Introduction

In September 2011 about 60 people camped out in Zucotti Park after a demonstration in downtown Manhattan against the financial elite at Wall Street and the unwillingness of the political elite to confront the practices of the financial market. Just as their sister movements in Spain and Greece the Occupiers felt that they were not represented by their elected representatives.

Occupy Wall Street (OWS) did both, it criticized the lacking efficacy of the representative democracy in the US and questions the democratic legitimacy of a representative system in general. Representative democracy has been increasingly come to be perceived as a separation of power from the people. The view that democratic elections would suffice to secure accountability of the representatives to the represented has lost much of its currency. Participation through consensual decision-making and inclusion was put forward as an alternative way of political organizing. The concept of representation was met with skepticism or outright rejection.

Despite Occupiers’ skepticism against representation, I contend that representation can be thought meaningfully in the context of OWS. My aim is to inquire after the relationship between representation and participation in Occupy Wall Street. Analyzing interviews with Occupiers, I ob-

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served a dynamic relationship between representation and participation which was most perceptible in the accounts about the role of the occupied space for the movement. I will carve out the character of the dynamic relationship by elaborating the question where do Occupiers see the movement’s potential contribution to the democratization of their society.\(^2\)

Democratization, from my point of view, is the increase of possibilities for people to influence the decisions that affect their lives. I build on the assumption that social movements\(^3\) can democratize a society (Della Porta & Diani 2006, pp.245–248). On the one hand, social movements can aim at the reform of political institutions by demanding the right and possibility to take part in the decision-making process of political elites (Welzel 2009). The demand for representation of marginalized groups in the formal political system is often part of such a strategy. On the other hand, social movements may aspire a democratization of all spheres of life. This radical democratic position defines democracy as “a project concerned with the political potentialities of ordinary citizens, that is, with their possibilities for becoming political beings through self-discovery of common concerns and of modes of action for realizing them” (Wolin 1996, p.31). The central strategy in this second form of democratization is the facilitation of participation.

One goal of OWS was to target the financial elite of New York (“Wall Street”) and to address the public in the US. The occupation in particular was used as a stage from which a public voice was given to those who felt politically, socially, and economically marginalized as a consequence of the last financial crisis (“We are the 99%”).\(^4\) Providing a voice to the marginalized, according to my view, implicitly included the claim to be a symbolic representation of the “99%.” The occupation of Zuccotti Park was crucial in this respect. It enabled Occupiers to be represented in the power center of the financial elite of New York and, equally, it was a pathway for outsiders to get engaged in the movement. This viewpoint corresponds with claims made by recent theoretical approaches that representation can foster participation. Seeking representation is one strategy to effect social change and, hence, possibly democratization.

However, the empirical data brings another strategy of democratization in OWS to the fore. The internal organization of the protest camp mostly followed the idea of prefigurative politics. Occupiers had the ambition to live the values that they wished to see realized in their society. Key in this prefiguration was the idea of participatory democracy. The encouragement of participation in the in-

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\(^2\) The empirical basis of this paper consists, first, of interviews that were conducted in 2012 with activists of OWS and, second, of discussions of activists at the Left Forum 2012 in New York.

\(^3\) Social movements are “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities” (Tarrow 1998, p.4). I will build this paper on the working hypothesis that Occupy Wall Street is a social movement.

\(^4\) “We are the 99%” was the most widespread slogan of the Occupy movement.
ternal organizational process, consensual decision-making and transparency were the corner stones of participatory democracy in OWS. Here too, Zuccotti Park did play a crucial role. First, the camp allowed to establish a space open to everyone for the deliberation and exchange of ideas and strategies. Second, the protest camp was a field of experimentation for prefigurative politics. The activities in the park made a whole range of decisions necessary, which allowed to put the envisioned social model to a test. I will conclude from the interviews that it is the aspect of prefigurative politics where Occupiers have identified the (possible) contribution of OWS to democratizing the US society.

The next section provides a short overview of recent theoretical approaches to representation. The third section introduces into the study of space in social movement research. After these two theoretical interventions, I will proceed in two steps to discuss the relationship between representation, participation and democratization in OWS. First, I will identify a representative claim in OWS and ask for the possibilities of participation in the movement. Second, I will discuss the experiences of activists in the prefigurative space of the protest camp. Finally, I will close with some considerations about the dynamic relationship that developed between representation and participation.

**Representation as process**

Recent accounts on representation responded to the critique that social movements voiced against established representative democracies. Some movements criticized that electoral representation excludes some minorities or marginalized groups from the political system. Others claimed that representative democracy is not reconcilable with their conception of democratic participation. In some strands of democratic theory, social movements and civil society actors themselves were becoming part of the solution to the issues that they have raised. Young (2002) and Urbinati (2006) assign an important function to social movements in a representative democracy: Social movements are a possible vehicle of inclusion and participation for marginalized groups that are in fact excluded from formal (i.e. electoral) representation. Michael Saward has extended these approaches. In his theory, social movements, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other non-state actors can perform as possible non-electoral representatives (Saward 2010, pp.37, 98–99).

According to his view, representatives do not necessarily depend on authorization in the form of elections. The prospective representatives and their targeted constituents negotiate a possible repre-

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5 For a critical assessment of this claim, see Thaa (2008).
sentative relationship in a process of claim-making and claim-reception (Saward 2010, pp.35, 39). The prospective representatives put forward, who they would like to represent in which ways. All those, who feel that their interests are implicated in this representative claim, can accept, reject or negotiate it (Saward 2010, p.45). The core idea of his theory is that the process of claim-making and claim-reception fosters participation of the population in a political system. In contrast to the position of supporters of direct democracy, participation and representation seem to be reconcilable in Saward’s approach (see Urbinati & Warren 2008). Alongside with electoral representation, the resulting non-electoral forms of representation can possibly render a political system more democratic (Saward 2010, p.163).

**Space and Place in social movement studies**

The spatial dimensions of social movements has been studied predominantly in two ways (see Tilly 2000; Sewell Jr 2001). On the one side, concrete places of confrontations, such as streets, plazas and buildings have been analyzed. On the other side, researchers have focused on the role of safe spaces (safe havens, spheres of cultural autonomy etc.) where the oppressed can retreat and form resistance (Scott 1990, pp.120–124). Both aspects are important for an analysis of Occupy.

According to Charles Tilly (2000, p.152), safe spaces and the attribution of meaning to contested places inhibit mechanisms that help to explain protest. Tilly argues that safe spaces are part of those spaces where contentious politics can happen (Tilly 2000, p.144): Due to their location or legal status, some spaces are more likely to provide protection from repression by authorities. Public occasions may also provide relatively safe stages for voicing critique, because authorities allow masses to gather on such occasions. This indicates that such spaces can provide opportunity structures for contenders.

Space can also be a protest repertoire. The occupation of a particular plaza or the route of demonstration is seldom the result of a random decision. Tilly shows that the locations of protests at the eve of the French revolution were closely knitted to the symbolic meaning of these places (Tilly 2000, pp.146–149). Analyzing the meaning that movement actors and authorities attribute with contested places can be decisive for understanding the dynamics of protest (Martin & Miller 2003, p.148). Such a research design adds a cultural element (the symbolic meaning of places) to Tilly’s structural analysis of protest (mechanisms and repertoire). However, the cultural aspect of contention seems to remain secondary in the structuralistic model of the contentious politics approach.
The concept of free space\(^6\) is crucial in James Scott’s work on power dynamics between oppressors and the oppressed (Scott 1990, p.118). The concept helps to understand how resistance and mobilization does not appear out of nowhere. In the contrary, mobilization is nurtured by longstanding community organizations that exist independent from hegemonic structures (cf. Polletta 1999, p.1). According to Scott, free spaces are crucial for the spread of so called ‘hidden transcripts,’ which is “discourse that takes place ‘offstage,’ beyond direct observation by powerholders” (Scott 1990, p.4). The hidden transcript and the accompanying social spaces help to transform the individual experiences of repression into a “collective cultural product” (Scott 1990, p.9). Carving out these systems of meaning helps to grasp the power dynamics between oppressors and the oppressed. As a consequence, culture and the social spaces of its articulation become an integral part of the explanation of political mobilization.

Francesca Polletta (1999) has criticized the concept of free spaces in collective action. Polletta holds that free spaces as such are not crucial for mobilization. From her point of view, the main analytical benefit of the free space concept has been “its capacity to integrate culture into structuralist models of collective action” (Polletta 1999, p.25). The issue she has taken with this idea is, firstly, that culture and structure are presented as being oppositional to each other in these models (Polletta 1999, p.17). She opposes this dichotomy, because structure can be understood as “cultural schemas […] that reflect and reproduce unevenly distributed power“ (Polletta 1999, p.16). Moreover, the cultural dimension of social movements is possibly influenced by structural conditions (e.g. the shifting reputation of ideologies over time). Secondly, she criticizes the tendency of many approaches to “reduce culture to structure” (Polletta 1999, p.2, her emphasis). The opposition to the powerful is viewed as dependent, first, on the structural conditions of the free spaces and, second, on the possibility of structural transformations in society (Polletta 1999, p.14). This, however, obfuscates the cultural dimension of structural transformations.

In her study of democracy in US-American social movements, Polletta underscores the role of culture in strategic action (Polletta 2002, p.5). An approach that refers to ideology or instrumental reason alone cannot explain why a social movement opts for a particular organizational form (cf. Polletta 2002, pp.5, 203). Many social movement actors opt for participatory democracy because they associate a particular meaning and style of deliberation with this form. However, these cognitive associations are not derived exclusively from the ideals of participatory democracy, but may

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6 Scott himself does not use exactly this term. He speaks of “social spaces insulated from control and surveillance from above” and about “social sites where the hidden transcript grows” (Scott 1990, pp.118, 119). Nevertheless, his work is paradigmatic for the concept of “free spaces.”
depend on social relationships that activists fuse together in the participatory democracy that they practice. From her point of view, this cultural influence needs to be analyzed in order to understand which organizational form activists think suits their strategic goals best.

In the case of social movements in the United States of the 20th century Polletta carves out that already existing social relationships served as the normative frameworks for building participatory democracy: friendship, religious fellowship or tutelage (Polletta 2002, p.3). Friendship, for example, was in one case an efficient associational model for building trust and consensus among members. At the same time, relying to much on friendship became an obstacle to incorporate new members for the movement (cf. Polletta 2002, pp.4, 221–222). Polletta convincingly shows how culture and structure are entangled.

However, the structure/culture dichotomy that Polletta hopes to overcome is in some way alive in social movement activism. This dichotomy finds an expression in the debate about the “open space” concept in the World Social Forum. The intention of the founders of the World Social Forum (WSF) was to create an “open space” for social movements and NGOs that facilitates a democratic discussion of alternatives to neoliberal politics (cf. Gautney 2010, pp.5, 177). In the view of Chico Whitaker (one of the founders of the WSF), the open space idea excludes that the forum itself can become a social movement (cf. Juris et al. 2011, p.287; Gautney 2010, p.101).

However, some activists around Walden Bello demanded that the WSF should indeed become a social movement. From their point of view, the time had come to make use of the mobilizing potential around the WSF. The political forces of the separate movements should be merged into a single global political actor (cf. Juris et al. 2011, p.287). Whitaker opposes this proposal, because the WSF would become more centralized and hierarchical as a result. This, in turn, would stay in contrast to the democratic guiding principles of the forum (Gautney 2010, p.177).

This debate paradigmatically pictures a tension between prefigurative politics (the open space idea) and the perceived organizational prerequisites for achieving social change (movements as actors). The tension also appeared in the Occupy movement, but interestingly in a less oppositional form. I suggest that OWS operationalized the dichotomy as two interlinked strategies to foster social change. This will show that the occupied space of OWS was neither simply used as a stage for the articulation of demands as Tilly’s model would suggest, nor was the space a retreat from confrontation in Scott’s sense.
OWS as a political actor and potential representative

Before the financial crisis of 2008 happened, “Wall Street” represented a social imaginary that was goaled towards the maximization of profit and individual success. This social imaginary was widely accepted, because it seemed to benefit the interests of the US society as a whole. But it has lost much of its credibility, once the US citizens felt the effects of the financial crisis. OWS confronted the representativity of “Wall Street” with an own representative claim. First, I will carve out the representative claim of OWS. Second, I will go into detail about the participative aspects of the claim.

According to Saward, representation is a relationship whose content is negotiated through events and processes. Demonstrations, the occupation of Zucotti Park and other publicly visible actions are the events in which we might identify a representative claim. Activists of OWS did not claim explicitly that they represented a certain part of society. Still, from the vintage point of Saward’s theory, it is possible to identify clues of a representative claim.

I take the slogan “We are the 99%” as a starting point. Slogans play an important part in framing processes in social movements (Snow et al. 1986). Through interventions in the public discourse movements seek visibility and recognition of their cause in the public sphere. Evenly important, slogans are tools to motivate bystanders for mobilization. Occupiers were aware of the fact that the movement would not gather 99 percent of the US population. The slogan rather captures the claim that OWS was a reaction to the crisis that “the 99%” were going through. Asking ‘who and what OWS was standing for’ will help to identify the representative claim that lies hidden behind the slogan.

OWS comprised many different political traditions and social classes. The spectrum reached from anarchists and left intellectuals to religious groups and libertarians. Occupy was similar diverse in demographic terms: the movement mobilized low-income and unemployed New Yorkers, as well as the losers of the (future) middle class. Likewise, OWS showed a considerably ethnic diversity.

The term “the 99%,” in my view, expresses that OWS offered to represent symbolically all those who felt that they were politically, economically and socially marginalized as a result of the last financial crisis. The “99%” constitute the reference point of the representative claim. OWS offered

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7 To my knowledge, there are no reliable statistics about Occupiers available for the time during the occupation (however, see Cordero-Guzman 2011; Milkman et al. 2013). I draw here from the assessment of my interview partners and from publications by activists (e.g. Writers for the 99% 2012).

8 The expression “the 99%” was explained as follows: „the idea of course was just to capture just, just the kind of
the “99%” a social identity by integrating the individual experience of the crisis into a collective one (cf. Jentges 2010, p.42).

What was OWS standing for? In contrast to many other movements, Occupy did not offer an identification through shared interests. The organizers refrained from putting forward a particular list of demands. A wide spectrum of topics had been discussed in Occupy though: they ranged from environmental issues to the high debts of house-owners and students. All in common was the underlying conviction that solutions to these problems should be sought through the participation of everyone affected. The aim was not simply to bring about social change through pressuring the political elites. Occupy was understood as a gateway to realize social change through democratic participation by Occupiers themselves in as many areas of society as possible. The core message of the representative claim is, according to my view, that OWS represented a lived political alternative to the representative system of the US. The practiced participatory democracy in the movement moved the principle of participation in the content of the representative claim.

Following the schema of Saward’s theory (2010, p.36), the non-electoral representative claim reads: OWS activists put up themselves and everyone who participates in OWS as a representative of a heterogeneous embodiment of marginalized voices (“the 99%”) against the financial and political elite of the US. This representative claim carries the message that the goals of Occupy can only be achieved through democratic participation.

Is there evidence that participation has been actively encouraged in the making of this representative claim? In other words, was participation not only the content, but also part and parcel of the concept of representation in OWS? Let us recall the discussion of the World Social Forum. Effective movement organizing is perceived by many activists as resulting in some degree of hierarchical (vertical) structures. Many grass-roots movements, therefore, would face the challenge that participatory (horizontal) structures have to give way to vertical structures once the movement grows bigger. Occupiers wanted to establish OWS as an actor that is visible in the political landscape, but express solidarity with all of us who don’t control [the] political system. […] Yeah, and it was meant to make the movement as broad and inclusive as possible. Everybody knew that 99% of the people wouldn’t join the movement. But aeh […] it was an attempt to make some kind of statement. […] It became a defining common for the movement” (Interview 1).

“I think for people who had felt really alone in their own struggle […] to start with coming down there [Zucotti Park, MF] was so significant and the GA [General Assembly, MF] was knitting their individual life, individual crisis into the movement. And being aehm, ah validated in your story” (Interview 5).

“The [planning, MF] group decided there will not be one demand and there real hope was to have assemblies spread all over the country and the city. […] [it] is less about getting something to happen right now in terms of legislative change than about creating a new kind of political organizing in the country, spreading it, deepening it. […] It’s about building new power” (Interview 1).
without compromising the horizontal structure of the movement.\footnote{On horizontalism, see Marina Sitrin’s study of community organizing in Argentina (Sitrin 2006). Sitrin was also a prominent figure in OWS.} I will give three examples how Occupiers were hoping to avoid hierarchical structures by increasing possibilities of participation.

First, the protest camp at Zuccotti Park was open to everyone and served as a learning resource: experiences, knowledge and skills were exchanged among participants.\footnote{“everybody came and brought their expertise and offered it” (Interview 4).} Similar to Polletta’s observation, activists “treated differences in skills and preferences as sources of mutual learning rather than as obstacles to equality” (Polletta 2002, p.4). This did not happen exclusively out of ideological convictions, but had a strategic goal. The aim of the activists was to build a “leaderful” movement: as many people as possible should be able to take up leadership positions.\footnote{About leadership and tutelage, one person said: “this idea of ‘step up step back,’ not just to stepping back but working with that folks to teach and mentor” (Interview 2, Person 1). This person used the term “leaderful” in this context.} Occupiers tried to avoid hierarchies that are associated with a hierarchical or representative system. Encouraging participation through tutelage was a means to avoid vertical structures.\footnote{“[The] commitment to having a group process and aehm you know to trying being non-hierarchical and trying to be consensus based and trying to do it in a way that the most people are heard and allowed to express themselves” (Interview 4).}

Second, in its self-representation to the public, the movement aspired to mirror the broad spectrum of its heterogeneous participants. The task of the press team was mainly to secure that as many different voices as possible were heard in the public media. For this reason, questions of representation of color of skin, age and gender were discussed in the press team.\footnote{A member of the press team said: “The goal of the press team was to train others. […] Especially we need people of color and make sure that as many voices as possible were speaking with the press” (Interview 1). Another member of the press team, however, mentioned that this was not always successful, because a group of “white,” young, male graduate students for a large part occupied the media stage (interview notes taken from memory, Interview 6).}

Third, activists were aware of the fact that leadership positions are at some point unavoidable. The question was then, how to hold persons in leadership positions accountable to the broader movement?\footnote{“In a movement you are in a position where you need to negotiate on behalf of other or the group […] How do we deal with that position in a horizontal movement? […] we need to think about these positions in terms of accountability aehm to the broader movement” (Panel 1, Person 1).} Lacking an established mechanism during the occupation, one person suggested in a talk after the eviction that the occupied space actually functioned as a means to hold people accountable to the movement.\footnote{In response to the person in the footnote above, the person said: “The park did a lot of that work [accountability, leaderfulness]. […] this space actually did that aehm, so I think to create the structures and in which people with leadership or responsibility can really be accountable. We need that space to know one another aehm and be more active and talking about things like privilege and power and oppression within that space” (Panel 1, Person 2).}

To conclude, there is proof for Saward’s theory in Occupy, but the empirical basis remains weak.
Why this is the case, is the matter of the next section. Occupiers sought social change less via visibility of their cause in the public. According to my view, we should not judge the significance of Occupy on the basis of the success of its confrontation with authorities and elites. Occupiers sought profound social change. However, I will show that they set the priority on the local and personal level, not the national one. Accordingly, Occupiers invested much energy in building non-hierarchical structures and community organizing. This is where I identify a relationship between aspired social change and democratization. The representative claim of OWS, though theoretically valid, is empirically weak.

**Occupying Space for Experiments**

OWS did not offer a concrete societal idea to substitute the current social model. Rather, it was a movement that found itself in open search for alternatives to the existing society (Brunnengräber 2012, p.46). Many Occupiers valued the fact that OWS offered a space for deliberation and a field of experimentation for political, social and economic alternatives. The occupied space invited participants to collaborate in the search for alternatives. The hope of the initiators was that the participants would deliberate and decide for themselves how they would like to change their society. Similar to Polletta’s judgment about American social movements, participatory democracy was a strategic choice and not exclusively an ideological premise. Why participatory democracy should be understood as a strategic choice in OWS, is the central question of this section. The social relationships in which Occupiers vested their experience of the occupied space, offer the clues to an answer.

I have grouped these social relationships with the help of three spatial categories: space as home, prefigurative space and diversity in space.

**Space as Home**

The occupied space was perceived as a “spiritual, emotional and political home.” The construction of the occupied space as a home resembles the idea of the “open space.” The goals of such a space are democratic deliberation and fostering good social relationships among participants. The General Assembly (GA) was the most important decision-making forum of the camp. Decisions are

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18 “I think Zucotti – even for people who didn’t live there – […] it was a home for them, it was a spiritual, emotional and political home for people in the movement, who were wanting to see, you know, convergence of those ideas of […] the claim to that emotional and political space was legitimate.” (Interview 5); Similar in Interview 1: „People felt in love with this place [Zucotti Park, MF], […] [it felt] like the rest of the world was unreal. The only reality was there. […] [I felt] like I was back home.”

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taken by consensus in GAs. The purpose of consensus is to ensure that everyone has a chance to be heard and that a “creative synthesis” of ideas is achieved (Graeber in Gelder 2011, p.23). It also became a means of bonding in the movement. The experience of collectivity in the encampment was “amplified” by the people’s mic that was employed during the GAs (Jodi Dean in Blumenkranz et al. 2011, p.91; see also Writers for the 99% 2012, pp.25–32). A people’s mic is a method to talk to a large crowd without electronic amplification. A speaker says a few words at a time and people within hearing range repeat them. This procedure is repeated till the end of the contribution. This encourages active listening and fosters community building: “[it] ignited a sense of unity and support for other people and their ideas” (Interview 4). The democratic character of OWS fostered Occupiers perception of the space as their home. In turn, once the democratic process became frustrating during the course of the movement, the emotional attachment to the space and the people in it helped to sustain the democratic process. In conversations about the social fabric of the protest camp, interview partners also mentioned their visions for democracy outside Occupy: Democratization and democratic innovation were located at the local and micropolitical level – the community, the family and the work place.

Prefigurative Space

The protest camp was a field of experimentation for prefigurative politics. Decision-making by consensus in a General Assembly of several hundred people was a huge experiment in itself. The park was not only used for experiments in political culture, but Occupiers sought to create a framework for alternative social structures. This had a reason: Despite the commitment to principles of democracy, openness and equality, social tensions had occurred among Occupiers. Some interviewees named the effects of mainstream society in Occupy as the reason for these tensions. Occupiers were socialized in a society that is based on hierarchies and cleavages. For example, some part of Occupy brought class and educational privilege with them. Others were less privileged in this re-

19 “The General Assembly was the heart of it for a lot of people. [...] It was the thing that you could rely on. Many things changed but that happened. [...] I think that it was actually most important, because it was the space where people aehm felt heard. [...] We were actually standing in community across race and class and gender” (Interview 5).

20 Occupiers “are bringing democracy back to its true basic common denominator, which is the person, the family, the community, rather than the candidate, the platform, the party and the campaign. [...] You know our workplaces are really run like dictatorships for the most part and something that seems very plausible to me is that the movement could aehm foster more democratic workplaces” (Interview 1). Similar another person: “For example participation within networks of mutual-aid, eviction defense networks, neighborhood assemblies, and food/land sovereignty struggles I would consider as participation within the movement” (e-mail correspondence with Person 2 of Panel 1).

21 “I think that people do want there to be a sort of prefigurative element to our politics. A kind of envisioning a new way of organizing ourselves, society, [...] the kind of values that we’re trying to embody could then be prefigurative towards a better way doing things” (Interview 3).

22 This was the case in Interview 4 and 5.
Subtle forms of exclusion and hierarchy soon appeared. This threatened the aspired democratic character of the movement and social structures of some kind were needed that would counteract these effects.

In reaction to this challenge, the protest camp offered activists, in the words of an interview partner, a more “stable” society. Health care, food, education and other social services were provided for free to everyone in the park (cf. Writers for the 99% 2012). In the framework of its possibilities, OWS was designed to meet the needs of marginalized people. Upfront discussions of hierarchical social relationships were another aspect of working towards a prefigurative space. OWS was not perceived as a free space that is unswayed by power relations. Occupiers actively tried to prevent that hierarchical social relationships of the mainstream society would become reproduced in the space of OWS (see Writers for the 99% 2012, p.90). Occupiers invested much effort in the prefiguration of a better society. In this respect, the protest camp was seen as an “embedded idea in space” (Interview 5).

In how far Occupy was successful in its attempt to prefigure their aspired society is not of primary concern for my argument. Crucial is the aspiration and the choice of strategy in this case. OWS was less about pushing for legislative change. Rather, OWS was meant to represent a model for political and social engagement in other cities. Some justified the lack of concrete demands with the priority of doing prefigurative politics. Prefigurative practices helped Occupiers to realize that they themselves are part of the reproduction of the social relationships that they were criticizing during their protest marches.

**Diversity in Space**

For one part, diversity was an important issue in OWS, because the movement was relatively homogeneous in its early days (Writers for the 99% 2012, p.112). It was criticized for being dominated by young “white” well-educated men with a middle class background. Soon people from different backgrounds and social identities joined the occupation. Some of them formed the “People of

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23 “For me it created a prefiguration of a more stable society in which you know health care doesn’t operate outside. […] The health care that we had within the plaza was done in the spirit of being part of a whole system” (Interview 4).

24 Another interview partner said on this topic: “In Zucotti square […] is a taking back of supposedly public space and re-imagining what it could look like: it could be a place for education, it could be a place for people to meet and share ideas without any kind of […] established social barriers. […] It was opening up the space for new types of social interactions to happen” (Interview 4).

25 “[The] experience of direct democracy is an educational experience whereby they recognize […] they are having political conversations what they really want rather than about Obama and Romney, what Obama and Romney want.” (Interview 1).

26 “For me what started to happen is to be aware […] [of] my own participation in perpetuating this systems of hierarchy […] and I think that’s the thing that we need to fight against in ourselves” (Interview 4).
Color Working Group.” Their demand was that Occupiers would act faithful to their proclaimed principles of openness, participation and equality. The group developed solutions how social barriers that were based on color of skin, origin, or sexual orientation could be overcome in OWS. The group offered anti-oppression training and established caucuses in the organizational structure. The experience that the group gathered during their work in the camp was eventually used to extend the group’s reach beyond the park (Writers for the 99% 2012, pp.119–120). The “People of Colors Working Group” is an example how the prefigurative space in OWS and its democratic principles initiated community organizing outside of the protest camp.

To sum up, participatory democracy can be seen as a strategic choice in OWS, because it suited the proliferation of democratic forms of community organizing and personal change best. Prefigurative politics created possibilities of democratic participation in the camp. In turn, reconstructing democratic social relationships in Occupy made participatory democracy operational. Community organizing and personal change together form a strategy to foster social change and democratization.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this paper was to inquire after the relationship between representation and participation in Occupy Wall Street. I have identified a connection along two different dimensions. In the first dimension, I have followed Saward’s theory of the representative claim. The movement can be interpreted as a non-electoral representative of marginalized voices in the US population. The occupied space provided an effective stage to voice the representative claim and fostered participation in the making of the claim.

However, participatory democracy was largely not intended to democratize representation. Democratization is not always directed at the state. According to my view, Occupiers were seeking social change, first and foremost, through community organizing and personal change. Henceforth, the form of democratization pursued by OWS is more in line with the tradition of radical democracy, which aims at the democratization of all spheres of life. From this perspective, OWS acquires the form of an open space for prefigurative politics.

Even though representation was not the primary aim of OWS, it profited from the visibility in the public that came as a result of the representation of the “99%.” This is where the second connection of representation and participation in OWS comes in. The spectacle of the occupation
was an effective means to mobilize (formerly unpoliticized) people for the less visible task of community organizing. Similarly, Juris suggests that Occupy brought people together, which otherwise would not have collaborated (cf. Juris 2012). Representation and participation were two different strategies in OWS. They were associated with different expectations, but, nevertheless relied on each other to promote democratization at different levels.

The dynamic between representation and participation did not remain without conflict. One source of conflict were the social relationships that Occupiers brought with them through their socialization. Although a range of social relationships were shaping the dynamic in a positive way (see the last section), other social relationships showed negative effects. Class division, educational differences, subtle forms of hierarchies and other forms of power relations were present in OWS, despite the commitment to overcome such structures. Some of the structural effects of social relationships that Polletta (2002) observed in American social movements was present in the open space experiment of OWS as well. Unfortunately, in the conclusion of her own study this effect remains unexplored in a dimension that is important for OWS.

After the eviction from Zucotti Park it seemed that OWS would split up in two factions. One faction was committed to the idea that Occupy is a movement and political actor. After the eviction, not few thought that the remaining money should be spent on mobilization rather than on community work. The other faction relied on OWS in its function of providing a prefigurative social framework. For those without class privilege, the eviction from the park was a negative experience in two ways. Firstly, the established safety network of the park was destroyed by riot police. Secondly, not few Occupiers seemed to break with the promise of prefigurative politics by prioritizing mobilization over community work.

As long as the encampment existed, the commitment to provide the basic needs for everyone in the camp was strong. It seems that after the eviction, the division along class among “the 99%” that OWS tried to overcome had significant effects on the debate about the future strategy of OWS. The opposition between movement/representation and open space/participation was resolved in the occupied space, but the dichotomy reappeared after the eviction.

27 I owe much of this line of argument to one of my interview partners: “once the occupation was gone and the people with greater class privilege went home […] then people were still wanting to figure out how to use this money to further the movement, but that wasn't necessarily creating a soup kitchen […]. It was very different for the people who didn't have a home […]. And in their mind […] of course the money gets spend on people's aehm basic needs first […]. But after the occupation happened that's not what a lot of people thought. Like ‘the money is here for the movement, the money is not here to feed and house New York, it's for a movement.' […] - like there was this divide” (Interview 5).
Literatur


