

No Expo Network: multiple subjectivities, online communication strategies, and the world outside

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Abstract

Technological devices are supporting the convergence of individuals and groups, sharing and implementing common repertoires of contention: these opportunities redefine possibilities for arranging at distance, defining a common minimum frame, and allowing multiple adhesion paths and ways of participation. Moreover, the ability to attract political and media attention and the maintenance of the internal solidarity play a strategic role both for successful protests and resistant movements.

According with the theoretical framework deepened in the first part, this paper analyses the mobilization against the Universal Exposition 2015 held in Milan. After a brief overview of the context and the mapping of the main organizations belonging to No Expo Network, an assessment of their involvement in the coalition is presented. Thereafter, the online communication strategy is explored through a systematic analysis of the No Expo website and its visibility in websites, blogs and social network sites of the various groups belonging to the Network. In a mixed perspective, both as scholars and as activists, in this article our purpose is, on the one hand, to describe and also to critically analyse the coalition and its dynamics; on the other hand, to underline the main criticalities of Universal Expositions, by supporting the No Expo arguments.

Keywords: contentious politics, strategic action fields, Expo, No Expo, mega events, online communication, social movements.

Introduction

Year 2015 in Milan meant Universal Exposition. Everything in the city seemed to speak this language and be somehow related to the mega event. Concerts, exhibitions, conferences, university courses: through the construction of a specific ‘strategic narrative’ (Freedman 2006; Ringsmose and Børgesen 2011; De Graaf, Dimitriu and Ringsmose 2015), the rhetoric in support of Expo2015 became hegemonic (Gramsci 2001). Beside this propaganda, some voices were raised to express doubts and opposition from different points of view: our purpose in this article is to analyse their communication strategies (especially, but not only, online), reflecting on how they tried to contrast the Expo2015 dominant discourse. We are conscious that these few pages are not enough for such an extended topic, firstly because No Expo Network was composed of a large number of individual and collective actors, and only some of them will find

space in the following pages; secondly because, along with the online communication (which is the main focus of our analysis), practices and protest actions were developed before, during and after the event.

The article is divided in four main sections: the first one briefly reminds the context in which Expo2015 emerged and the circumstances surrounding the protest, the second one is dedicated to the theoretical references, the third one presents the fieldwork, and in the last one some conclusions and reflections are proposed. We present here a mapping of the organizations, an evaluation of their centrality level, and the main results related to the No Expo online communication strategies. These findings are part of a wider research and are mainly based on a systematic analysis of online communication (No Expo website and different communication channels of single groups of the Network) and 8 semi-structured interviews with different kinds of activists (Bertuzzi forthcoming).

To conclude this brief introduction, and before the contextualization of the No Expo mobilization, we need to clarify as our perspective is engaged and also partially ‘militant’ (Shukaitis, Graeber and Biddle 2007; Halvorsen 2015; Russell 2015), as we were somehow involved in No Expo Network and we shared its critical positions.

Contextualization

On 31 March 2008, the BIE (Bureau International des Expositions) commissioned to Milan the 2015 edition of Universal Exposition, with the theme ‘Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life’: the organization was assigned to Expo 2015 S.p.a., a company created in October 2008 by Italian Government, Lombardy Region, Province of Milan, City of Milan and Chamber of Commerce of Milan. The Universal Exposition is a mega event (Roche 2000; Muller 2015; Gruneau and Horne 2015) which, according to latest dispositions of the BIE, is planned every five years, lasting for a maximum of six months: the first one (of modern era) dates back to 1851 and was held in London. This was the second time that Milan hosted the Expo, after more than a century. In Expo2015 142 countries participated, along with international organizations (e.g. United Nations, European Union, Caribbean Community), big corporations (e.g. Coca Cola, Joomoo, New Holland) and a number of NGOs (non governmental organizations) gathered in the pavilion named Cascina Triulza.

In parallel to the evolution of the event, protests against it have been raised since 2007 when No Expo Committee was created (for a detailed reconstruction, see also Casaglia 2016). There were several important steps, like critics against the PGT (Piano di Governo del Territorio: Territory Government Plan) of Milan, or observations to the variant of the PRG (Piano Regolatore Generale: General Regulation Plan) in implementing the Program Agreement for Expo2015. However, especially some events characterized the mobilization: it should be reported at least No Expo Festival in May 2010, No Expo Climate Camp in June 2012 and the big demonstrations in October 2014 and May 2015.

Then, various mobilizations to which No Expo Network participated over the years must be added, from No TAV (Treno Alta Velocità: High Speed Railways) to No TEM (Tangenziale Esterna Milano: Eastern Milan Orbital Road) and No Pedemontana, to name only few. These mobilizations were strongly related to No Expo and were an occasion to unveil the connections between the mega event and the transformation of the territory: they were also partially successful struggles, in that they were able to connect locally base protests with a more general reasoning over neoliberal governance (Mossberger and Stoker 2001).

As well known, in order to understand how social movements build counter-narratives or how they use existing discourses to propose alternative scenarios (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2011; De Graaf and Dimitriu 2012) is important to consider the background where contentious discourses emerge (Bröer and Duyvendak 2009). In our case, at least two elements must be remembered: the security-warning built around No Expo Network during the months preceding the event, in a stigmatizing climate of security paranoia; and the various scandals that accompanied the works of preparation (see: Barbacetto and Maroni 2015; Moccia 2015; Casaglia 2016). Starting with this last aspect, it's correct to point out that, despite dominant public discourse has been particularly favourable to the event, some voices, even including institutional ones, contested the mainstream propaganda: such critics were mainly focused on the costs of the event, and especially on bribes paid with numerous arrests and judgments. In addition to these criticalities, relatively perceptible even by public opinion, other anomalies, highlighted by No Expo Network, found a certain amount of visibility: firstly, those aspects related to the repercussions of the 'over-construction' that the event would have had on Milan; secondly, the inconsistency of the main sponsors with the declared philosophy of the event.

Given this situation, different groups gathered around No Expo Network, contesting both the specific realization of the 2015 edition and the general philosophy of such events (Bertuzzi forthcoming). In fact, an important goal of No Expo Network was to bridge some of its arguments with previous editions of the Universal Exposition and with the opposition against other recent mega events conducted in Italy (see: Bobbio and Guala 2022; Casaglia 2016).

All that said, in the next paragraph we will remind some theoretical contributions useful to frame our research, starting from general considerations about contemporary protests and collective identity, and then focusing on the use of the Internet by social movements. Then, the following section will be specifically devoted to the description of the remarkable internal variety and the online communication strategies of No Expo Network, in order to answer our research questions:

RQ1: What kind of collective actors were part of No Expo Network?

RQ2: What was the importance of the online communication in the context of the No Expo message? How did No Expo Network, and the groups composing it, use the Web in order to propose their arguments and promote their actions?

RQ3: What form of internal organization No Expo Network developed and how do the different groups interact among them?

Theoretical framework

As previously anticipated, our focus in this article will be especially on the online dimension of No Expo Network; this is the reason why in this brief theoretical framework we will remind some references regarding the role assumed by the Internet for contemporary social movements.

It's quiet shared the assumption that new possibilities of participation supported by technological devices are favouring the convergence of individuals and groups, which, in the past, probably would never have shared common actions and protests (Bennet and Segerberg 2011; Pleyers 2011). These conditions redefine the forms of confrontation based on organization, dialogue and agreement at distance (Kamel 2014), the definition of a common minimum frame (Tremayne 2014), and the dynamics of adhesion to protest, allowing multiple paths and ways of participation (McDonald 2002; Pleyers 2011). In such general framework, several scholars have stressed for a long time the phenomenon of the personalization of protest (Inglehart 1977; McDonald 2002; Micheletti 2003), namely a growing 'tendency to engage with multiple causes by filtering those causes through individual lifestyles' (Bennett and Segerberg 2011, 771): this kind of personalization sometimes jeopardizes the 'collective identity' of social movements, giving space to forms of 'individualized collective actions' (Micheletti and McFarland 2010).

Also for such reasons, studying the political dimension of the Internet nowadays becomes mandatory: however, as della Porta and Mosca (2009, 772) stressed, 'for many years the debate on the political effects of the Internet has been mainly focused on an abstract level, with scarce references to empirical data', leading to underestimated (Bennett 2003) or contradictory (Di Maggio, Hargittai, Russel Neuman and Robinson 2001) results. One of the solutions applied to contrast this situation has been to analyse ties and relations between groups and individuals: 'networks', in fact, are acquiring centrality not only as analytical devices, but also in their empirical nature of 'organization as ideology' (Bennett 2005), privileged places for reflexivity (della Porta and Mosca 2005) and opportunity of new 'digital repertoires of contention' (Earl and Kimport 2011). If the Internet has been treated as an object of study, in other cases it has also been used as a tool of analysis (Mosca 2014), in particular, to study links between different organizations (Caiani, della Porta and Wageman 2012), their ability to mobilize resources (Caiani and Parenti 2013) and to build movement imaginaries (Bennet and Segerberg 2011).

Given this panorama, several authors have highlighted the potential of the Internet, from its ability to create transnational networks (della Porta 2005) to its usefulness in terms of protest instrument (Jordan 2002; Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010), from organizational advantages (Gerbaudo 2012) to its democratic value (Mosca 2007). On the other hand, there is who emphasizes the limited

effectiveness of the Internet itself, which at best could only strengthen existing offline relationships and identities (della Porta and Mosca 2009; Diani 2000), and whose democratic power is not so often developed (Rucht 2004). What it seems irrefutable is that the Internet gave to social movements the possibility to develop new repertoires of collective action (Tilly 1984), offering a great help to the uprising of a new paradigm of contentious politics (McAdam et al. 2001), that Bennett and Segerberg (2012, 2013) labelled as ‘the logic of connective action’. At the same time, it has to be admitted that this great potential of the Internet represents also its main limit: its very nature of ‘weak-tie instrument’ (Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll and Rosson 2005) entails a difficulty to maintain long mobilizations (Diani 2000) and leads to faster decline (Earl and Schussman 2003). In the end, we do not think correct to opt for partisan positions, neither techno-optimistic (Shirky 2008) nor techno-pessimistic (Morozov 2011) to online protest, the first one stressing the creation of a ‘virtual public sphere’ (Langman 2005), the other fearing an augmentation of classical dynamics of exclusion (Cammaerts 2008); we prefer to embrace a more prudent and halfway position (Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010; Gerbaudo 2012) recognizing the importance of the Internet but without assuming a devaluation of human beings.

To conclude with a general remark, we can observe that certainly the emerging and the spreading of the Internet (along with other older and broader processes) implied a growing complexity of society at large and also of social movements more specifically: this does not necessarily constitute an obstacle to the development of collective identities, but instead makes them plural and therefore not superimposed in a single political identity (Monterde, Calleja-López, Aguilera, Barandiaran and Postill 2015). So, already in the past, various attempts to define the growing extension of social movements were proposed, from ‘action sets’ (Aldrich and Whetten 1981), to ‘rainbow coalitions’ (Peterson 1997), from the idea of an ‘archipelago of islands’ (Diani 1988) intended as a wide network of different subjects gathered around a very general issue, to the classic concept of ‘contentious politics’ (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001). In our perception the best framework to understand contemporary movement coalitions is the one proposed by Jasper (2014) that insists on the strategic dimension and the agency of both single individuals and SMOs (social movement organizations), in the more general paradigm that Fligstein and McAdam (2012, 3) defined as that of ‘strategic action fields’, namely ‘a meso-level social order where actors (who can be individual or collective) interact with knowledge of one another under a set of common understandings about the purposes of the field, the relationships in the field (including who has power and why), and the field’s rules’.

Fieldwork analysis

As remembered in the introduction, in this article the analysis is limited to the communication strategies (especially online) of No Expo Network: we mainly did it through an observation of digital media (websites, blogs, social networks

sites) and 8 semi-structured interviews with different kinds of activists. The findings presented in the next pages will be also discussed (especially in the conclusion) referring to other parts of our research, namely a framework analysis on the main files produced by No Expo Network, and the direct participation in public assemblies and demonstrations (Bertuzzi forthcoming).

Mapping the network

As a first aspect, it's correct to specify the nature of No Expo Network (an heterogeneous aggregation of groups) and that of its antagonists (the management trust of Expo2015 and all the investors, private and public, involved in it). In this sense we can primarily recognize a multidimensional asymmetry. On the one hand No Expo Network, composed by a huge number of grass-rooted organizations, most of them without a juridical status and with different purposes: the existence of each organization was strictly connected to the activism of their members; moreover, their goals and strategies were constantly shared and discussed. On the other hand, an aggregation of public institutions (transnational, national and local), corporations, enterprises and only a residual group of NGOs. The asymmetry emerged firstly in relation to the different forms of organization (informal and grass-rooted vs. bureaucratized), secondly to economic resources invested in promoting/contesting the Exposition, thirdly to opportunities for media access. Finally, and in a more general frame, asymmetry could be detected in the contrast between the constructive power of Expo message and the deconstructive purpose of No Expo Network: the first perspective was managed by a massive recourse to marketing communication addressed to an international distracted public, the second one required an articulated set of arguments and a potential mass willing to evaluate them.

Considering this, our first purpose was a descriptive one: to outline a map of the Network and to answer our first research question, namely:

RQ1: What kind of collective actors were part of No Expo Network?

Till first months of 2015 some of them were linked in the homepage of <http://www.noexpo.org>, but in that period the website was renewed and the list disappeared: we asked the reasons to some activists involved in the communication management, and it didn't seem to be the result of a strategic choice but only a consequence of website restyling. Anyway, we reconstructed the list through our notes, journal articles and information collected among activists, focusing on an incremental approach in order to include as much organizations as possible involved in coordination, organization and participation. From the 18 organizations previously listed in the website, we increased the number till 55, most of them without a juridical status; moreover, some of them were specific coalitions (mainly focused on a single No Expo campaign) composed by pre-existing organizations and/or new organizations created to contrast some specific Expo projects (e.g. civic committees against construction of new water channels which converged in No Canal coalition).

So, the first important aspect to be considered is related to the variety of these grass-rooted organizations: we reconstructed this variety from the self-definition of the groups themselves traced on their social network sites (from now on: SNSs), blogs and websites. The real protagonists of No Expo Network were, at least in its more visible phase (year 2015), the most important metropolitan and regional ‘Self-Managed Occupied Social Centres’ (Centri Sociali Occupati Autogestiti, in Italian; from now on: CSOAs); other important actors were the collectives of students (mainly composed by students from the university but also from the high school) and the movements against big infrastructure projects. Different groups and individuals supporting specific No Expo campaigns, other pre-existing campaigns on common goods, and initiatives on housing and the right to the city represented the variety of the Network also. Moreover, some unions were included in the Network as co-organizers of some events, such as the Euro MayDay. All these actors listed in Table 1 were Italian, but a little number of groups and activists from other countries joined the mobilization, participating in some events and collaborating in the critical work of imaginaries’ (de)construction.

Table 1: Internal composition of No Expo Network

Category	Groups
Occupied Social Centres	Piano Terra, Zam, Lambretta, Sos Fornace, Il Cantiere, Torchiera, Casc Lambrate, Macao, Boccaccio, Leoncavallo, Conchetta, Baraonda, Transiti
Students' SMOs	Studenti contro Expo, Unione degli studenti, Collettivo Bicocca, Studenti per l'altra Europa, Movimento Studenti Rho, Collettivo Universitario The Take-CUT, Dillinger, Rete Studenti Milano, Link, CCS Coordinamento Collettivi Studenteschi, Giovani Comunisti, Studenti bergamaschi
Movements against infrastructures	No Canal, No Tav, No Muos, No Mose, No Grandi Navi
No Expo related campaigns	Io non lavoro gratis per Expo, Liberati da Expo, NoExpoPride, We-Women Fuor d'EXPO, Io non studio gratis per Expo
Pre existing campaigns or SMOs	Off Topic, San Precario, Ri-make, La terra trema, Antispefa, Genuino Clandestino, Paci Paciana, Autonomia diffusa, Eat the Rich, Acqua ben commune, Ira-C, Abitare nella crisi, Spazio Mutuo Soccorso, EuroMayDay
Unions	CUB, USB, Slai-Cobas

By means of our semi-structured interviews and our participation in assemblies and events, we then tried to define a centrality level of the various collective subjects involved in the Network. In this very case we use the term ‘centrality’ in a broader meaning, as an indication of the different levels of coordination, organization and participation to the No Expo events.

We identified 15 groups as ‘coordinators’, meaning that they were the main actors of the Network, defining the general strategies and framing the ‘official’ discourses and rhetoric. Then, 13 groups can be labelled as ‘organizers of events’, being involved especially in specific situations and when singular initiatives were developed. Finally, 18 were simple ‘participants’, because they were only involved in the physical participation in collective appointments.

If we consider the single groups belonging to those three different levels, we can summarize saying that the ‘coordinators’ were especially represented by the main local CSOAs, that not only had a greater visibility in the city of Milan and a better ability to mobilize activists but also ‘imposed’ the specific issue of the ‘right to the city’ (Lefebvre 1968) as the central one during the years of mobilization (Casaglia 2016; Bertuzzi forthcoming). In the ‘organizers of events’ (and partly in the ‘participants’), on the contrary, there were numerous collectives of students, namely subjects that, at least in theory, have much time to spend but less networks to rely on; in addition to them we detected various other anti-capitalist Italian movements, especially those based in other parts of the country, and some specific campaigns and various national unions.

Apart this very broad and generic typology, there’s an important point to remark: heterogeneity of organizations and participation’s dynamics during last years implied a discontinuity degree, namely a different weight assumed across time by the collective actors involved in the general mobilization: in particular, the growing central role of CSOAs must be an other time remembered (Casaglia 2016; Bertuzzi forthcoming). For this reason it’s not useful to consider this ‘centrality classification’ as an absolute homogeneous measure along the time; it can rather be considered as a trend indicator of organizations’ leadership attitude in the specific context of No Expo Network.

This last point leads us to consider the various ways of using online protest in the general frame of the No Expo coalition.

Online communication strategy

In this paragraph, we will try to add some interpretative remarks to the report of our findings, starting from our second research question, namely:

RQ2: What was the importance of the online communication in the context of the No Expo message? How did No Expo Network, and the groups composing it, use the Web in order to propose their arguments and promote their actions?

For this purpose we considered some structural aspects of its online communication, in particular those expressed through <http://www.noexpo.org>, and their communicative impact on websites, blogs and SNSs of the main groups belonging to No Expo Network.

The first important aspect is related to the mimetic strategy that characterized the No Expo website: for example, its logo has been designed altering the original Expo logo (see figure 1). Same colours, same lettering, but subverted through the explicit explanation, in the payoff, of the three main effects which, according to opponents’ viewpoint, have been produced by the event: debt, concrete, precariousness (‘debito, cemento, precarietà’, in Italian). In such subvertising practice (Chesters and Welsh 2011) it’s possible to read a sort of brand strategy (Banet-Weiser 2012) in the No Expo Network communication; this aspect has been already noted (della Porta and Piazza 2008) in some of the so called No-coalitions (No Tav, No Mose, but also No Global), in which No

Expo Network could certainly be comprised, and in other recent mobilizations or, broadly speaking, social movements such as Occupy or Anonymous (Beraldo 2017).

Figure 1: No Expo logos and banners



Considering this important premise, we explored if and how it existed a sort of coordination, or at least a coherent connection, between the No Expo website and the websites or blogs of groups and organizations belonging to No Expo Network. The heterogeneity of groups and organizations was reflected also in their web-based communication channels: as reported in Table 2, the most diffused web tools were SNSs, used by almost all of the organizations mapped (42 of 55); then followed websites (19 of 55) and blogs (19 of 55). Of the 55 organizations mapped, 39 had a website and/or a blog and only two had a website, a blog and at least one SNS profile.

Table 2: Online communication channel of No Expo Network

	Level 1 (tot. 15)	Level 2 (tot. 13)	Level 3 (tot. 18)	Campaigns, MayDay (tot. 7)	TOT. (53*)
Web site (WS)	6	4	6	3	19
Blog	5	3	3	3	14
Social networks sites (SNS)	15	11	13	4	42
Only WS+blog	0	0	0	0	0
Only WS+SNS	0	2	4	2	8
Only Blog+SNS	3	3	3	2	11
WS+blog+SNS	2	0	0	0	2
Nothing	0	0	0	1	1

After this first overview, we checked the existence of a permanent link to the No Expo website in the homepage of the 39 organizations which used the website and/or the blog as communication tool: only eight of them had a permanent link to the No Expo website. Among them, only four organizations with a permanent link were strongly involved in the Network, participating to what we identified as the ‘coordination table’: this evidence is relevant if we consider that, according to the classification presented in the previous paragraph, 15 were the organizations participating actively to the coordination table of the Network. We, in fact, assumed that a permanent link is a multiplier of visibility in a comprehensive communication web strategy, an instrument ‘for reciprocal help in attaining public recognition, and for potential means of coordination’ (Burris, Smith and Strahm 2000, 215). We also considered the visibility of the No Expo initiatives in the same websites and blogs: only 20 of the organizations considered gave visibility to some of the initiatives promoted by No Expo Network.

These evidences allow us to introduce some considerations, which can better pinpoint the significance and role of the No Expo Network online communication. A first finding concerns the non-exploitation of the opportunities related to web-based communication: the website (but also the common pages on SNSs) was not the first strategic communication channel if we simply consider its diffusion in relation to SNSs of single groups. The second

evaluation brings us back to the asymmetry previously quoted: although the mimetic strategy of the No Expo website, we can't consider it completely as a tile of a Corporate Communication Strategy. It was, despite all, the result of an agreement and a very different, if not opposite, decision-making process to those identifiable in the organizational structure of Expo enterprise: assembly based vs. pyramidal structure, horizontality in decision making process instead of top-down approach, self-reflexivity as method instead of corporate pragmatism, plurality of subjectivities instead of a unique and coordinated image for marketing purposes, voluntary work of activists instead of a professional full-time contracted team with specific professional skills.

This assumption is also shared by the activists we have interviewed, who appeared on the one hand very conscious of the high level of (technical and political) expertise that characterized the coalition, and on the other hand convinced of the marginal (or at least secondary and ancillary) role that the online communication should have had with respect to the offline actions.

When we created the website, in the group more involved in the organizational team, we were discussing what slogans we could use. Someone proposed “debt, concrete, precariousness”. From that idea we recovered the old No Expo logo with the man of Leonardo and we attached it to the graphics and colours of Expo. In some ways this choice was very instinctive, very little strategically planned if we think to strategy as a result of a rational and “in cold blood” choice...Some other more fine tuned communication tools, such as Expomapp for Android and iOs, are not in the No Expo website but they're more complex examples of mimetic strategy...Communication, especially web communication, at the moment, is extremely amateur; at the beginning we tried to propose and share a policy related to communication strategy, but extreme fluidity of collective self-organized aggregations, and more and more among civic committees, prevents to implement a real common communication policy.

The website, in fact, despite its communicative potentiality, has been perceived as a bidimensional tool, a document container, an information instrument, but it couldn't return the heterogeneity and the social complexity of communicative actions promoted by No Expo Network, whose viral potentiality went well beyond the Web.

I think the best way to understand No Expo Network is not through the website, but focusing attention on main initiatives which impressed rhythm and effective public visibility: the critical mass in Monza (7 July 2013) which arrived just in front of Villa Reale, one of the official representative headquarter of Expo and officially within the perimeter of the red line; moreover we produced the game Expopolis, based on Monopoly game, and we performed it in many squares...each one can download, reproduce and personalize it, according to local struggles against land-grabbing and the context where you want to play. In addition we can consider also some important campaigns like No Canal campaign and student's campaign against voluntary work. All these events were the best communication

actions of the Network and the website can give you only a partial and reductive feedback of communicative activities.

It seems that communication richness outside the No Expo website (in other web-based channels of communication, and especially outside the Web) couldn't be recollected and presented in it, for many different reasons: the first one is strictly related to the long-time decision-making process behind the publication of contents on the website; secondly, the autonomy of each organization was respected and, in some ways, encouraged, because it was a guarantee of the potential viral effect of spontaneous and grass-rooted activities promoted by a multiplicity of subjects which couldn't be constricted in a coordinated communication strategy, such as a corporate one.

Movement networks: variety of issues and the management of media propaganda

Also considering other parts of the research not included in this paper (Bertuzzi 2017; Bertuzzi forthcoming), we finally refer to our third research question (RQ3: What form of internal organization No Expo Network developed and how do the different groups interact among them?) with a special attention to the management of the media (negative) propaganda.

All the research (web based analysis, in depth interviews and participant observation) and militant activities we conducted, gave us the opportunity to evaluate from different perspectives a so complex aggregation of collective actors: the mapping was necessary to understand the shaded boundaries of the Network and some participation dynamics. In the middle of our research we felt useful to reconsider what a social movement is. According to the classical definition of Mario Diani, a social movement is 'a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict' (Diani 1992: 13). Starting from this perspective, we should then speak of No Expo Movement and not of No Expo Network, but there are some important reasons which allow us to introduce a distinction between Network and Movement: the Network is necessary to build up a Movement, but it's not sufficient. Crossing the main findings about the online communication of No Expo Network with the interviews and the participant observation in some important No Expo events, we can say that the most lacking elements preventing us to speak about a No Expo Movement were the absence of a coordination process (in the communication dimension, and in the events' organization and participation) and the consequent impossibility to build a long-term mobilization; moreover, it seemed to lack a real 'collective identity' able to give a sort of continuity along the years of mobilization. The distinction here proposed also found the agreement of some activists interviewed: they distinguished, for example, No Expo Network by No Tav Movement – the second one with a long history and a strong capacity to support

its goals even if built up by different organizations with quite divergent points of view (della Porta and Piazza 2008).

Then, regarding our specific analysis, we also must consider the huge number of issues faced by the organizations belonging to No Expo Network (land grabbing and right to the city, labour exploitation, cultural policies, animal rights, environment protection, education, pinkwashing, greenwashing, and so on). In this sense, and trying to connect the organizational dimension with the communicative aspects, the website was only the lower common denominator: as already specified, much more than on websites, blogs and SNSs, communication was rooted in the actions promoted by groups of (or single) organizations. Therefore, social creativity and viral effect implied only a limited coordination degree (in communication and, more in general, in the action strategies) but, in some circumstances, namely in the collective appointments, this gave back a fragmented image of the Network and ‘legitimated’ the cannibalism of mainstream media (traditional and new ones), allowing them to spread a negative storytelling of the whole coalition (Bertuzzi 2017). In this regard, No Expo Network showed fluctuating trends both among the media sphere and the ‘world outside’: occasionally it was able to emerge getting positive attention from the citizens and the media (or at least from a part of them) like in the No Canal mobilization or with the Exopolis Game, in other moments it seemed to undergo the events that itself organized and which were manipulated and trivialized by the media, as it happened during No Expo MayDay when a small number of quite limited destructive actions (against cars, windows of banks, and shops) were able to catalyse the public discourse on the event, totally obscuring and delegitimizing the No Expo discourses and the participation of thousands of people.

Conclusions

In the previous pages we analysed different aspects regarding internal composition, discursive opportunities and (online) communication strategies of No Expo Network. In what follows we will try to briefly re-consider the results at the light of some more general questions: what are the dangers/problems of this kind of coalitions? Are there any positive/constructive elements of the use of SNSs and online communication that we can learn from this example and that can become a collective toll-kit?

Starting from the end, we remembered the distinction between movements and networks (Diani 1992), stressing how the definition of a ‘collective identity’ is necessary to build a movement coalition. At the same time, an apparent weak point, being a Network and not a Movement, could be also interpreted and strategically played as an opportunity: in fact, creativity and viral potential of the actions proposed by different subjects could be diffused only through weak ties and weak coordination environments. However, this wasn’t actually the case of No Expo Network, which was substantially defeated in its scopes and resulted in a ‘failed mobilization’ (Zamponi 2012): with this definition we mean

here that the No Expo mobilization couldn't resist in its initial efficacy and potential strength. At the same time it's important, as pointed out by Zamponi (2012), to critically analyse also these kinds of mobilization in order to 'break the academic habit of studying only successful protests'.

With specific reference to our case study, the partial failure we are talking about could be symbolically highlighted, for example, by the election of the CEO of Expo2015 S.p.a., Mr. Giuseppe Sala, as new Mayor of Milan in 2016 (Bertuzzi 2017). We are aware that the very purpose of the mobilization was not to stop the Expo or to prevent the election of Sala, but rather to develop awareness on the way in which this kind of events have a flywheel effect with regard to the neoliberal transformation of urban governance. In this regard, along with the partial failure, we must also recognize a parallel partial success in the ability to connect local mobilizations (No Canal and others) under the umbrella of No Expo, in order to underline the more general processes underneath the localized consequences of the event.

Going back to the strategic dimension and to the agency of individuals and SMOs, we saw as the logic of connective action in No Expo Network took a central position. As already said, in absence of a real shared 'collective identity' and facing the difficulty to maintain a strong mobilization along the years, the multivocality, the networked dimension of the coalitions and the 'atomization' of some collective processes, also represented one of the main potentialities of the Network itself: potentialities not always developed and often neutralized by the public dominant discourse that was in favour of the *kermesse* and tried to stigmatize any form of dissent. In this sense, we can propose a generalization saying that those coalitions embracing a logic of connective action needs a very strong collective identity, maybe even more than those still characterized by a logic of collective action. This is visible for example in the apparent weakness of the use of SNSs when not sustained by a common minimum frame: in fact, the only moments that could attract a generalized interest among the public opinion (even if an interest then declined in a negative, stigmatizing way) corresponded to those events that maybe began on the Internet but then had an offline resonance.

It's true that different kinds of mobilization with other characteristics (greater extension, more visibility, some forms of support from international and political allies, and so on) could also mobilize resources and gain visibility only remaining at an online dimension, at least for some period; but it's also true that the great appeal of the online dimension of social movements typical of the Nighties/Noughties is nowadays decreasing, and also those recent mobilizations 'born' on the Web needed to go on the streets to conquer (or try to conquer) their real goals (Gerbaudo 2012; Tufecki 2017). Even more, it's always more evident as it's impossible to abandon the logic of collective action and how the online and the offline dimension should be taken as a whole: the lack of communication strategy we registered in our empirical analysis (visible also in other recent episodes: see for example the Global Debout in France and then in other countries) and the way this lack can affect patterns of integration across

different collective actors, are phenomena that should be at the top agenda of social movement studies (and also of the activists' reflections) in the years to come.

To conclude with a provocation, we would like to emphasize how online protests, and more in general media struggles, require big energies and investments, but this didn't coincide with the medium-long term cultural change pursued by many of the organizations belonging to No Expo Network. So, the struggle between the mega event and the surrounding protest was not the warfare but only a transition point, where new coalitions were experimented, distances and closeness among organizations were tested, and asymmetries in power relations were challenged or reproduced. In such situation, surrender to a media battle can maybe be considered as part of a wider strategy aimed at getting out of the colonized media circle in order to look for other languages, strategies and codes.

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