased or they perceived working in their current occupation (for example as teachers) as activism. Cortese (2015) refers to the latter group as *occupational activists*. This concept expands activism beyond the paid and unpaid participation in social movement organisations and makes an important contribution to our understanding of sustainability of activism over the life-course.

Trajectories of activism

Social movement research has primarily focused on recruitment into activism (Klandermans 2007) and to a lesser extent on retention (Corrigall-Brown 2012; Bunnage 2014) and disengagement (Fillieule 2015). Studies which have employed a biographical perspective on activism have addressed "biographical availability" (McAdam 1986), that is whether activism might be constrained by family or work commitments. However, studies have demonstrated that family and professional obligations do not affect the participation in non-hazardous, and even in dangerous actions. For example Nepstad and Smith (1999) have shown that men and women have been involved in solidarity movements with Central America regardless of their marital status and their careers. On the contrary, the close connection between various life-spheres means that commitment is maintained (Passy and Giugni 2000). Moreover, as I will discuss below, working conditions and parenthood can actually motivate people to become politically active.

What the studies that look at persistence in and disengagement from activism have in common is that they tend to focus on the involvement in one particular movement or one particular form of protest. For example, Passy and Giugni (2000) studied members of a SMO of the Swiss solidarity movement. They found that those who experienced a congruence of life-spheres (activism, work and family) stayed involved in the movement whereas those who experienced a disconnection of the life-spheres – for example living with a partner who did not share the same political goals or making career changes – tended to withdraw from the movement. However, due to its focus on Third World activism, this study cannot capture to what extent the involvement of those who disengaged from the solidarity movement might have moved on other causes, for example environmentalism. Similarly, Downton and Wehr (1998) who studied activists in the peace movement found that a congruence of life-spheres, for example joining a peace commune which allowed activists to share making money and raising children, contributed to sustaining activism.

Corrigall-Brown (2012) considers different social movements and distinguishes four different trajectories: persistence, transfer, individual abeyance and disengagement. *Persisters* stayed active in the same movement, those who *transfer* stayed active in the same movement while moving to another place, *individual abeyance* characterises those who interrupted their participation and resumed it later on whereas *disengagement* does not involve a return to activism. Although Corrigall-Brown (2012) acknowledges that activists might shift from one movement to another and that they resume their engagement after a period of individual abeyance, she is very much focused on involvement in "contentious politics" including "participation in both civic and community social movement organisations and activities, including demonstrating, rallying, marching, and protesting" (p. 11). Although this conceptualisation includes a broad range of activities, it does not include *occupational activism* (Cortese 2014). Occupational activism occurs in paid employment in a range of occupations including radical social work (Lavalette 2011; Turbett 2014; Emejulu and Bassel 2015) and *academic activism*[3] (Taylor and Raeburn 1995; Askins 2009; Brown and Pickerill 2009; Kyle et al. 2011).

I argue that in order to gain a fuller understanding of the sustainability and trajectories of activism it is important to think about activists as "boundary crossers" (Lewis 2008; Kyle et al. 2011; Roth 2015a) who move between different sectors and between paid and unpaid activism over their life-time. Such a perspective builds on and further develops the notion of "biographical consequences" (McAdam 1989) of activism, that is what impact activism has on personal and professional life-spheres. McAdam (1989) found that former activists were more likely to work in helping professions, however, he does not identify these occupations as a form of activism. The participation in NGOs can also lead to a variety of careers, especially when the boundaries between

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[3] Academic activism or academic activists refers to academics who are involved in social movements and who reconcile their work as researchers and educators with their work as activists.

political activism and volunteering is not drawn too strictly (Eliasoph 2013). Thus, volunteering in Amnesty International as a student can be helpful for a career as a lawyer, participation and interest in autonomous movements can contribute to an academic career and voluntary participation in political parties and trade unions can lead to full-time positions (Roth 2003).

Moreover, voluntary and full-time social-political commitment can be exercised simultaneously or successively and can be reflected in a variety of forms in career choice and activism trajectories. Thus, the voluntary commitment in the workplace lead to a staff position in advocacy work – or vice versa (see also Taylor 2004). On the basis of four generations of activists, Janet Newman (2012) shows how voluntary participation in grassroots organisations alternated with paid positions in trade unions and political parties while academic research was complemented by voluntary participation in think tanks. Thus activism can be maintained in different forms and with different material and personal consequences. In the next section, I discuss burnout as a risk to sustained activism and how it can be prevented.

Experiencing and preventing burn-out

How can socio-political commitment be sustained over the life-course? What are the requirements for "personal sustainability"(Cox 2009, Cox 2010), which are also important for the sustainability of social movements and social change organisations? Work in social movements can be physically, psychologically, physically and financially stressful. Maslach and Gomes (2006) identify exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy as three key components of burnout. Exhaustion (the individual stress component) is experienced as being overwhelmed and drained; cynicism (the interpersonal component) is a response to exhaustion, initially self-protecting it undermines the commitment to the cause; inefficacy (the self-evaluation component) is experienced as lack of achievement due to lack of resources and unachievable goals (Maslach and Gomes 2006, p. 44). Thus, burn-out results not only from vicarious post-traumatic stress, for example, when working with victims of abuse, but also can also be triggered by the working conditions in social change organisations which are characterised by long working days, conflicts and varied frustrations, in addition they often lack of resources and recognition (Cox 2010).

Gorski and Chen (2015) report that *education activists*[4] experienced chronic psychological and mental health effects including chronic depression, stress, anxiety and panic attacks, the decline of physical well-being as well as disillusionment and hopelessness. Pursuing the "perfect standard" identified by

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[4] Gorski and Chen (2015) define these activists as "social justice activists whose activism revolves around social justice concerns such as racism, sexism, the corporatisation of the public sphere, anti-immigrant oppression, and environmental justice as they relate to school and schooling" (p. 386). However, only those who were involved in unpaid activism were included in the study even though many worked in educational organisations including universities, schools and non-profit organisations addressing educational justice (p. 392).

Bobel (2007), they developed a "culture of martyrdom" (Gorski and Chen 2015, p. 397) that prevented them from engaging in self-care. As social justice activists they felt that taking advantage of high-quality health-care or taking time out to sustain themselves would undermine their activism. However, when they realised that burn-out can lead to disengagement, some of the activists interviewed changed their attitude towards self-care and became interested in learning how to overcome the "culture of martyrdom".

It needs to be emphasised that burnout is not only experienced by volunteers in social change organisations but also by paid staff. Rodgers (2010) analysed the work-culture and emotional context of Amnesty International which is characterised by commitment, sacrifice and guilt. The normative expectations of selflessness that are reinforced and institutionalised in the organisation result in high turnover of paid staff. Moreover, it is important to point out that paid employment in social change organisations is often low paid and precarious as it depends on unreliable funding and donations (Eltanani 2016).

It is common for (feminist) activists to work on short-term contracts or combine various part-time jobs or freelance work. After all, most activists have to make a living – they might work in a helping profession and volunteer in social change organisations before they find paid employment in social change organisations. Full-time activists who do not have a paid position in a social change organisation have to rely on savings, benefits and the support of friends and family unless they have inherited wealth. Thus, those from privileged backgrounds will find it easier to volunteer than those who have to provide for themselves and dependents.[5] Notwithstanding international networks, recognition and prominence, activists' careers are often precarious (Newman 2012; Faludi 2013).

In order to prevent or overcome burnout, the imbalance between goals and resources to achieve them needs to be addressed. This can include shifting the focus of activism and develop more realistic, pragmatic goals (Maslach and Gomes 2006). Furthermore, engaging in mindfulness practices such as yoga, tai-chi and meditation can help activists to deal with burnout and become more effective in the social justice movement (Gorski 2015). Achieving a balance through paying attention to personal needs, avoiding exhaustion through work, making time for reflection and play and diversifying activities enables activists to avoid burnout and contributes to sustaining activism (Downton and Wehr 1997: 543). In her study of feminist and women's right activists involved in online campaigning, Gleeson (2016) found that even though the two campaigners who worked on the campaign as paid part-time employees were in a precarious position, they remained far longer with the campaign than the unpaid campaigners. The paid campaigners avoided burnout since they were able to distance themselves from the campaign and to work fewer hours. At the same time, the paid campaigners were highly identified with their work and reported that they spent more hours than needed. Frantz' (2005) study of NGO

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[5] Regarding class-differences between activists see also Valocchi (2013).

staff also highlights how professionalism and social values were intertwined. Staff emphasised that they wanted to develop professionally in order to be better able to contribute to the realisation of the aims of the organisations they were working for.

Activism, paid or unpaid, has "biographical consequences" (McAdam 1989) for the private lives and professional choices of activists. Burnout is a risk both for volunteers as well as for staff in social change organisations. In order to sustain activism, burnout needs to be avoided which includes (what I would call) an "activism-work-life balance"[6]. I argue that in order to understand the development of activism over the life-course it is necessary to acknowledge that activists might shift from one movement to another or from one tactic to another, including occupational activism. Such boundary-crossing is overlooked if one focuses only on one form of activism or only one social movement. Moreover, it is important to recognise that (in addition to social change organisations) family, community and work places can also be sites of activism. In the next section, I provide a brief overview over varieties and different spheres of activism.

Spheres of activism - varieties of activism

Closely related to the question of how the participation in social movements fits into the life course is the question what form this involvement takes on. It is well known that the action repertoires of social movements are extremely varied, ranging from low-risk (eg peaceful, approved demonstrations) to high risk (eg, illegal occupations), and low-cost (eg, signing an e-mail petition) to high-cost (eg time-consuming participation in grassroots discussions) actions (Tarrow 1998, Taylor and Van Dyke 2007). This means that there is a wide range of more or less time-consuming and potentially dangerous activities which can be more or less easily be reconciled with other commitments.

In addition to distinguishing different forms of participation based on cost and risk, another dimension is the question of whether it is outsider or insider activism. *Outsider activism* refers to mobilisation outside political institutions such as peaceful protests or direct action, in contrast to *insider activism* includes "lobbying, testifying, writing legislation, providing public education, mobilizing constituencies, and supporting women candidates" (Spalter-Roth and Schreiber 1995, p. 105). Much social movement research has focused on outsider activism and activism tends to be equated with it, however insider activism including the involvement in governmental and intergovernmental organisations has found increasing scholarly attention. In the context of the women's movement this includes research on "femocrats" (Eisenstein 1996), feminists who have taken on positions in local, regional or national

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[6] There is a wide literature on "work-life" balance which discussed how employment and family can be reconciled (Eikof et al. 2007; Roberts 2007). This literature has primarily addressed women's ability to combine work and care obligations. I suggest developing this further and consider how activism can be both reconciled with family and paid employment.

governments. Pettinicchio (2012) points to the central role of *institutional activism*[7] and encourages overcoming the dichotomy between outsider and insider activism. Social movements can have more or less outsider status, moreover insider activists (eg members of Green parties or government commissions) can provide important resources for grassroots organisations.

The relationship between outsider and insider activism is of interest in many respects. Of political interest is the ability to create alliances and mobilise resources (Glasius and Ishkanian 2014). Analytically a differentiated (or differentiating) look at different forms of participation is important to enable the division of labour and cooperation and overcome conflict between different movement actors. In this context, key figures in social movements (which I discuss later on) who have gained experience in different political contexts and can mediate between various spheres of activism are of particular importance. Staff positions in social change organisations and insider activism provide access to various resources which in turn can be made available to outsider activism. Moreover, activists might be engaged in multiple forms of activism at the same time. For example, holding a staff position in an NGO or in local government does not rule out participation in protests. A biographical perspective shows that over the life course insider and outsider activism can alternate or can be exercised simultaneously and result in boundary crossing between different sectors (Lewis 2008, Roth 2015a). Insider and outsider activism, exit and latency phases are thus integrated into everyday life and are in mutual relationship with other spheres of life. Moreover, activism is not restricted to social movement organisations but can be embedded in everyday life – in parenting practices, neighbourhood involvement and workplace engagement.

Family

Parents and "significant others" can have a great influence on the political socialisation of their children.[8] For example, Weigand (2001) found that "red-diaper babies" who grew up in communist households participated in the second wave of the women's movement. In her study of NGO staff, Frantz (2005) documented that in the majority of families of origin political commitment played an important role. Women in the GDR peace movement felt that they owed it to their children to fight for their convictions even if this involved risking prison sentences (Miethe 1999). They perceived that their parents had been complicit with the Nazi regime and they did not want to be accused by their own children for not standing up to the communist regime. Parents can thus be role models and children's experience of participating in a

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[7] Institutional activists are individuals who effect change "from within organisations and institutions" (Pettinicchio 2012: 501).

[8] Apart from family members (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings etc.), for example teachers and religious figures (eg pastors) may have an influence on the value system and the political beliefs of children and young people.

demonstration, attending an anti-authoritarian day care centre or a Waldorf school or growing up in shared housing can influence children's future political participation. This does not mean that children of leftist, anti-racist, feminist parents necessarily share the beliefs of their mothers and fathers.

Social movement scholars have so far paid little attention to parenting practices as a form of activism. However, Sisk and Duncan (2006) discuss parenting in the context of peace work – it can contribute to raising the next generation of peace activists as well as contribute to "the own growth as effective peace worker" (p. 56). Similarly, Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (2006) perceive "plant[ing] the seeds of nonviolence in our children" as peace activism (p. 229). Furthermore, LGBTI parents are constantly confronted with the question how to raise children in a heteronormative society (Averett 2016). Thus parents can - consciously and unconsciously, positively and negatively – influence the political socialisation of their children. It would be of interest to systematically investigate care work and the gendered division of household labour as a form of "lifestyle activism", i.e. primarily individual action in the privacy sphere (Haenfler et al. 2012). Political mothering also includes community engagement for educational justice (Fuentes 2013, Macdonald 1997) and health-related issues (Ryan and Cole 2009). Thus, parenting can motivate social engagement in community and environmental activism, as I discuss in the next section.

Community and environment

Neighbourhood and environmental activism are also embedded in everyday life and can be a further expression of parental involvement. Commitment to environmental issues can be based in the concern for the lives of family members, and the ethnic community (and social class) (Naples 1998). Pardo (1995) for example examined the mobilisation of Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles against a prison and an incinerator in their neighbourhood.[9] As "mothers" they understood themselves initially as defenders of the neighbourhood, but over time they worked together with environmental groups across the state. The identity as mothers plays a crucial role for the involvement in environmental justice activism (Bell and Brown 2010). Of course, community-activism is not restricted to parents but also includes environmental and social justice activism of youth (Shah 2011).

Conscious consumption or political consumerism constitutes another form of activism embedded in everyday life. In this context one can distinguish "boycotts", thus avoiding products that have been manufactured in an environmentally stressful way or under exploitative conditions, from "buycotts", i.e. the acquisition of products produced in an environmentally friendly and fair way (Balsiger 2010, Neilson 2010, Brown 2013). Such forms of political

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[9] MELA - Mothers of East Los Angeles - a grass-roots organisation comprised also some Catholic priests and Mexican-American politicians on the city and state level.

consumerism can be understood as "lifestyle" movements (Haenfler et al 2012). These individual, private actions can contribute to social change.

Employment

Finally, employment constitutes a central arena for activism. Rank and file members, full-time trade unionists, women's and minority officers are active on behalf of their constituencies, act as mentors, recruit union members and involve union and non-union members in events (Roth 2000, Roth 2003, Kirton and Healy 2013). Voluntary and paid representation in the workplace focusing on the improvement or security of working conditions constitutes an important form of social activism which is anchored in everyday life.

Furthermore, feminist organisations have been defined as "the places in which and the means through which the work of the women's movement is done" (Ferree and Martin 1995: 13) and provide contexts for volunteer and full-time commitment. Such organisations not only comprise political groups, feminist magazines and health organisations, but also businesses (Martin, 1990; Ferree and Martin 1995). Of course, other social movements also offer paid employment in non-governmental organisations, magazines, book and food stores, clinics and so on (Rothschild-Whitt 1979, Kleinman 1996, Brown 2013).

As long gender[10] structures paid and unpaid work we can observe gender differences in social movement participation which are characterised by different experiences and interests. Thus men and women may engage in various ways for (or against) social change in different stages of their life. Of course, not just gender, but class, ethnicity, "race", religion, nationality, sexuality, age and many other aspects of privilege and discrimination shape the involvement in social movements. For example, class differences matter with respect to recruitment and activist identity (Valocchi 2013).

Participation has not only biographical consequences for activists and may influence their career and family planning, it has also an impact on their immediate environment - family members, friends and neighbours and colleagues. I will now turn to some key figures in social change organisations and what they contribute to social change organisations.

Some key figures in social change organisations

Social movement literature has put significant emphasis on the discussion of leaders and their roles for social movements (Morris and Staggenborg 2007, Reger 2007) and the invisible leadership of (African American) women has been noted (Barnett 1993). Attention to key figures who perform significant tasks in social movements supplements the existing literature on leadership. Based on

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[10] Gender differences and (stereotypical) notions of femininity and masculinity are socially constructed.

my research (Roth 2003, Roth 2007, Roth et al. 2014) I suggest the following key figures which can only be analytically distinguished and in practice often overlap: the broker, the femocrat, the knowledge producer, the consultant and the founder, who take on various functions in social movements. This is not an exhaustive list of key figures[11], but rather these types reflect various forms of occupational or institutional activism. Although these key figures are primarily based on my research and reflections on feminist activists and women's organisations, I suggest that they play a role in a wider range of political and social movement contexts.

A central role is played by the *broker*, who by virtue of participation in diverse political contexts and organisations mediates between grassroots organisations, local government, international non-governmental organisations and intergovernmental organisations and who thus can provide contacts and contributes to the diffusion of ideas (Keck and Sikkink 1998, Woodward 2003). Through volunteer and full-time commitment, she[12] has gained experience and knowledge. The broker has created networks on which she can rely and which she is constantly expanding. She establishes connections between activists working in different spheres who either do not know each other or have difficulties interacting with one another.

The *femocrat* (Eisenstein 1996) has - at least temporarily - decided to take on the "march through the institutions" and is thus engaged in *institutional activism* (Pettinicchio 2012). Her political socialisation might have taken place in the autonomous women's movement, in (more left-wing) parties or trade unions. Her office might represent the interests or provide services to women, sexual or ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups. She has access to resources, but is confronted with the accusation of de-politicisation and co-optation when she makes compromises. Such criticism overlooks, however, that the femocrat not only has a mediating function (between government and social movements), but that she can also provide material resources as well as access and legitimacy.

The *knowledge producer*[13] is located in universities and think tanks. She seeks to contribute to the formation of critical thinking through teaching and research. Her analysis of social change can provide a basis for the evaluation of social and economic policy. On the one hand, through her participation in committees, she can critically accompany and legitimise political decisions; on the other hand, she can make her expertise available to autonomous feminist

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[11]Further key figures include the witness, the mentor, the pioneer, the veteran and the scapegoat (Pettenkofer 2013), the martyr and the financier (Virchow 2013) as well as the organiser, the strategist, the motivator and the representative (Rucht 2013).

[12] These key figures could be female or male. Men are also meant when I am using the female form.

[13] Of course, knowledge production and learning processes are not restricted to formal educational institutions and research institutes. On the contrary, social movements are important sites for the production of knowledge (Choudry 2015) and learning processes (Miethe and Roth 2016).

organisations and provide a critical outsider perspective. This type represents *occupational* and *academic activism.*

The *consultant* has her own business and works with organisations in the private, public and third sectors. She might offer equality and diversity training or conceive and carry out events. She has created an enterprise which expresses her political convictions. The consultant is more independent and flexible than those who are employed by institutions, but also more precarious. As an entrepreneur, she has to sell herself to an even greater extent than those (more) permanently employed with regular income. In contrast to a (full-time) university employee who can more easily afford to give a lecture or participate in a conference without obtaining an honorarium, a self-employed consultant carefully needs to consider her commitment to the cause, the potential networking opportunities and the loss of income which she might risk by participating in an event without being paid. She also represents *occupational activism.*

Finally, another key figure is the *founder* of a movement organisation; whether it is a grass-roots organisation, publication (for example a journal) or company. The founder can mobilise resources of all kinds - whether unpaid labour, real estate, financial resources, media attention or political support. Her organisation may be engaged in protest and advocacy or provide information, training or services and creating jobs or apprenticeships or internships.

Common to these key figures which are identified here – the broker, the femocrat, the knowledge producer, the consultant and the founder – is that they are constantly facing the contradictions and tensions between insider and outsider activism, co-optation and transformation due to their border-crossing activities (cf. Lewis 2008; Newman in 2012, especially Chapter 7). Their work is characterised by the tension between reform and radical critique. In order to illustrate the work of these key figures, I will now turn to a feminist organisation, the women's cooperative *WeiberWirtschaft* which was created in the late 1980s in West-Berlin. This allows me to explore the relationship between professionalisation and activism and the sustainability of activism at the individual, organisational and movement levels.

The women's cooperative *WeiberWirtschaft*

The emergence and development of the women's cooperative *WeiberWirtschaft* is embedded in the transformations of German, European and global women's movements (Wichterich 2010, Ferree 2012). In the 1970s, autonomy - which included a distancing from political parties and trade unions - played a major role for the West German women's movement. With the creation of the Green Party and of women's representatives and woman equality bodies in the 1980s the integration of West German feminists in mainstream political institutions began. This process became even more intense after German unification (1990). The subsequently increased presence of women in politics and business and the adoption of policies seeking to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family

life can be seen as a success of the women's movement. However, the affinity between (liberal) feminism and neoliberalism has been noted (Fraser 2009). In a tricky way, the demands of women's movements for self-determination, self-reliance, individual liberty and autonomy are compatible with the logic of globalised markets. What does this mean? Neoliberalism involves the transfer of tasks that were previously covered by the state, to private sector or civil society as well as an emphasis on personal responsibility and efficiency. This meets with feminist demands for self-determination and opens up possibilities for women's NGOs and gender consultants. Kantola and Squires (2012) characterise these changes as a shift from *state feminism* to *market feminism*. While it is welcome that the expertise and services of feminists are paid adequately, the reliance on project and performance-bound funding encompasses the risk of co-optation and de-politicisation.

I consider the fact that the cooperative *WeiberWirtschaft* could be established and that it is still active as a success and an example for sustainable activism at the organisational level. As I will argue in this section, this success is based on a willingness to take risks, to learn, to compromise and to put many hours of (unpaid) work into the founding and development of this organisation. Luck and historical circumstances contributed to the success of this initiative, but without the ability to negotiate with a broad range of actors it would not have been possible to take advantage of these political opportunities.

From a feminist perspective, organisations are of great interest. On the one hand, women have for a long time been excluded from influential organisations and from influential positions within such organisations (Acker 1990). On the other hand, women have formed a wide variety of feminist organisations which have contributed to social change (Martin 1990, Ferree and Martin 1995). The majority of these organisations are cultural or political, as a primarily economic organisation or enterprise the women's cooperative *WeiberWirtschaft* is an unusual feminist organisation.

This women's cooperative represents a real utopia in the sense that it is guided by the moral principles of equality, democracy and sustainability (Wright 2013). The organisational structure of the cooperative and the low share price (€ 103) ensure equality and democracy to a much greater extent than other business enterprises. Men can buy shares, but can only be involved in a limited form due to the organisation's commitment to promote women. The cooperative represents three models of intersectional feminist practices distinguished by Naples (2013): local democratic practices, cooperation between state and community, as well as democratic practices in the transnational context. What factors and paradoxes contributed to the success of *WeiberWirtschaft* and how does this project reflect and inspire feminist transformations? In this section, I will first discuss the data on which this case study is based. Then I will provide a short history of the women's cooperative before I turn to the role of the key figures of social change organisations that were introduced earlier.

Data

This account is grounded in personal and activist knowledge (Choudry 2015) rather than on a systematic academic research project. My discussion of this organisation is primarily based on reflections by the founders and other members of the cooperative which were published in a book celebrating the 25th anniversary of *WeiberWirtschaft* (Neusüß and von der Bey 2015). The book documents the difficulties and conflicts that the organisation encountered as well as the success which even surprised the founders themselves. Thus, the data on which I draw was created by the organisation itself. As a (close) friend and colleague of some of the founders, I knew about the project from the earliest discussions in the second half of the 1980s and became one of the members of the cooperative. Thus my knowledge of the organisations is embedded in my everyday life and biography. However, I don't consider myself an activist in the organisation. My involvement was restricted to listening to the accounts of my friends about the difficulties and successes they experienced, occasionally attending events, supporting the organisation financially[14] and offering reflections from my perspective as scholar of feminist organisations in the afterword of the book. Thus my account is partial and might be perceived as sympathetic and biased. I certainly hope that this account will be supplemented by studies that employ interviews with founders, former and current renters and executive board members.

A short herstory of *Weiberwirtschaft*[15]

The idea of *WeiberWirtschaft* is grounded in feminist scholarship and the women's movement. In 1985, three of the founders of *WeiberWirtschaft* published a report on the obstacles to women's self-employment based on a study funded by local government, the West-Berlin senator for economy and employment, in which they outlined the idea of a women's founders centre. This idea was further developed during a women's movement event - the first women's work conference in West-Berlin in 1987 - and a voluntary association was founded in the same year. As a result of these debates, the idea of creating a women's founder centre to help women overcome the obstacles of founding businesses such as lack of affordable offices or missing day care facilities emerged.

Between 1987 and 1989, in preparation for the founding of a cooperative, the founders established a voluntary association, opened an office and obtained public funding for paid positions for project management and public relations.

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[14] In addition to buying shares for myself, I gave shares to my niece and mother – representing three generations of supporters of a feminist organisation.

[15] This account is based on the information provided on the website of *WeiberWirtschaft* http://www.weiberwirtschaft.de/fileadmin/user_data/pdf/informieren/Praesentation_auf_3_ Seiten_englisch_2014.pdf and on Neusuess and von der Bey (2105). Details are provided in order to show what obstacles the organisation faced and what role the key figures which I introduced earlier played in dealing with them.

The cooperative was founded in 1989, moved into an office in 1990 and obtained funding for two staff positions from the senator for women in the local government. In 1992, the cooperation was included in the register of cooperatives and bought a building complex which was renovated between 1993 and 1996. In 1994, the refurbishment of a part of the building complex was completed and the first tenants moved in. Two years later, in 1996, the entire complex, including social housing (13 apartments) was available for use.

In 1998, the cooperative experienced a significant crisis when 40% of the building complex was affected by contamination. Ironically, this was a result of the ecological renovation of the building (heating, airtight windows, the removal of tiles from the walls) which within three years after completion of the renovation had allowed naphtalene, which was part of the roofing cardboard in the suspended ceiling, to diffuse into the air (Smentek 2015, p. 75). The contamination had to be removed and new spaces for the renters whose office spaces had become unusable had to be found. These measures put significant financial pressure on the organisation which had to raise additional funds in order to keep the building. The refurbishment was completed in 2000 and in order to deal with the conflicts between the executive board and the renters a mediation unit was established.

In 2000, 80 per cent of the units were occupied; as of 2012 100 per cent of the offices were rented to businesses and other interested renters joined the waiting list. In order to support women founders a number of services were introduced: cheaper rents for founders during the first year, access to a day care centre on site, affordable meals in the restaurant on site and micro-credits for members of the cooperative. Over the years, the cooperative won a number of awards recognizing it as an ecological, family-friendly, innovative enterprise. In the next section, I will address what makes this enterprise a feminist organisation and why the involvement in the organisation should be considered feminist activism.

WeiberWirtschaft as a feminist organisation

According to Patricia Yancey Martin (1990) an organisation is feminist if it meets the following criteria: "a) it has a feminist ideology, b) has feminist guiding values, c) has feminist goals, d) produces feminist outcomes, e) was founded during the women's movement or as part of the women's movement" (p. 116). These criteria[16] apply to *WeiberWirtschaft*, as I will illustrate based on the recollections of the founders and members of the cooperative.

Feminist ideology

The idea of the cooperative emerged based on an analysis of the obstacles to women's self-employment. The findings of the study indicated that women

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[16] As mentioned above, WeiberWirtschaft was founded in the context of the women's movement.

found smaller enterprises and usually on their own, they have often a family that they are caring for and they have less access to public funding. These obstacles could be overcome by creating a centre for women entrepreneurs where small enterprises can share infrastructure and participate in training. This infrastructure should enable women to create their own workplaces and "move away from the victim role" (Hübner 2015: 38). Founders deliberated about the legal form of the organisation. They considered private property as an expression of existing patriarchal power relations and rejected the idea to become a "capitalist". The idea was to put property into women's hands and to redistribute the profit gained through renting out the property by making it available to the women's movement (von der Bey 2015: 15). Thus the founders developed the idea of a women's cooperative to start a feminist money cycle: Many women contribute small amounts of money, to 1) buy a large property, create space for women's enterprises and women's projects which 2) provide employment opportunities for women, 3) make the economic contribution of women visible and 4) make profit that will be used to support women's projects (von der Bey 2015: 15).

Feminist guiding values

In order to put this idea into practice, a significant amount of money had to be raised. Even though the cooperative successfully pooled money through selling shares to women (and later on also to men), the shareholders equity (about € 250,000 in March 1993) was not nearly sufficient to buy and renovate a large building complex. The cooperative thus had to consider what compromises to make to raise the necessary capital (approximately € 6 million) to buy the building. In line with their values, the founders hoped to get a mortgage with ideologically compatible banks such as the *Ökobank* (ecological bank) or the *Bank für Sozialwirtschaft* (Bank for social economy). However, these banks could only offer credit up to € 500,000. The founders then looked for a bank that was led by a woman, but the only woman in Berlin who led a branch of a bank could only make credit decisions up to € 500,000. Not only was it difficult for *WeiberWirtschaft* to find a bank that met their values, mainstream banks were not keen to give a small group of women, mostly social scientists with lack of management experience and hardly any equity, a very large sum of money. Moreover, the banks were afraid that supporting feminists from the women's project movement would spoil their reputation (Gather 2015: 46). In the end, a partially publicly owned bank specializing in mortgages provided the credit needed to buy the property (Gather 2015). Just as the legal form of the organisation was informed by feminist values, they also shaped the process of finding the necessary resources. At the same time, financing the project required compromises, a point I will return to below.

Feminist goals and outcomes

The aim of *WeiberWirtschaft* is to enable women to create their own businesses, but that does not make it a liberal feminist organisation. First, as a cooperative the organisation spreads participation and decision making throughout the shareholders. Second, with lower rents for new entrepreneurs the organisation engages in redistribution. Third, the founders actively sought financial support from local government. Furthermore, the organisation considered sustainability and the reconciliation of paid work and care work through establishing a day care centre. At the time of writing this article, *WeiberWirtschaft* is still repaying its loans. Once this is achieved, it remains to be seen whether *WeiberWirtschaft* will be able to return to its origins and realise the feminist money cycle making earned surplus available to feminist projects, single mothers, and to people and businesses in the Global South. Thus, *WeiberWirtschaft* represents an alternative to neoliberal practices, by contributing to the redistribution of resources.

Crises and conflicts – and how to deal with them

Of course, the herstory of this feminist organisation was not free of crises and conflicts. The question of how renters should be involved in the decision making processes became particularly salient in the crisis situation when part of the building were found to be contaminated by naphtalene. Renters voiced the suspicions that they had been misled and that the problem had been known to the executive board when the property was purchased (Smentek 2015: 78). The members of the executive board who had put years of unpaid labour in establishing the founders' centre were hurt and outraged (ibid). The conflict was even covered in the local press. General assemblies as well as renters' assemblies were held, some women left the cooperative. In response to the conflict, a mediation unit was founded in order to solve conflicts between the executive board and the renters (Smentek 2015: 78).

Another conflict concerned rent arrears. The cooperative could not afford to relinquish income through rents and had to figure out how to deal with renters whose businesses were not successful. Some renters envisioned the cooperative as a "big nurturing mother" (Zauner 2015: 66) and experienced the fact that the executive board suggested restructuring if rents were not paid after repeated extensions as a lack of solidarity. The executive board reflected on whether they were "adopting male behaviour from the evil economy" and had become "normal landlords" (ibid), but concluded that they had to take a clear stance in order to assure the success of the enterprise. Moreover, they recalled that (some) renters were grateful to be confronted with a "reality check" instead of further investing in an unsuccessful endeavour (ibid).

The collection includes an article which is based on a conversation between the editors and five renters who moved into the building complex between 1994 and 2008, according to which conflicts played a bigger role in the early stages of the cooperative and declined after the building work was completed (Mieterinnen

im Gründerinnenzentrum 2015). Renters (all of them are shareholders of the cooperative) are involved in the decision what enterprises can move in thus can prevent competitions. Some of the renters take advantage of the networking and exchange opportunities that the proximity to other enterprises offers.

Thus, *WeiberWirtschaft* had to overcome various obstacles and conflicts in order to realise the dream of a "real utopia" (Wright 2013). I consider the women's cooperative as "prefigurative politics" (Yates 2015) because it successfully created workplaces for women in an ecological, family-friendly, democratic feminist enterprise. Paradoxically, the creation of workplaces for women was accomplished through a great amount of unpaid, voluntary work.[17] In the next section, I return to the relationship between professionalisation, professionalism and activism and to the key figures of social movements that I identified earlier.

Professionalisation, pragmatism and principles

How was it possible that a small group of students, unemployed women and recent post-graduates with no equity and little prior knowledge of property development were able to buy and refurbish a large property and establish a cooperative and women founders' centre of international reputation? Each of the key figures I introduced earlier played a different role in this process. Obviously, the women are *founders* since they established a new organisation.

Thus, let's start with the *knowledge producer*. The starting point of the project was the insight – findings from a study on women's employment opportunities – what obstacles women who want to establish businesses face. The founders thus were academic activists addressing the problem by coming up with a solution, a women's founder centre. Throughout the phases of creating the cooperative and founders centre a lot of knowledge and expertise was needed: legal, financial, architectural, planning and business expertise. In addition, the cooperative had to learn how to deal with conflicts within the organisation. The necessary expertise to establish the project was acquired in different ways – to a large extent through learning processes of the founding members and those who joined later on. However, activists also benefited from expertise sponsorship, for example, a well-known female architect supported the project through providing her expertise pro bono. In addition, the cooperative paid for legal assistance.

Closely related to the ability to mobilise resources is the fact that the women engaged in *WeiberWirtschaft* were capable *brokers* able to create alliances across multiple sectors. On the one hand, as a women's project *WeiberWirtschaft* could mobilise the support of women identifying with and active in the women's movement who bought shares throughout the herstory of the organisation. Given that it is unclear whether it will ever be possible to pay

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[17] The founders estimate that in the 1990s alone the unpaid labour put into creating the cooperative was worth the equivalent of about € 2.5 million (von der Bey 2015: 19).

out the shares – and that the idea is to invest potential profits into women's projects – in this case share ownership means investment in the women's movement, not in individual profit. During the crisis that required the refurbishment, the cooperative had to raise money in a short period of time. The organisation put together a campaign involving events, panel discussions, press conferences and marketing actions and successfully sold 2000 shares, increasing equity by 30%. On the other hand, the founders had to convince banks and local government that the project is efficient. Thus the organisation successfully communicated both with the women's movement as well as with economic and political leaders and the general public. *Femocrats* in the local government played an important role supporting the project. The cooperative offers office space for *consultants* which use the networking opportunities on site.

Professionalisation and activism – professional activists

So could every activity be activism? Yes and no. This depends very much on the context and the social movement as well as the stage of the life course of an activist. For example, *digital activism*, that is supporting a social movement, social change organisation or campaign through online action (Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010) can be prefigurative and recruit participants in offline protest events (Mercea 2012) or it can contribute to movement retention (Bunnage 2014). Thus, rather than equating activism with radical or direct action, it is important to differentiate between different forms of activism and appreciate that they suit different demands – demands of movements and social change organisations, but also demands of the individuals active in them. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that radical activism can have system-stabilizing effects (Blühdorn 2006), while occupational and academic activism can have significant negative career consequences and may include harassment and intimidation (Taylor and Raeburn 1995). Thus, high-risk activism is not limited to direct action, but can also include occupational and academic activism. Whether an activity qualifies as activism thus depends on a variety of factors, including the identity of activists, goals and outcomes.

Shifting between different forms of activism over the life-course can sustain activism at the individual, organisational and movement level. Activists gain experience in paid and unpaid work which can be transferred from one sphere of activism to another. This includes learning processes as well as spillover effects (Meyer and Whittier 1994). Such shifts are also important to address or prevent burnout. For example, a gay rights activist who had been involved in direct action and advocacy work demanding support for communities affected

by HIV and AIDS might open a gay friendly health clinic, thus providing a service for one of the affected communities while making a living.

Furthermore, *academic activism* can play a particular role in sustaining activism.[18] It can offer long-term activists paid employment that allows to continue working with social movements and activist communities as well as socializing new generations of activists while at the same time earning money that allows sustaining a family. It also offers spaces for activists who return to university for courses or a degree which provide a space for reflection, learning and networking (Kyle et al. 2011, Roth 2015a). Thus the academy can support and sustain as well as legitimise and professionalise activism (Kyle et al. 2011).

Does this mean that professionalisation of activists and activism is unproblematic? No. Just like any form of activism, professional and professionalised activism requires ongoing critical reflection on strategies, goals, practices and compromises. No matter how good the intentions, social movements are not free from contradictions as accounts of racism, sexism or homophobia in progressive movements demonstrate. Moreover, demonstrations can be important means to express outrage and oppositions, but they can also become ritualistic (Rucht 2003). Fair trade is aimed at improving the lives of farmers, but can be and is incorporated into capitalism (Brown 2013, Dauvergne and LeBaron 2014, Busa and King 2015). Canvassing is an efficient means of gaining large numbers of signatures for progressive causes but undermines meaningful participation and fails to build grassroots capacity in local communities (Fisher 2006). Gaining access to local and national governments and intergovernmental organisations can distance NGOs from the constituencies they are representing (Lang 2013, Carroll and Sapinski 2015). Sustainable activism – no matter in what form it comes – requires accountability to values and to constituencies and contribute to empowerment (Kilby 2006).

Conclusions

Sustainable activism requires both elasticity and rigor, the ability to learn and compromise as well as the willingness to stick to values and convictions. As I have argued in this article, participation in social movements should not be thought as separate from but as integrated in everyday life and the life course. Everyday experiences - for example, discrimination, inequality and injustice - can be the cause to become active in different ways to fight for one's own interests or for future generations. This commitment in turn can serve as a model for others. If we understand activism as embedded in everyday life, then we find key figures as role models and mentors in parents, teachers, students and colleagues. Political beliefs may be reflected in educational methods, the choice of schools, transportation, consumer products and jobs. These decisions,

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[18] Of course, in the neoliberal and managerial university, the spaces for academic activism are increasingly difficult to create and to defend (Crowther & Scandrett 2016).

in turn, can affect children, partners, neighbours and colleagues. Thus I argue for a sophisticated understanding of commitment that does not reduce activism to the participation in protest events, but takes into account a wide range of more or less collective action. This does not mean that the importance of protest events should be questioned but that these should be more strongly related to other forms of activism as it is currently the case in the study of social movements. This also means perceiving the cross-border work of insider and outsider activists: mediator, femocrat, knowledge producer, consultant and founder represent different key figures who mediate between civil society, public sector and market as I have shown in my case-study of the women's cooperative WeiberWirtschaft. Key figures in social movements are active at local, national and international levels, as volunteers and paid staff. A focus on sporadic protest behaviour or a particular variant of movement participation (either insider or outsider, protest or participation in a movement organisation) does not address these life projects. A biographical perspective, however, allows to take the sequence of participation in various social movements and forms of activity in the view and to recognise the extent to which these experiences of multiple participation influence the development of networks and social movements and contribute to the sustainability of activism at the individual, organisational and movement levels.

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About the author

Dr Silke Roth is Associate Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology at the University of Southampton (UK). She is interested in meaningful work and engagement for social justice. Her areas of research include the participation in and the impact of voluntary organisations, social movements and non-governmental organisations. In order to understand the intersection of individual and social change she finds biographical methods particularly useful for connecting micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of analysis. Contact email silke.roth AT soton.ac.uk