



Partecipazione e CONflitto
* *The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies*
<http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco>
ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)
ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)
PACO, Issue 9(3) 2016: 949-980
DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v9i3p949

Published in November 15, 2016

Work licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non commercial-Share alike 3.0 Italian License

RESEARCH ARTICLE

TOO BIG, WILL FAIL Megaevents and Protest Participation

Luca Massidda

University of Roma Tre

Stefania Parisi

Sapienza University of Rome

ABSTRACT The paper examines the relationship between “social democratic megaevents” (Olympic Games and World Expos) and political protests. It tries to analyze the reasons that led these popular ceremonies to act in our societies as catalysts of social conflict and activators of an “agonistic citizenship”. Today some structural characteristics of the network society – growth of urban populations; increase in migration flows; widening of socioeconomic disparities – determined a renewed “political” interest for these great public rituals, which in a previous season of the modernity had shown themselves capable to patch up the lacerations of the social fabric. But in recent years something is broken in the relationship between megaevents and urban populations and we are witnessing a growing antagonism against events historically conceived with a function of social “glue”. The aim is therefore to reflect on the meaning of this “antagonistic drift” of “social democratic mega-events” through the analysis of a specific case study: the Attitudine NoExpo Network (Milan 2015). We identified four crucial dimensions to trace the NoExpo movement’s physiognomy and define the reasons for its opposition to the world fair: the historical relation between Milan and a cultural form of antagonism; the crucial role of the territorial factor in the formation and evolution of the movement; the centrality of the practices in the structuring of the movement’s identity; the adoption of an instrumental and tactical approach in the choice and use of media.

KEYWORDS: Expos, Megaevents, NoExpo Network, Protest Practices, Urban Conflict

CORRESPONDING AUTHORS¹: Luca Massidda, email: luca.massidda@uniroma3.it; Stefania Parisi, email: stefania.parisi@uniroma1.it

1. Megaevents and Social Conflict

1.1. *Megaevents as Peacemaker Apparatus*

On 5 May 1851, four days after the opening of the *Great Exhibition*, Queen Victoria, the extraordinary sponsor of the event, recorded in her diary, with pride and astonishment, the outcome of her meeting with Sir G. Grey, at that time Home Secretary of the Empire: “it had been estimated that between 5 and 700,000 people had been assembled in the Park that day! Inside the building there were between 20 and 30,000”, nevertheless “there had not been *one* accident on the 1st of May, nor *one* Police Report” (in Fay, 1951, 51). The first megaevent² (ME) in modern history. And the first mass public. More than half a million people in Hyde Park. More than 20,000 in the Crystal Palace. Not even *one* accident. Not even *one* police report. And yet they were the years when the first metropolitan crowds terrorized the public order keepers and committed social scientists in an alarmed effort to outline their undisciplined profile. London registered more than 2,300,000 inhabitants, almost 500,000 new citizens moved there in the last decade, and the earnings of a lawyer was 40 times higher than the salary of an unskilled worker. *And there has not been even one accident.*

In 1851 the *Great Exhibition* worked as a wonderful social glue and a powerful political tensions anaesthetic, “providing special non-work opportunities which people could use to review the agency (or lack of it) represented by their work, to review the space and time frameworks which structured their lives (...) and to review their sameness and

¹ This paper is the result of a strict collaboration between the authors, which shared the drafting of each section. Luca Massidda wrote paragraphs 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 2.2. Stefania Parisi wrote paragraph 2.1, 2.3, 2.4. The third conclusive paragraph was written in partnership by the two authors.

² In recent years the scientific community has produced a wide, multidisciplinary literature on MEs. It is an almost impossible endeavor aiming to return the depth of this scientific production in the brief space of an academic article. We limit ourselves here to indicate the work of Maurice Roche (1994; 2000; 2003). In our opinion, this represents, from a sociological perspective, the most effective and significant analysis of the ME's concept. For a more recent attempt to systematize and categorize MEs' typologies we refer to the work of Martin Müller (2015). With regards to the Italian context, of particular interest is the work carried out by Chito Guala in his researches on the ME's legacy (2015).

difference from their fellow citizens, from foreigners, and from 'Others', together with their capacity to coexist peacefully" (Roche 2000, 220).

From that initiation, the World Expos main function has been to rebuild, materially and symbolically, the wounds of the social fabric. First, by acting as moments of detent of the social conflicts. Expos "carried explicitly instrumental and ideological 'class appeasement' themes aimed at promoting cooperation between the classes" (Roche 2000, 77). Fostering "the theme of 'social peace' between labour and capital, rather than 'class war'" (Roche 2000, 77), Expos act, in the cultural dimension, as social democratic apparatus³.

This social democratic ability of the MEs to act as peacemakers of the social system through the organization of major collective ceremonies (that although historically organized by the elite, had in the active involvement and participation – possibly excited – of mass publics their fundamental premise) seems to substantially resist till today.

1.2 Megaevents as Protest Platforms

Throughout history, the MEs have repeatedly been a privileged stage for the emergence and representation of the conflict. By their nature, they have always founded a new form of public arena that could offer to the cause of dissent an extraordinary showcase and an opportunity for a spectacular *mise-en-scène* of their protest. World Expos and Olympic Games in fact "provide an organizational structure and culture that facilitate political opportunism" offering "multiple entry points and multiple opportunities for the airing of political issues" (Houlihan and Giulianotti, 2012).

Usually, however, the protest was not addressing the event itself, its logic and contents, but it was rather limited to exploit its exceptional nature so as to justify a cause or hit an opponent who was *elsewhere*. The ME was a spectacular field of battle, but it wasn't the enemy.

The classification proposed by Houlihan and Giulianotti, taking into account just the Olympic Games, shows the substantially instrumental nature of the political antagonism against MEs. In fact, the authors identify two typologies of political conflict in the history of the Olympic events: *state versus state confrontations* and *conflicts between social movements and the state*⁴. The interstate conflict intensifies especially in the

³ For a more detailed analysis of the "social democratic bias" of the first World Fairs we refer to Massidda 2011; 2015.

⁴ "Until recently, utilization of the political opportunities presented by the Olympic Games tended to fall into one of two categories of activity: state versus state, or social movements versus the state. Examples

years of the Cold War. In this case the “national” activity of protest can take two forms: the *boycott* or the *challenge*.

During the Summer Olympic Games in Moscow (1980) and Los Angeles (1984) the two great superpowers mutually stressed their willingness not to take part in the events hosted by the rival nation. But the conflicts between the two contenders that most entered the Olympic imaginary are those that have preferred the *engagement* to the *exodus*. During the Winter Olympics in Lake Placid (1980), the US hockey team defeated in the final round the favourite rival Soviets and let America screaming at *miracle on ice*. Eight years earlier, however, in Munich in 1972, the Russian basketball team subverted the forecast by inflicting to the invincible U.S. team a memorable – and hotly contested – defeat.

Even the expos stages after World War II become the arenas for the claim of superiority – at political, cultural and symbolic level – of their development model: in Brussels (1958), Montreal (1967) and Osaka (1970) USA and USSR transfer their battle for the conquest of space in their pavilions. This time America has the last word, showing during the Japanese event a moonstone brought back by the astronauts of the Apollo 11 mission just eight months earlier. But in the history of World Exhibitions, the most spectacular interstate contest is hosted by Paris in 1937, when at the foot of the Eiffel Tower, the Soviet and Nazi pavilions faced each other in an architectural duel.

However, starting from the second half of the Sixties, both extraordinary and dramatic pages of the political protest that chooses the Olympic arena as theatre of its action are those written by political antagonistic actors. Whether they come from inside the Olympic circus and express pacifically their political dissent (e.g. the black power salute of John Carlos and Tommie Smith) or, more often, moving from the outside against the big event space (the most violent action is represented by the terrorist attack committed by the Palestinian group *Black September* during the Munich Olympic Games in 1970), in both cases, with all the appropriate differences, the intention is to exploit a global stage to gain visibility and legitimize a cause that has not directly to do with the ceremony taking place. Students (Mexico 1968), ethnic minorities (Sydney 2000), religious groups (Beijing 2008), the social movements continue periodically to demonstrate in front of the Olympic parks, but the object of their claim predominantly remains elsewhere: in the despotism of an authoritarian national government, in the

of both categories are still evident, but the peak intensity of the former was from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, whereas political action by social movements is still increasing in frequency” (Houlihan and Giulianotti 2012, 703). In the first category of conflict the Olympics become an arena for interstate politics, in the second one the Olympic event is identified by non-state social movements as the ideal stage to guarantee visibility and impact to their political claim.

non-recognition of a marginalized social group civil rights, in the persecution of a religious community.

1.3 Megaevents as Political Enemy

Or at least until 2010, when the protests of Canadian activists point straight to the heart of Vancouver Winter Olympics (Boykoff 2014). From that moment almost any ME has to face a social movement of protest challenging its own logic. The grand ceremony becomes the enemy. This is the case of the Football World Cup hosted by South Africa in 2010 (Cornelissen 2012), the London Olympic Games 2012 (Graham 2012; Boykoff and Fussey 2014; Fussey 2014), the 2014 Brazil FIFA World Cup (Ivester 2015), the World Expo of Milan 2015 (Off Topic and Maggioni 2013).

It's true that antagonistic social movements against the ME can be also traced in previous years. What is substantially changing, however, is the centrality, intensity and recurrence of these antagonistic practices of opposition to the "social democratic" MEs: from emergent phenomena – especially starting from the early Nineties of the Twentieth Century – they became dominant at the beginning of the new millennium.

It has to be said that between 1999 and 2001, a new era of political activism (inaugurated from the rise of the so-called "anti-globalization movement") lays down the reasons, forms and practices of its renewed antagonism, making network through the radical protests against two *urban* events: the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle (1999) and the G8 summit in Genoa (2001). In these cases, however, to trigger the protest are urban events that historically have a very different nature from that of World Exhibitions and Olympic Games. The former are indeed elite: they evade from the public gaze and wall urban spaces physically interdicted to the masses⁵. The latter have historically built their staging on a social democratic, inclusive ideology, they invite the public to participate, open their spectacular spaces to the masses. The viral load of political antagonism of the ones, should not in any way take into account the spread of the protest movements against the others.

⁵ In the emblematic case of Genoa, the city centre was materially divided into a limited access area – the "yellow zone" – and another one hyper-surveilled and totally inaccessible to non-residents: the "Fortress Genoa" or "red zone". During the season of the "global movements", the names of all the cities in which protest took place (Nice, Prague, Naples, Göteborg, Genoa, etc.) acquired specific and particular meaning and settled both in the collective memory of the activists and in the media narratives as "tags". This kind of "urban label" will last as an invariable characteristic in occasion of summits, countersummits and social fora (Parisi 2004).

So what are the reasons that can help us understand this changed relationship between social democratic MEs and the forms of insurgent politics? Why Expos and Olympic Games, although conserving their ability to enchant the masses, seem to completely lose their genetic “gift” to stop social tensions?

1.4 The New Trigger Factors of the Political Protest

The last massive restructuring operation to which Capital has submitted itself to insure a new season of “successes” – wearing an original *informational* habitus (Castells 1996; Fuchs 2008) – brings the conditions for the proliferation of new forms of political protest (Castells 2009). Especially when the system has to resolve one of its cyclical crisis and it decides to impress a neoliberal turn to its logics⁶. In particular, two characteristics of the current socio-economic order act as “trigger factors” for renewed forms of social antagonism:

- the reconsideration of the relationship between Capital and Labour;
- the growth of wealth and income inequality.

Both this factors find in the ME an amazing stage for size and visibility. The MEs, by virtue of the exceptional nature inscribed in their DNA, are suitable to represent the extraordinary occasions that the social system can use to test new forms of territorial governance. The exceptional time of the Event allows the Capital to demand the provisional suspension of the legislative constraints that normally still attempt to control its action, in order to enable businesses to move with the speed and freedom that the organization of a ME requires. In this sense, ME behaves, for the Capital interests, as a great multiplier of that strategic resource for the neoliberal accumulation which is deregulation. Even Labour relations can't get out of this deregulation process. ME exceptional time allows Capital to request a further contraction of workers rights.

Similarly, by its nature, the ME offers a further acceleration to the logic of flexibility: while the time of employment contract that a ME can provide is *fixed-term* by definition, the time of the daily work performance is instead *open-ended* by necessity (having to meet the hectic schedules in the ME's setting up puts on hold every normal consideration about the legitimate duration of a working day). The bigger is the event, the more flexible has to be the work to ensure its success.

⁶ We fully agree with the invitation of Donatella della Porta to *bring back capitalism into protest* analysis: in order to understand the main characteristics of the anti-MEs movements, “in terms of social basis, identity and organizational structures and strategies, we should look at the specific characteristics of the socio-economic, cultural and political context in which these protests developed” (della Porta 2015, 3).

But what the work for MEs loses in guarantees, not necessarily is recovered in the payroll. Rather, historically, an exceptional availability of a large proportion of unpaid work contributes significantly to the success of a ME: during the great ceremony, thousands of young people accept to participate, as volunteers, in the organization of the extraordinary enterprise. It is certainly not a newness for the MEs (they indeed always considered the number of volunteers involved as one of the historical criteria for assessment of their success), but if in a system which guaranteed employment and protected work, the volunteering for MEs was perceived as a free and exceptional choice of the worker, today the same phenomenon is immediately perceived as the most advanced and shameless form of exploitation⁷.

The current restructuring of the Capital-Labour relations finds therefore in the MEs containers the ideal laboratory in which testing, in extreme conditions, the degree of resilience of its new unbalanced “contract”. But at the same time these hyper-spaces of transnational informational capitalism (Fuchs 2008) make the contradictions of the renewed development model extraordinarily visible. And therefore habitable. Normally in fact “capital and labour increasingly tend to exist in different spaces and times: the space of flows and the space of places, instant time of computerized networks versus clock time of everyday life. Thus, they live by each other, but do not relate to each other” (Castells 1996, 506). In the MEs theme parks, this “governance of the distance” between elites and masses is exceptionally suspended. Nothing new. Rather, the full social democratic meaning of the popular carnivals (Bachtin 1968) resided exactly in this ability to momentarily stop the distinctions of status, role, wealth and ease the tensions experienced in the normal time of everyday life and work. Why today this exceptional cohabitation, instead of generating social harmony, seems to produce social conflict? If the level of inequality in the Twenty-First Century society has reached dimensions similar to those of the social system born after the industrial revolution (Piketty 2014) why the usual cultural solution for containing tensions no longer seems to run? Which crucial changes in the social system contributed to compromise the historical capacity of the ME to act as collective rituals of social peace?

⁷ Emanuele Leonardi and Michelangelo Secchi have recently depicted Expo 2015 as an extraordinary “laboratory for neoliberalization”, an exceptional space and time in which capital, virtually undisturbed, may test new forms of territorial governance and experiment a new regime of labour relations (Leonardi and Secchi 2016). As we will see in the next paragraphs, this interpretation represents a main topic of almost all the interviews realized with the activists.

1.4.1 *The Political Frame*

We are witnessing a radical change in the political context. The deep crisis of the modern political system – in its macro-dimension (the nation state is no longer the main agent of global politics, it is no more able to solve problems emerging in the local territorialities and it is forced to withdraw from all areas of social life) and micro-dimension (there is a widespread and pervasive crisis of trust in the system of political representation and in its historical institutions: parties and trade unions) – produces at the same time a violent contraction/devaluation in the space of “the politics” and a parallel process of expansion/revaluation into the territory of “the political” (Mouffe 2000; 2005)⁸. The social conflict no longer finds legitimate forms of delegation in the *politics* field, in its institutions and its professionalism (della Porta 2015, 24), while recognizes many opportunities of representation in the *political* area. In the antagonistic dimension of the political, conflict “can take many forms and can emerge in diverse social relations” (Mouffe 2005, 2), but it runs the risk of suffering a “representational” deficit. While the conflicting situation in the arenas of politics has indeed a high-definition (the “adversaries”, the “cause”, the “battlefield”, the “rules of engagement”, the “stakes”: all aspects of the conflict are clearly “represented” and “representable”), in the political field the definition is very low, to the point that not only the antagonist profile, but even the physiognomy of the conflicting subjectivity risk to be unrecognizable.

Therefore, it becomes necessary to give shape and substance to an opponent whose features differ from any traditional political representation and find new contents and new logics around which aggregate the identity of the social movements. These “absences” generate a strengthening of the agonistic practices around that concentrations of interests and imaginary which are the MEs: on their stages, an adversary who normally avoids any representation, moving frantically through the flows of the global economy, jumping from one node to another of the Network and infiltrating in the interstices of everyday life, manifests itself with conspicuous shamelessness. At the same time those social movements that don’t want to hear about ideology, leadership and

⁸ “By ‘the political’, I refer to the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in all human society, antagonism that can take many different forms and can emerge in diverse social relations. ‘Politics’, on the other hand, refers to the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflicting because they are affected by the dimension of ‘the political’” (Mouffe 2000, 101). According to Carpentier, we can summarize this dichotomy as a “distinction between the narrow-political system (‘politics’) and the broad-political dimensions of the social (the ‘political’)” (2011, 3-4).

structure, find in the *off the chart* ME's performance, the ideal symbolic material for building – and sharing – a recognizable collective identity.

1.4.2 *The Space of the Protest*

As a consequence of socio-economic transformation, even the social conflict changes its characteristics and the context in which it shows itself. After the “short” suburban season of postmodernity, the informational revolution again upsets the spatial morphology of capitalist society. And its conflicts. “Globalization, the rise of the new information technologies, the intensifying of transnational and translocal dynamics” (Sassen 2007, 250): these three tendencies, structurally atopic, paradoxically replace the city at the centre of the world system, “demystifying the notion of placelessness of innovation in the Information Age” (Castells 1996, 67). This *spatial turn* gives the conflict an opportunity to reposition itself in a field, the urban space, which historically most suited to it than the horizontal flatness of the suburban sprawl. Out from the traditional Factory, it emerges into the Metropolis – the space in which today culture, communication and innovation are put at the service of production. Big events served as peace festivals until they have been able to lead the masses out of their elective conflicting space: the *workplace*. As long as the Factory has been *the* place of social conflict, in MEs, like World's Expo and Olympic Games, the trick of distracting the public with the shared show of its staging has worked out.

But what happens when the city stands out as the new site of the conflict (Negri 2008)? When the new productive paradigm, abandoned the rigid compartmentalization of the industrial model, calls into question any possible distinction between the space of Labour and the space of everyday life, between the work-time and the leisure-time (Berardi 2004; 2009; Lazzarato 1997; 2013)? Capitalist contemporary mode of production, based on knowledge and human skills, generates critical subjectivities that find into the metropolis the right place for organizing themselves and their protest. Housing, mobility, income: social protest is urban protest. *The Right to the City* (Lefebvre 1968) is the main claim and MEs are the ideal platforms.

1.4.3 *The Nature of the Publics and the Physiognomy of the Activists*

The changes which affected the social *structure* are not enough to explain the mutated nature of MEs, from social peacemakers to conflict catalysts. Or better, they need to be correlated with mutations that affected the forms of *agency*. In particular, there are two social actors to be observed: the public of MEs and the political activists. Let's start with the first one. Which is the main difference between the audiences addressed by the great ceremonies of the industrial modernity and the ones called to par-

ticipate in the big cultural happenings of the XXI century? It's a matter of social roles. Henry Meyhew, a Victorian journalist and social researcher, in his comic novel *1851: Or, The Adventures of Mr and Mrs Sandboys and Family Who Came up to London to "Enjoy Themselves" and to See the Great Exhibition*, describes in these words the popular crowd waiting in Hyde Park, in front of the Crystal Palace, for the passage of Queen Victoria and her royal procession: "For miles round all wore a holiday aspect; the work-people with clean and smiling faces, and decked out in all the bright colours of their Sunday attire, were up and about shortly after daybreak, and, with their bundle of provisions on their arms, were soon seen streaming along the road, like so many living rays, converging towards the Crystal focus of the World" (Mayhew 1851, 128). The "Sunday dress" replaces the working uniform: the Great Exhibition enchants its audience in the other-space of the Feast, it changes the "tyranny of the clock" which beats the hectic rhythm of the working on the assembly line with the "alien, untouchable, out of the ordinary" time of the adventure (Simmel 1997, 223). The audience attending the Great Exhibition of the "golden age" was made up of workers who came from the Factory to see the product of their work in the spotlight of the emerging entertainment industry (Pellegrino 2011). The time of production and the time of "consumption" were separated: while attending Great Exhibition, they were not blue-collar workers, but spectators (Abruzzese 1973). Their claim for wage and rights were directed to the Factory – the place where they saw themselves as workers. The costume change therefore represented a change of role. This adventurous charm that in the industrial modernity was able to confuse the main identity of its potential antagonist it is more difficult for contemporary MEs.

Contemporary publics are asked to produce the event itself: by working at the event as volunteers, but also by posting news, pictures and comments about it on social network sites, making it *relevant* for collective imaginary and public opinion. They are producers while consuming. These new conflicting subjectivities are often knowledge workers, creative, precarious, cognitive workers. They are employed (or not) in creative industry, they live in metropolitan areas, they organize themselves in network-movements which focus their attention on specific request or topic. A ME like the Expo, that happens in their place of *work* (the metropolis), is interpreted as an occasion for highlighting their role into a capitalistic knowledge economy and into the "event economy" of a global city (Lazzarato 2004). They well know the mechanism of creating a show, so they are not enchanted by an Expo. MEs are no more able to produce wonder in their potential antagonists: the hocus-pocus of distraction still worked for "workers", but it is not the case, today, with performative audiences.

How can MEs now distract their potential antagonist? Which exceptional suite can offer to the “furious” *fifth estate* (Allegri and Ciccarelli 2011) of the cognitive precariat? With which alternative role can distance it from the reasons of its daily discontent?

2. The Attitudine NoExpo Case Study

The “Attitudine NoExpo” Network depicts, in our perspective, an interesting and topical case study. In fact, it has offered us both the opportunity to observe live the logics followed by an urban-based social movement which addresses its political antagonism directly against a ME, finding in its gigantic manifestation the ideal opportunity for locating protest directly “inside the linkages between the market and the state, capitalism and democracy” (della Porta 2015, 3), and the occasion to verify the persistence of the qualities and vocations of the post-industrial protest movements.

In this way the analysis of the NoExpo Network should help us to answer our two main research questions:

- What are the reasons which can explain the mutated nature of the social democratic MEs, their overturning from a conciliatory to a conflicting pattern?
- What form it takes, what logic follows, and how acts a protest movement that aggregates its antagonism around the exceptional occurrence, in time and space, of a metropolitan ME?

In particular, we have identified four crucial dimensions to trace the NoExpo movement’s physiognomy and define the reasons for its opposition to the world fair:

- the historical relation between Milan and a cultural form of antagonism (par. 2.1)
- the substantial role of the territorial factor in the formation and evolution of the movement (par. 2.2);
- the centrality of the practices in the structuring of the movement’s identity and in the definition of its political action (par. 2.3);
- the adoption of an instrumental and tactical approach in the choice and use of media (par. 2.4).

We explore these four dimensions in the following paragraphs, reporting the first outcomes of our qualitative analysis of the NoExpo Network.

After a preparatory study of the main texts produced by the Network itself, lasted from March to April 2015, we conducted, between May and June 2015 – the first two months of the Universal Exposition hosted by Milan – nine in-depth interviews with ac-

tivists of four collective particularly representative of the Network: Genuino Clandestino, Macao, Off Topic, Centro sociale SOS Fornace⁹.

The following section illustrates and argues the main ideas emerged from the research.

2.1 The Cultural Factor. A Look into the Recent Past of the Movements

The city of Milan represents an interesting observatory of political antagonism's dynamics: its quality of "city-lab" (frequently recalled in the reflection of our interviewees), at the vanguard of the productive transformations that have gone through the Italian economic and social history, produced over time an urban political and social scene rather lively. This fervour becomes especially evident if we focus on the sphere of so-called "new social movements" (Touraine 1977; Tarrow 1989), the conceptual framework which has analyzed the evolution of participation and political antagonism in the years following the decline of the traditional workers' movement and its organizations (parties and trade unions).

The goal of reconstructing the genesis of the "other Milan" and the roots of the antagonistic processes that our work aimed to observe, found a first important suggestion in the classical study on the urban movement areas coordinated by Alberto Melucci (1984). Here we found important links to our research path: the relevance of cultural production experienced in the new forms of participation, the centrality of this sphere, not immediately "political", and the attention paid to the spaces that host these cultural activities (see the case of Leoncavallo) in the definition of antagonistic subjectivity. The long wave of the transformations observed in that seminal study appears useful for a reading of the NoExpo protest, especially if we associate it to the reflections of the same Melucci about "identities in flux". Two main characteristics of new social movement identities are particularly useful to trace the physiognomy of *our* network: they are defined and recomposed starting from lifestyle and cultural consumption; they seek and affirm "challenging codes" (Melucci 1996) within the framework of an increasingly blurred participation that involved both personal and political dimension. Despite a radically changed historical and economic framework, these nomadic and "under construction" identities (Melucci 1989) still produce collective aggregations in which have place values such as self-realization, creativity, communication skills, personal autonomy, flexibility of belongings.

⁹ We will refer to each interviewed activist by using the initial of his/her name. Genuino Clandestino's activists use instead a collective name: "Andrea Zappa".

All these qualities of the “new antagonistic subjectivity”, emerged during the so-called “reflux” of the Eighties, displayed themselves again in the new protest cycle (Tarrow 1994), started in the late Nineties and early XXI Century with the “global movements” (Ceri 2001; della Porta 2003, 2004) and, in the years immediately following, during the anti-war mobilizations (della Porta and Diani 2004). These innovative characteristics of the activism influenced forms, relations and internal democracy of the movements themselves (Ceri 2003); we find them, duly updated, in the “urban” form of the protest against Expo2015.

Melucci's reflections (1989, 1996) on the mixing of individual and collective demands in the new social movements represent another well suited element to the analysis of the NoExpo Network. It is in fact characterized by flexible relationships between activists, by the existence of an informal communication network between collectives and groups, and finally by the cohabitation of multiple memberships. This continuity is inscribed in the same biographies of the activists: in the life experiences of our interviewees re-emerges the same mix of professionalism (operating in the fields of culture, art, and communication) “discovered” by Melucci, in the Milan movement areas, over thirty years ago. This cultural and professional cluster is still useful to understand the internal composition and mode of action of a movement that identifies its opponent in the Expo, considering the ME as the highest expression of an urban “event economy” that, from the *Fuorisalone* to the *Fashion Week*, transforms the city in a productive stage.

2.2 The Territorial Factor: Birth and Evolution of the Network

The NoExpo Network has a deep spatial root. It is the belonging to a given territory, physically involved in its every day life by the cumbersome presence of the exhibition park – the Rho area – to trigger the first forms of opposition to the Milan ME. In the weeks immediately following the presentation of Milan candidacy as host city for Expo2015 – July 2007 – “a series of urban realities of the Milan northwest hinterland” (L., Off Topic) begin to question the opportunity of the ME, the impact that this will have on the surrounding areas, and it gives birth to the NoExpo committee. The first subjects part of the committee are SOS Fornace and some individuality politically engaged in the area. SOS Fornace is an occupied space established in Rho since 2005¹⁰. Leading this first phase of protest against the Expo ME is thus a collective actor of the social an-

¹⁰ <http://www.sosfornace.org/chi-siamo> (accessed September 30, 2016).

tagonism, deeply rooted in its territory, that builds its political action within the urban fabric that “hosts” its occupation.

The group has built a relevant part of its antagonist politics pursuing a radical challenge against the construction of Rho Fiera, and the conversion of the former industrial refinery establishments into the Europe’s largest fair park, “an event that marked the history of this area” (S., SOS Fornace). The members of SOS Fornace immediately grasp the project Expo2015 in perfect continuity with the ongoing process of tertiarization: an advanced service economy is replacing the traditional industrial mode of production of the Rho Area, dismantling its physical structures and compromising its social fabric. Expo2015 is therefore immediately perceived as the newest and most spectacular chapter of a political strategy that produces financial speculation, determines the devaluation of the surrounding area and doesn’t generate positive spillover for local people. While it’s seeking to strengthen the Milan connection to the global cities network, attracting new flows of money, goods and tourism, the new fair site disconnected significant portions of the local areas by the rhythms and interests of the great metropolis: “they built the station of Rho Fiera, and so the Rho Centro Station started to lose centrality and relevance” (G., SOS Fornace).

Global connection, local disconnection (Castells 1996), with the investment in the Fiera site, Milan renews its vocation as events city and at the same time produces on the territory “a new geography of centrality and marginality” (Sassen 2007, 111). While the fair connects Milan to the global cities network, the suburban centre of Rho seems to fall into a marginalized *black hole*. The fact that the border of its “structural irrelevance” (Borja and Castells 1997) is only a few meters away from the spotlight of the big fair events, only makes the wound more *exposed*.

The territorial dimension confirms its central role in the history of the movement during the reorganization (or better the *relaunch*) of the protest, moving from the traditional and closed form of the committee to the open and flexible logic of the network. The need is to distance itself from the risk of a militant localism, to “exit from a NIMBY logic” (L., Off Topic). Without this connective tension, the movement risks to be trapped in its local roots.

But how to build the network? How to convince political subjectivities that haven’t to live physically side by side with the Expo to *engage* themselves in the NoExpo protest? Again, paradoxically, the territorial dimension confirms its central role. It is the activation of a sort of *territorial connectivity* to guide the construction of links between the different collective actors that are aggregating around the NoExpo Network. First of all including in the movement “pieces of city” (L., Off Topic) that in a first phase had perhaps looked with a little detachment to what was happening in the distant outskirts

of Rho (G., SOS Fornace); then creating ties that go beyond Milan and its immediate hinterland, building a network of relationships with all “those territorial struggles and resistances that in our country were creating themselves on analogous dynamics, on models of territorial governance” (L., Off Topic) similar to those involved by the great exhibition event. To act as glue between different local struggles and resistances is therefore the recognition of a similar model of territorial governance. In this “two-steps” expansive process – first the city and then the rest of the country – the NoExpo Network includes new actors of insurgent politics (Castells 2009), like Macao and Gen-uino Clandestino, and forms alliances with other territorial protest movements. In 2010 it was then held in Rho the NoExpo Festival, “the first national meeting of urban struggles and territorial resistances” (L., Off Topic).

Even the accrued success that the Network can claim in these years of protest demonstrates the centrality of the territorial dimension in the history of the movement. In 2013, with the No Canal campaign, the movement starts “really to attack the Expo machinery” (L., Off Topic), finally succeeding to stop one of the most advertised projects envisaged by the original master plan for Expo 2015: *the waterways*. This is one of the few cases where a popular struggle against the construction of a great work has been successful. The decisive factor has been the adoption of a complex strategy aimed to root the protest in the places and in the consciences of people that live in the territory involved by the huge infrastructural work. After a long phase focused to extensively analyze the project, it is the deep rooting in the territory and the widespread involvement of local people to make the difference. The construction of this popular-territorial tie (“a micro Val Susa”) allowed the creation of “a new imaginary” on the protest movement (L., Off Topic) and encouraged the inhabitants to line up with militant activism, in defence of places – the parks of Trenno, Pertini and Cave – that had “an history of popular conquests” behind them, a daily care work by the local people (L., Off Topic) who transformed these spaces in a “collective heritage asset” (Harvey 2012, 97).

According to our point of view, the territory has been, at the same time, the original “node” and the “link” of the NoExpo Network. In the Network Society locality seems to have changed the morphology of its social capital, that is no more only a bonding factor, but also – and above all – a bridging device (Putnam 2000). In the dimension of political protest the link with the territory is no longer limited to act as the “heavy” element for the rooting and intensification of local struggle, but it also operates as the main “light” relational source for the extension and sharing of the antagonist practice. If localism discovered its ability to exercise a “networking making power” (Castells, 2009) as an alternative to the mainstream one, then it is not surprising that exactly as

happens for the global elites, it also addresses the extraordinary concentrations of relations (political, economic and cultural) represented by the MEs (Roche 2003, 116) so as to increase its connective resources.

The “territorial connectivity” is also the element for the inclusion into the NoExpo Network of those collective actors that, unlike SOS Fornace and Off Topic, have, historically and materially, a more detached relationship with the physical space and daily life of Expo2015: Macao and Genuino Clandestino.

Macao experience “doesn’t start from the Expo” (D., Macao) and it doesn’t have a totalizing relationship with the ME. The political and cultural activism of the Milan collective follows in fact a parallel and independent path. But the 2015 event in Milan enters the Macao antagonist agenda for its ascendancy to the city as the most visible “localization” of that event economy that since many years characterize the economic and cultural life of Milan¹¹.

If for Macao joining the NoExpo Network means to have an opportunity to fight against the most intrusive manifestation of a pervasive economic logic, for Genuino Clandestino moving against Expo means to contrast the ME “non-place” that celebrates the food globalization, the values and practices of an everyday, material, “a zero km” relationship with the territory¹².

2.3 An Event Economy, an Eventful Protest

This strong spatial bias of the movement is also reflected in its practices. Somehow all the actions implemented by the Network can be interpreted as material and/or symbolic forms of territorial re-appropriation. In the NoExpo practices the territory is a right to reclaim and a space to conquer: in a traditional way, through its physical occupation; in a convivial way, imagining new relational and community forms of living; in a ludic way, creatively subverting its identity and narrative; in an intellectual way, redefining scientifically its logics.

Analyzing the different practices which marked the development of the protest constitutes a fundamental step to understand the logic of the movement against Expo 2015. For a network of collectives and activists that joins and acts against the excep-

¹¹ The seminar organized by Macao in Milan on the 12 and 13 April 2014, entitled “Making public. Forms of representation and new maps of the city-exhibition”, is representative of the attention that this independent center for art, culture and research has dedicated to the analysis and unmasking of an event economy logic.

¹² <http://genuinoclandestino.it/il-manifesto> (accessed September 30, 2016).

tional occurrence, in time and space, of an urban ME, practices are not merely manifestations of an antagonistic political action. Indeed, they also play a key role in structuring the identity of the movement. They not only represent an objectification of an antagonistic political ideology, but also provide elements to build collective identity and relational components for the structuring of the antagonistic subjectivity. For this reason, in our analysis of the NoExpo's practices we resort to the concept of *eventful protest* developed by Donatella della Porta: "My assumption is that many protests have cognitive, affective and relational impacts on the very movements that carry them out. Especially some forms of action or specific campaigns tend to have a particularly high degree of 'eventfulness'. Through these events, new tactics are experimented with, signals about the possibility of collective action are sent (...), solidarity feelings are created, organizational networks consolidate, sometimes public outrage at repression develops" (2008, 30).

The reflection of della Porta about the effects of the practices on the activists helps us to understand the production of new subjectivities in the NoExpo Network. It appears in fact as a space within which the *events* (actions, meetings, campaigns, performances), collectively built and lived, change the subjectivities of the protest. Moreover, as it was the case of the so-called "anti-globalization" movement, even the "Attitudine NoExpo" network, established in 2007 as an aggregation of "committees, associations, *centri sociali*, activists of the grassroots unions, radical left militants"¹³, brings together organizations and individuals with stories and memberships already structured, which are redefined starting from shared practices.

This collective subjectivity tries to rebuild itself and its political consciousness through models of association far from space and time of traditional work, based on variable-geometry coalitions and mutual support. In this perspective, the practices of a flexible "network movement", which provides identity and multiple affiliations, work as *events* in which political subjectivities are produced on the basis of relationships between activists and between groups of activists.

We take cues from this suggestion to distinguish four types of protest practices which have tried to "strike" Expo from multiple viewpoints and, at the same time, have helped to redefine, with their cognitive, affective and relational impacts, the NoExpo's identity: *knowledge-oriented practices*; *convivial practices*; *ludic practices*; *traditional practices*.

¹³ <http://www.noexpo.org/chi-siamo> (accessed September 30, 2016).

2.3.1 Knowledge-oriented practices

With this label, we refer to the creation of dossiers and reports, production and publication of texts and studies, the organization of seminars and workshops. These practices produce data, provide assessments, calculate costs, appreciate the impacts of the Event. They result in some respects from the counter-information of the Twentieth Century, the goal of which was to reveal the falsification of the system by rebuilding “true facts”. In the present context, they are firstly used as tools to sabotage the “consensus machine” (L., Off Topic) built around the Expo, to gain the trust of the audiences and obtain authority and reliability in the debate with media and institutions, and to contrast the power of definition of Expo’s typically modern “expert systems”. The activists need to build alternative expert knowledge, allowing the NoExpo Network to challenge the consensus machine on its own ground: “we had to be credible when we were talking, when we were contesting public events” (L., Off Topic).

Knowledge-oriented practices play a crucial role in the history of the movement: understanding the meaning of the ME, its correlations with the economical and political global context and its long-time effects on the hosting city (and its inhabitants), is recognized as a primary necessity by the NoExpo activists we interviewed. Facing the economic model of the Expo event needs in fact *tools to understand* and reveal the nature of this urban/global economy. The building of this expert knowledge constitutes the first step to organize response actions and resistance against the ME: “You must be able to understand how it works and how to ‘strike it’ [...] effectively” or “if you can not make this leap, eventually you lose” (D., Macao).

Moreover, this scientific expertise is not only a crucial factor in the strategic definition of a political action able to *strike* the complex apparatus of the ME, but it represents also an important resource in the ongoing process of identity-building of the Network. Through its research and dissemination activities the NoExpo Network acquires social capital (necessary for the consolidation – inside and outside – of its collective identity) and increases its relational capital (essential for the strengthening and broadening of its political ties).

Off Topic is the main actor in this category of practices¹⁴ which includes cultural productions such as the dossier *Exit Expo 2015*; the book *Expopolis*, edited by Off Topic and Roberto Maggioni; the *No Canal* report; the realization of the *NoExpo Weekly Bulletin*, which follows the path of the dispute from the designation of Milan as “city of the Expo” until the opening of the Event and the following *Cronache dal Decumano*,

¹⁴ This “intellectual” leadership is also the key factor for understanding the central role played by Off Topic into the NoExpo Network. Its research activity represents in fact a strong tie for the Network, it constitutes its main legacy and perhaps it’s also open the way for the relaunch of the protest in the post-event period.

published since May 2015; the seminars *Expowhat* and *Making public. Forms of representation and new maps of the city-exposure*.

2.3.2 Convivial practices

Under this definition we group some collective actions that have a direct link to the official theme of Expo 2015: the nourishment, used however in a critical way, with an eye to production, consumption and consumers' lifestyle. Convivial practices have two main functions, one outside-oriented and one inside-oriented. In the first case the NoExpo Network resorts to this typology of action to build an alternative imaginary on the Expo main theme – *Feeding the Planet. Energy for life* – opposing to the global singularity of the Milan event the normal everyday life. NoExpo activists organize popular lunches, antagonistic *happy-hours* and urban open-air market to contrast the spectacular gastronomy show staged on the Expo's Park. In the second case, convivial rituals – e.g. the NoExpo Camping of 1st May – serve to strengthen the social ties between the different network nodes and to activate informal occasion of self-representation. Convivial practices, staging arenas aimed to “produce relations, by facilitating communication as well as affective ties” (della Porta 2008, 31), represent a strategic resource of collective mobilization for those social movements, like the NoExpo Network, which try to aggregate different, heterogeneous actors in complex webs of interactions¹⁵. In addition to this relational bias of the convivial practices there is another reason for understanding their centrality in the history of the NoExpo Network: they show an immediate high fitness with political protests which main orientation is the construction of the common (della Porta 2015, 167). Inside the NoExpo Network the most “convivial” actor is Genuino Clandestino with its “biological” aptitude to the Common goods.

The most emblematic reference in this group of practices is the organization of a social lunch by Genuino Clandestino: “on May 2nd we organized a popular lunch offered to all; everyone could bring something to eat, there were a lot of farmers, they brought their products, we cooked in the streets, and we did it *in front of Eataly*. [...] occupying a terrain, producing grain, baking bread and take it to the streets are much more revolutionary actions. It is something that remains, because it is a path, a process that involves many people and become virtuous” (Andrea Zappa, Genuino Clandestino).

Again, the intention to communicate and establish a dialogue with citizens is explicit, as well as explicit appears the intent to promote a “cultural cultivation” promoted by the activists, together with the aim of creating an opposition between sharing food and shopping it in a luxury market. The goal is to demolish the representation of food as a

¹⁵ It is no coincidence that the most original form in the Anti-Austerity Movement – the camp (della Porta 2015, 21) - is a convivial one.

business and bring the focus on patterns of production and distribution more virtuous and sustainable for the environment and the workers.

2.3.3 *Ludic Practices*

These practices are characterized by the centrality accorded to forms of cultural communication and entertainment. They try to dump the ME logics and its narrations resorting to artistic and performative languages. In these cases, activists resort their knowledge and experiences as photographers, film makers, actors, musicians and so on. This category includes some event-practices, particularly significant for the construction of an alternative imaginary about Expo. Ludic practices allow NoExpo's activists to experiment new tactics of cultural sabotage against the ME. This typology of action started to be an eventful practice yet during the years of the New Social Movements, when a new middle class of socio-cultural professions led the protests against the post-Fordism paradigm. When, for the first time, the protest arose in the sphere of cultural reproduction and daily life (Touraine 1981, Habermas 1987, Melucci 1989), the city became a right to claim and the "ludic" a revolutionary political purpose (Lefebvre 1968). It is no coincidence that the most creative actor in the "ludic field" is Macao, an art&culture oriented collective who would feel right at home in the streets and with the slogans of the *France May*.

Among these practices, we remember the performance staged by the NoExpo Network at the former Teatro Smeraldo, which now houses the exclusive hypermarket "Eataly". The action apes the chorus of agreement to the Eataly patron, Mr. Oscar Farinetti, winner without competition of a contract for the management of twenty restaurants within the Expo site, and accused of applying unfair labour policies in his company. The effect of displacement over the public ("it seemed like a flash mob organized by Eataly itself" – L., Macao), represented by the customers-consumers group and ideally by all the citizens of Milan, is much more effective than other interruptions of the market business set up by traditional boycott. Despite being a "radical action in the effects" (D., Macao), from a *tactical* point of view, it resulted able to elude, at least temporarily, control devices and supervision: "realistically, if we had organized a cordon of protesters, five minutes later we would have been thrown out" (L., Macao).

In this category we can also include the photographic campaign "Exponiti2015" (an ironic "vision experience" which aims to show the broken promises of the Expo: works and projects announced and never achieved, only visible through special glasses), the "Olimpiadi No Canal" (a photo gallery that suggests an alternative and creative use of equipment and building materials of the *waterways*), and the counter-inauguration

that took place at the gates of the Expo on the morning of May 1, beating the official opening of the event to the draw. These practices generate disorientation, curiosity, attention and, ideally, engagement in their publics.

2.3.4 Traditional Practices

We refer here to a set of traditional practices historically attributed to the experience of protest movements of the past seasons: pickets, parades, assemblies, flyering. These traditional practices work as aggregative moments for the different social actors that belong to the NoExpo Network, both when they are aimed to the outside, capturing the attention of mass media, public opinion, and not-yet-engaged audience (e.g. MayDay Parade), and when they operate as instruments for the inside building of the Network political strategy (e.g. weekly plenary meetings). These practices often intersect other modes of political action considered so far. In fact, the actions or performances are in many cases discussed through collective assemblies open to the whole Network. They are also used as stand-alone modes of protest, and not purely preparatory events, by some subjectivity more related to the territorial dimension and the space of the place where it stands the Expo, like the Centro sociale SOS Fornace.

Just this collective, suggests us a reflection useful to consider the articulation of the protest practices in a way as dynamic as possible: “practices exist not only in the world of ideas: they are tools that everyone can decide to choose according to the objective to be achieved” (S., SOS Fornace). Consequently, facing an opponent like Expo the narrative of which has effects on several levels, the same protest practices must be constantly rethought and adapted to the context.

It is in this sense that we must interpret the decision to implement the above-mentioned playful performance on the morning of May 1, when activists staged a “counter-inauguration” of Expo 2015 at the still empty gates of the Fair: “we believe that was the right thing to do for beating the inauguration of the big event to the draw, the way to go and stay *just there* and not only in the centre of the city” (S., SOS Fornace). An attractive action like that, in addition to “throw a spanner in the works of Expo with a theatrical performance, it was also something that could entice people to participate in the parade in the afternoon” (S., SOS Fornace).

Thus ends, ideally, the circular reference between old and new practices of protest, suggesting an overall availability of the movement to the tactics as well as the long-term strategy. It is a legacy of political and communicative activism of recent seasons movements (e.g. the so-called “anti-globalization” movement) overall clear, and a confirmation of the ability of the movement to build collectively that character of “event-

fulness” (della Porta 2008, 31) capable of creating a sense of community among the participants.

2.3.5 The NoExpo MayDay: an “eventless” protest?

In our brief analysis of the practices acted by the NoExpo Network, as we have seen, we never made reference to the event of May 1, 2015. We decided to leave in the background the clashes of May 1, not only because, understandably, they have not been re-enacted in the stories of our interviewees, but mainly because they, for the interpretive perspective that we have adopted, do not serve in any way to answer our two main research questions.

Adopting the perspective of the eventful protest to classify and interpret the antagonistic practices of the movement legitimizes, in our opinion, this position. What happened at the MayDay 2015 do not represents an action with a particularly high degree of “eventfulness”. Not if we assume, as in our research, the activists’ point of view to understand the reasons for contesting the ME and its logics. The immediate high relevance of the MayDay’s riots in the public opinion and in the media sphere can’t contradict this stance. Quite the opposite. Let’s get back to della Porta. She “suggests that the contemporary sociological reflection on conflicts as producers of social capital, collective identity and knowledge, could be useful to balance the negative vision of conflicts as being disruptive of social relations, an analysis that can emerge from an exclusive focus on the most extreme forms of political violence” (della Porta 2008). For the movement, the NoExpo Mayday does not produce social capital, collective identity and knowledge. Rather it emphasizes the negative vision of the conflict as a destroyer of social relations. From the point of view of the NoExpo activists the MayDay had a level of eventfulness rather low, it did not allow the testing of new tactics (which has instead been re-absorbed in the narrative density of the riots and devastations), it didn’t create feelings of solidarity, it didn’t send signals about the possibility of collective action, it didn’t consolidate organizational networks, and, especially, it did not create a public outrage in support of the protest. The difference compared to what happened in Val Susa, one of the cases of eventful protest given by della Porta, is evident: “In Val di Susa, the activists underline the positive effects of direct action as a moment of growth in solidarity with the local population. (...) First of all, the interaction with the police around the occupied spaces produces the spread of injustice frames (...), often mentioned by protesters as a source of consensus within the community and the strengthening of a collective identification with it” (della Porta 2008, 43).

In this sense, the MayDay2015 is not a transformative event in the history of the so-

cial movement. Or at least it is not such if we assume the perspective of the activists and their political action. They rather respond to the event trying to steal its transformative potential through the silence: the blackout of all the Network communications and the cancellation of all the scheduled meetings. The “post black-bloc” blackout in the NoExpo’s communications is particularly significant. As we will see in the paragraph above, the activists of the Network tend to act in the territories of the mainstream media, traditional and not, as “poachers” of attention. Despite the extraordinary media coverage obtained by the riots of May 1, the NoExpo’s activists cease any attempt to reach – and loot – a so wide audience. They prefer to stay silence, not replying to any charge that is moved against them. They use the silence not only to distance themselves from the incidents, but above all to detonate the transformative potential of an event that has got out of their hand, an event that threatened to permanently compromise the in fieri identity of the movement.

2.4 Protest and the Mediasphere

The movements active on the political scene between the end of the Nineties and the new millennium focused their attention on the mediasphere, and its culture and economics, as a crucial hub of contemporary social conflict (Lovink 2002; Couldry and Curran 2003). They also invested collective effort in elaborating the construction of alternative media (Atton 2002; 2004). These media, more or less *radical* (Downing 2001) in their political intent, differed from the “mainstream” ones for their mode of production and distribution of the contents, for the aesthetics of their messages, for the relations with their publics and the *engagement* they generated with their audience (Downing 2008; Rodriguez 2001).

The well-known claim of Indymedia (the largest network of media-activist websites in the 2000’s) was “Don’t hate the media, become the media” – and in fact activists were very interested in making media a field in which they might create a *new kind of conflict* (Downing 2002; 2003). In particular, media-activism was considered as a social laboratory for the re-appropriation of the media as “means of production rather than means of representation” (Pasquinelli 2002, 13-14).

Compared to the last decades’ activists, the point of view about mediasphere of the “NoExpo” activists appears radically changed. As D. (Macao) said us, today “the social media won”. The critical thinking about the Net shows how social media have captured people in a mechanism of production/gratification/surveillance: “enthusiasm over new gadgets and apps, communicative sites and practices – like Twitter, Facebook, and

blogging – displaces critical attention from their setting in communicative capitalism” (Dean 2010, 28; see also Terranova 2012; Fuchs 2015). But the NoExpo activists seem to care not too much about it. They simply look at the social media platforms as the best channels to share their contents with the largest audience possible: “For political ends, it is impossible to leave Facebook or Twitter. It’s just crazy. And even if you exactly duplicate the same software to Facebook, you lack millions of users” (D., Macao).

This option seems to show a less and less ideological use of the media and therefore a daring interpretation of the *tactical* (Garcia and Lovink 1997) approach to the mediasphere, that seems like a *disengagement* of the activists towards the mediasphere. Media are considered, by these activists, like a means to an end. Of course both individuals and collectives of the Network are often strong users of digital media; their use of them, however, is more conflicting from the point of view of *contents*, than from the point of view of the *structure* of the media itself.

What happened since the 2000’s? “The Capital made up ground. At that time Indymedia was the medium that everyone followed. There was no *Repubblica.it*. There was Indymedia. But we can extend this reasoning to the whole web” (S., SOS Fornace).

The web itself changed its nature: “Internet is no longer the cyberspace told by cyberpunk authors and populated by hackers – the modern cowboys. Now the web is Google and YouTube. The marketplace has fenced parts of it. And they *ate* you. I currently do not know if there is space for the communication of the movements” (S., SOS Fornace). And still: “It’s changed the relationship with technology, *the web has changed*. When Indymedia was born the central point around which the media activism had joined was the counter information. Today it is no longer sufficient to address the way in which web communication works” (D., Macao).

So, movements are rethinking about their ability of weigh on mainstream web dynamics: the web “makes possible self-production of media contents, but it makes it more difficult to transmit them to a large audience without staying in some circuits” (D., Macao). It seems just like the means of production were at hand, but the dissemination of communication and information contents has to go through big corporations channels, if the activists want to reach a large audience: “You have to do something in that world, if you don’t want to be reached only by people who already know that you exist” (D., Macao).

Overall, the reading and interpretation of the mediasphere seems to have lost something compared with last decades’ movements. From the point of view of these activists, media are no more places in which they can create different relations and different models of society. Media are again *instruments*. Building an alternative media environment for the communication of the movement today is not an option. There is no

more space – and time – for a trench war against the corporate media system. Not even in the digital universe. According to D. (Macao), the purpose is “reasoning about tools that are able to place themselves *inside* the web, and redirect its publics (...), using social media as a gateway for bringing publics on external contents”.

We don’t know if this attempt will succeed, but in the meanwhile media are still considered as useful channels to spread an antagonistic imaginary about Expo – a theme that runs through much of the activists’ narratives.

In the “growth phase” of the media-activism, Pasquinelli (2002, 11) identified a difference between an “*Anglo-Saxon*” media activism and a “*Latin*” media activism. The first approach to the mediasphere is more technology-oriented; the second uses narrative strategies as a mean to create opposition to the “consensus machine”. The activists we interviewed seem to accord their preference to the Latin approach: they want to knock out the mainstream communication about the Expo (new jobs opportunities, new strategies to fight the world food issue, lots of benefits for the local economy, etc.) and they aim to produce an alternative narrative by using many kinds of media languages (photography, video-making, theatrical performance, etc.). It is here, in this *Latin DNA*, that we find the particular character of the narrative that different voices of the movement relate in the interviews; and it is here that reside, probably, the need and the ability to build a counter-narrative of the big event. Moreover, the same interviews let emerge this “NoExpo attitude” from the cultural production, which some activists claim as its own distinctive “With the due respect for the counter-information, we work to reach other results” (D., Macao).

3. Conclusion

The Expo gates closed on October 31, 2015. Rather than the ballet of numbers on the total audience recorded and the “immediate” relationship between costs and benefits of the big event, to really decide the success of the Expo it will be its long-term legacy. A material legacy, physically inscribed in the urban fabric of the city, in its spaces and its infrastructure. And a symbolic legacy, deposited in the consciousness and in the shared memories of the millions of viewers, many young people and children, who visited it.

The post-event time will also be decisive for expressing a political judgment on the “Attitudine NoExpo” Network. Right afterwards the Expo’s closing, the movement has claimed this need to measure the sense of its political action beyond the exceptional time of the ME: with the symbolic ritual of a social walk – from Piazza Duomo to the

expo gate of Cascina Merlata – it immediately tried to re-appropriate the daily life of a city already “orphan” of its universal spotlight¹⁶.

But yet in our interviews, realized in the hectic weeks of the opening, the awareness of having to cope with the ME’s logic over a long-term horizon had strongly emerged in all the components of the network: according to L. (Off Topic) the decisive jackpot lies in the need to “ferry the NoExpo identity beyond the Expo”, to let the reasons for the “No” – and their alternative vision – into the long-term zone of the “event-horizon” (Roche 2000).

Since its birth the movement knew it had to change itself in parallel with the evolution of the ME: from the “NO against the Expo bid”, to the “No against the Expo event”, up to the “NO against the Expo model” (L., Off Topic). Even the action strategies have to evolve in parallel: if at the beginning, the purpose is yet to throw a spanner in the works of Milan candidature, when the activists begin to be awarded that the logic of the process is irreversible, the aim is to “build a mechanism that allows us to hardly damage the Expo” and, finally, after the end of the happening, the pivotal topic becomes understanding how to build a bridge with the city that will remain after the Expo (L., Off Topic).

This is a long-term perspective, focused on the issue of the Expo legacy, which sees all the Network’s components we have intercepted lined up: in Andrea Zappa opinion (Genuino Clandestino) the goal is to “imagine, build a project for the city, something that is able to live during the Expo event, but that could even survive after the event”. For S. (SOS Fornace) the life span of the NoExpo Network can be ensured by the fact that the three dynamics it chose to sum up the meaning of its protest – debt, cement and precarity – “will also be the Expo main legacy”. D. (Macao) expresses even more clearly the need for the Network to evolve, in its practices and its objectives, if it wants to sustain, in the long run, the comparison with that events economy of which Expo is “only” a paradigmatic representation: “This is not an approach that born and dies with the Expo”. After “all the work of reporting and disclosure that the path Attitudine No-Expo has made, and to which we have participated”, it is necessary to make a leap ahead in the dispute, designing a credible alternative to the model of the big event. “If you are not able to make this leap ahead, in the end you will lose” (D., Macao).

¹⁶ The initiative has been documented by Wu Ming 2, in the last chapter of its book: *Il sentiero luminoso*. The text can also be consulted on the Wu Ming Foundation website, accompanied by a photographic reportage realized by Exposed Project (<http://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2016/04/fantasmidiexpo-un-cammino-rituale-raccontato-da-wu-ming-2-umberto-torricelli-e-exposed-project/>, accessed September 30, 2016).

Among the network's nodes we interviewed, Off Topic seems to be the most directly involved in the attempt to ferry the NoExpo network across Expo. On one side trying to enter the expert debate on the Expo's legacy (e.g. through the *knowledge-oriented practice* of the conference "The power in Milan after Expo"¹⁷); on the other side looking for the solidification of the links between the various components of the movement (e.g. through the *convivial practice* of the #NoCanal Party – May 29, 2016 – celebrating the greatest political victory of the movement); finally trying to rebuild the antagonist instance of the NoExpo Network around other, more actual, territorial conflicts (for example adhering to the #NoTriv movement¹⁸).

It will be enough to avoid the risk that the political history of the NoExpo runs out in a short-term presence of the movement in the urban scene? The territorial and "tactical" vocation of the NoExpo movement will be able to counteract the "neurotic tendency to disappear" (Lovink 2013, 243) that characterize the current forms of the political antagonism? It will resist to the establishment's attempts of subsuming its protest languages in the sphere of the "event economy"? Or it will be reduced to "a temporary glitch, a brief instance of noise or interference" (Lovink 2013, 243) able to disturb only for a few months the interests of the system?

References

- Abruzzese A. (1973), *Forme estetiche e società di massa. Arte e pubblico nell'età del capitalismo*, Venezia: Marsilio.
- Allegri G., R. Ciccarelli (2011), *La furia dei cervelli*, Roma: ManifestoLibri.
- Atton C. (2002), *Alternative Media*, London: SAGE.
- Atton C. (2004), *An alternative Internet. Radical Media, Politics and Creativity*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bachtin M. (1968) [1965], *Rabelais and His World*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Berardi F. "Bifo" (2004) *Il sapiente, il mercante, il guerriero. Dal rifiuto del lavoro all'emergere del cognitariato*, Roma: DeriveApprodi.
- Berardi F. "Bifo" (2009) [2007], *The soul at work. From Alienation to Autonomy*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Borja J., M. Castells (1997), *Local and Global. The management of cities in the Information Age*, London: Earthscan Publications.

¹⁷ Conference hosted at the University of Milan on January 17, 2016.

¹⁸ Off Topic dedicated its latest publication to this thematic (2016).

- Boykoff J. (2014), *Activism and the Olympics: Dissent at the Games in Vancouver and London*, London: Rutgers University Press.
- Boykoff J., P. Fussey, (2014), "London's shadow legacies: security and activism at the 2012 Olympics", *Contemporary Social Science*, 9(2): 253-270.
- Carpentier N. (2011), *Media and Participation A site of ideological-democratic struggle*, Bristol: Intellect.
- Castells M. (1996), *The Rise of the Network Society*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Castells M. (2009), *Communication Power*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ceri P. (2001), *Movimenti Globali. La protesta nel XIX secolo*, Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Ceri P. (2003), *La democrazia dei movimenti. Come decidono i nonglobal*, Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino
- Cornelissen S. (2012), "'Our struggles are bigger than the World Cup': civic activism, state-society relations and the socio-political legacies of the 2010 FIFA World Cup", *The British journal of sociology*, 63(2): 328-348.
- Couldry N., J. Curran (2003) (eds.), *Contesting media power*, Lanham, MD: Rowman&Littlefield Publishers.
- Dean J. (2010), *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- della Porta D. (2003), *I new global. Chi sono e cosa vogliono i critici della globalizzazione*, Bologna: Il Mulino.
- della Porta D. (2004), "Multiple Belongings, Tolerant Identities, and the Construction of 'AnotherPolitics': Between the European Social Forum and the Local Social Fora", in D. della Porta and S. Tarrow (Eds.), *Transnational Protest and Global Activism*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- della Porta D. (2008), "Eventful protest, Global Conflicts", *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory*, 9(2): 27-56.
- della Porta D. (2015), *Social movements in times of austerity: bringing capitalism back into protest analysis*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- della Porta D., Diani M. (2004), "No to the war with no ifs or buts". *Protest against the War in Iraq*, in V. Della Sala and S. Fabbrini (eds.), *Italian Politics*, Oxford: Berghahn Books
- Downing J.D.H (2001), *Radical Media. Rebellious Communication and Social Movements*, London: SAGE.
- Downing J.D.H. (2002), "Independent media centers: A multi-local, multi-media challenge to global neo-liberalism", in M. Raboy (eds.), *Global media policy in the new millennium*, Luton, UK: Luton University Press, pp. 215-232.

- Downing, J.D.H. (2003), "The Indymedia phenomenon: Space-place-democracy and the new independent media centers", in J.G. Lacroix, G. Tremblay (eds.), *BOGUES: globalisme et pluralisme*, Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, pp. 57–67.
- Downing J.D.H. (2008), "Social Movement Theories and Alternative Media: An Evaluation and Critique", *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 1(1): 40-50.
- Fay C.R. (1951), *Palace of Industry, 1851: A Study of the Great Exhibition and its Fruits*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fuchs C. (2008), *Internet and Society. Social Theory in the Information Age*, New York: Routledge.
- Fuchs C. (2015), *Culture and Economy in the Age of Social Media*, New York: Routledge.
- Fumagalli A. (2016), *L'inconfondibile leggerezza del bilancio di Expo SpA*. Revised may 3, 2016 (<http://effimera.org/l-inconfondibile-leggerezza-del-bilancio-expo-spa-di-andrea-fumagalli>).
- Fussey P. (2014), "Command, control and contestation: negotiating security at the London 2012 Olympics", *The Geographical Journal*, 181(3): 212-223.
- Garcia D., G. Lovink (1997), *The ABC of tactical media*. Revised may 10 2016 (<http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9705/msg00096.html>).
- Graham S. (2012), "Olympics 2012 security: welcome to lockdown London", *City*, 16(4): 446-451.
- Guala C. (2015), *Mega eventi. Immagini e legacy dalle Olimpiadi alle Expo*, Roma: Carocci.
- Habermas J. (1987), *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Harvey D. (2012), *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, New York: Verso.
- Houlihan B., R. Giulianotti (2012), "Politics and the London 2012 Olympics: the (in)security Games", *International Affairs*, 88(4): 701-717.
- Ivester S. (2015), "Culture, resistance and policies of exclusion at World Cup 2014: the case of the 'Baianas do Acarajé'", *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 7(3): 314-324.
- Lazzarato M. (1997), *Lavoro immateriale. Forme di vita e produzione di soggettività*, Verona: Ombre Corte.
- Lazzarato M. (2004), *La politica dell'evento*, Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.
- Lazzarato M. (2013), *Il governo dell'uomo indebitato. Saggio sulla condizione neoliberalista*, Roma: DeriveApprodi.
- Lefebvre H. (1968), *Le Droit à la ville*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

- Leonardi E., M. Secchi (2016), "EXPO 2015 as a Laboratory for Neoliberalization. Great Exhibitions, Urban Value Dispossession and New Labor Relations", *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, 9(2): 567-595.
- Lovink G. (2002), *Dark fiber: Tracking critical internet culture*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press
- Lovink G. (2013), *Zero Comments: Blogging and Critical Internet Culture*, New York: Routledge.
- Massidda L. (2011) *Atlante delle grandi esposizioni universali. Storia e geografia del medium espositivo. Storia e geografia del medium espositivo*, Roma: FrancoAngeli.
- Massidda L. (2015), "The great Exhibition: storia di un'evasione di massa", *Ricerche storiche*, 45(1-2): 181-192.
- Mayhew H. (1851), *1851 or, The adventures of Mr and Mrs Sandboys and Family who Came up to London to "Enjoy Themselves", and to See the Great Exhibition*, London: David Bogue.
- Melucci A. (eds. 1984), *Altri codici. Aree di movimento nella metropoli*, Bologna: Il Mulino
- Melucci A. (1989), *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs*, in J. Keane, P. Mier (eds.), *Contemporary Society*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press
- Melucci A. (1996), *Challenging Codes. Collective Action in the Information Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mouffe C. (2000), *The Democratic Paradox*, London: Verso.
- Mouffe C. (2005), *The Return of the Political*, London: Verso.
- Müller M. (2015), "What makes an event a mega-event? Definitions and sizes", *Leisure Studies*, 34(6): 627-642.
- Negri A. (2008), *Dalla fabbrica alla metropoli. Saggi politici*, Roma: Datanews.
- Off Topic (2016), *SBLOCCAITALIA. Dalle trivelle agli stoccaggi di gas*, Lu:ce edizioni: Milano.
- Off Topic and R. Maggioni (2013), *Expopolis. Il grande gioco di Milano 2015*, Milano: Agenzia X.
- Parisi S. (2004), "Firenze, Europa, Pianeta Terra. La città globale", in F. Sedda (ed), *Glocal. Sul presente a venire*, Roma: Luca Sossella Editore
- Pasquinelli M. (eds. 2002), *Media Activism. Strategie e pratiche della comunicazione indipendente*, Roma: DeriveApprodi.
- Pellegrino A. (2011), *Macchine come fate. Gli operai italiani alle Esposizioni Universali 1851-1911*, Milano: Guerini e Associati.
- Piketty T. (2014), *Le Capital au XXIe siècle*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

- Putnam R.D. (2000), *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon & Schuster
- Roche M. (1994), "Mega-events and urban policy", *Annals of Tourism research*, 21(1): 1-19.
- Roche M. (2000), *Mega Events and Modernity*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Roche M. (2003), "Mega-events, Time and Modernity: On Time Structures in Global Society", *Time & Society*, 12(1): 99-126.
- Rodriguez C. (2001), *Fissures in the mediascape: An international study of citizens' media*, Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Sassen S. (2007), *A Sociology of Globalization*, New York: W.W. Norton.
- Simmel G. (1997) [1911], "The Adventure", in D. Frisby and M. Featherstone (eds.), *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, London: Sage, pp. 221-232.
- Tarrow S. (1989), *Democrazia e disordine. Movimenti di protesta e politica in Italia 1965-75*, Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1990
- Tarrow S. (1994), *Power in Movement: Collective Action, Social Movements and Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Terranova T. (2012), "Attention, Economy and the Brain", *Culture Machine*, 13(1).
- Touraine A. (1977), *The Self-Production of Society*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Touraine A. (1981) *The Voice and the Eye. An Analysis of Social Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wu Ming 2 (2016), *Il sentiero luminoso*, Portogruaro VE: Ediciclo Editore.

AUTHORS' INFORMATION:

Luca Massidda is PhD in «Communication and New Technologies» at University IULM of Milan (2007-2010). He is currently Post Doc Research Fellow at the University of Roma Tre. He is adjunct professor of Urban Sociology at the School of Architecture and Design of the University of Camerino.

Stefania Parisi is PhD in «Communication Sciences» at Sapienza University of Rome. She is currently Post Doc Research Fellow at Sapienza University of Rome. Member of the Scientific Committee of the Section “Cultural Processes and Institution” – Italian Sociological Association (AIS). Main research interests: Metropolis and urban conflicts, Net- and cognitive capitalism, Media studies, Gender studies.