‘A Movement of Popular Education Oriented towards Action’?:

Attac in France and Sweden.

Fredrik Uggla,
Dept of Government,
Uppsala University.

(The figures in this paper are somewhat preliminary and should not be quoted.)

During the last five years, the movement for global justice (a.k.a. the anti-globalisation movement, the alter-mondialisation movement, etc.) has come to the fore. By pressing issues that appear to relate to a new political dimension, through its manifestations at summits of international organisations such as the WTO and the EU, and through its promotion of gigantic social forums, this movement seems to represent something novel in the political life of established democracies.

Drawing on empirical material from one particular part of this movement—the organisation Attac—and its development in France and Sweden, my paper aims to provide a more thorough evaluation of the character of this movement. In particular, I focus on the demands advanced by the group and on the targets that it chooses for its actions. Thus, I note that in spite of the traits mentioned above, Attac also manifests quite conventional aspects in terms of demands, action repertoire and targets.

INTRODUCTION

Remarks on the changing nature of political participation abound. Briefly put, such observations fall into two categories: those that note a quantitative change in participation (declining turnout at elections for instance), and those portraying a qualitative change (e.g., from electoral participation to other forms of expression).¹

The present paper will take a closer look at the latter kind of assessments, drawing on a case study of what may be called a critical case, in the form of an organisation that has generally been portrayed as new, global and innovative. The organisation studied is Attac, an acronym that stands for the “Association pour la taxation des transactions financières pour l’aide aux citoyens”. Since its foundation in France in 1998, the group has advanced a set of demands

¹ E.g., Pippa Norris, Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
primarily related to financial liberalism and its consequences. Thus it forms part of a broader movement that is variously referred to as the anti-globalisation movement, the altermondialisation movement, or the movement for global justice. From its origins in France, Attac has spread to at least 30 other countries. By looking at the experiences of the organisation in France and Sweden, this study asks how much of the actual practices of this group actually stand up to the above cited claims.

IDEAS OF NOVELTY
It is sometimes suggested that the universe of social movements and groups in civil society is acquiring a new character. To begin with, scholars studying individual political participation often indicate a shift towards a repertoire in which protest action is becoming increasingly common as a form of political expression, perhaps even to the extent of making disruptive strategies part of the acceptable set of actions.²

Claims such as these are often coupled to suggestions regarding the increased importance of global developments for the organisation of group action.³ In this view, group action is increasingly oriented towards the global arena, in a way that brings two related consequences. In the first place, demands of international character are likely to take precedence over national ones, as traditional themes for movement activism (workers’ rights, education, social issues) become subordinated to international developments. As one observer notes with regard to the (anti-) globalisation movement, “states and domestic political institutions are no longer the dominant targets for political protest. Rather, activists are increasingly accessing international opportunities for influence outside the state.” ⁴ As a corollary of this, the trend towards a de-institutionalisation of activism is likely to be strengthened as national institutions become less important as targets and guides for political behaviour.⁵ “If movements are becoming transnational, they may be freeing themselves of state structures

---


⁵ Ruud Koopmans and Jan Willem Duyvendak, ”Conclusion” in Hanspeter Kriesi, Rudd Koopmans, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and Marco G. Giugni, New Social Movements in Western Europe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 238-251, p. 248f.
and thence of the constraining influence of state-mediated contention”. The result may be a kind of activism oriented towards violent and direct actions against targets at the international level; a diagnosis that appears to have been proven in instances such as protest against the WTO in Seattle in 1999 (“the battle of Seattle”), against the IMF in Prague in 2000, against the EU in Gothenburg in 2001, and so on.

Several factors are given as possible explanations for changes such as these. Some observers indicate technological change, noting that “[w]ith the global communications revolution, citizens’ groups and NGOs have acquired new and more effective ways to organize across national frontiers and to participate in the governance of global affairs”. Other observers trace the increase in political protest to changes at the level of political culture and confidence in political institutions. Beyond such explanations looms the general trend towards globalisation, as local and national developments become increasingly influenced by international factors in the economic, financial, environmental, political, cultural, and social areas.

IDEAS OF INERTIA
Suggestions such as the previous ones have not escaped criticism, as opponents have questioned the extent to which these re-orientations have really taken place. Accordingly, spectacular events such as those in Seattle and Prague may be exceptions to the general rule on the static or conservative character of activism.

In particular, it has been noted that popular participation in global affairs is limited as to its actual extent. Even where protest movements have scored spectacular successes over global institutions, this has been achieved by targeting institutions at the national level. This was the case with the MAI/AMI, for instance. Accordingly, it is often pointed out that globalisation...

---

10. The task of the MAI was to set up a global standard for investment, resulting in a legal and ditto mechanisms framework for the protection of foreign direct investments under the auspices of the OECD. In more concrete terms, the agreement would establish how foreign investment in a country should be treated in terms of legal position, rights vis-à-vis state monopolies, and taxation for instance. In such areas, the impetus of the agreement was clearly to establish a very liberal regime in these matters. (David Henderson, *L’accord multilatéral sur l’investissement: Leçons d’un échec* (Paris: Sciences Po/GEM, 1999), p. 32ff.) Additionally, the MAI was designed as a charter to which countries could chose to adhere or not, thereby extending beyond the rather limited number of OECD countries. In August 1997, the text of the treaty – which was an internal, restricted document – was leaked and subsequently posted on the internet, which in turn triggered intense discussion and attacks, also on the net. (Ibid., p. 32) But opposition to the treaty was not limited to a couple of emails lost in cyberspace. In country after country, parliaments and politicians became flooded with criticism, and national politicians began to rally to a cause that they had previously shown very little interest in. In May 1998, the...
and the increase in trans-national networks of activism does not automatically transfer political activism to the supra-national level. Instead, some observers claim that “transnational movements continue to consider national governments as important and, in many cases, even primary targets”.

The global level lacks the crucial features – accountable politicians and favourable public opinion – for effective group action. Even as institutions such as the World Bank and the European Union have attempted to increase their openness during the last years, they rarely offer groups the same possibilities as national politicians. Instead, it is argued that factors at the level of national politics still matter a great deal more than the supposed homogenising impact of globalisation on movement action. Thus, the very idea that globalisation will cause social movements to shift their action to the global arena has been called into doubt.

If the idea of a change in target has been severely challenged, re-orientations in strategies and demands are seldom called into doubt. One should note, though, that such suggestions have to be weighted against the fact that neither global demands nor international strategic coordination are exactly new, as the 19th century suffragette and anti-slavery protests demonstrate, for instance. Thus, the relevant question here primarily becomes one of degree and the extent to which actual change really lends credence to the alleged fact that “as political authority moves towards global institutions, we should expect changes in social movement repertoires similar to those Tilly observed with the rise of the nineteenth-century national polities”. Are the changes that can be witnessed among contemporary movements really akin to those transformations brought about by the rise of the nation-state?

---

French government set up a special investigative committee that after consulting with NGOs, unions and other groups, presented a rather damning report on the agreement (the Lalumière report). (Ibid., p. 41) In the light of this report, Lionel Jospin, France’s Socialist Premier Minister at the time, declared in front of the French national assembly that the agreement would imply “fundamental problems for the sovereignty” of the signatory nations. (Ibid., p. 42) France’s turnabout effectively killed the MAI and at an informal meeting in early December 1998, the project was abandoned.

ATTAC AS A CASE

It has sometimes been suggested that the emergence of Attac is one indicator of the qualitative shift in participation\textsuperscript{16}: it has obtained a reputation for being prone to protest action, it has been cited as an example of the proliferation of “dot-causes” (network structures employing the internet as an organisational tool)\textsuperscript{17}, its primary demand (introduction of a tax on financial transfers) is intimately related to the area (finance) where the impact of globalisation is most pronounced\textsuperscript{18}, it has been said to herald a new way of relations between organisations and the political establishment\textsuperscript{19}, it claims to act on an “international scale”\textsuperscript{20}, and so on. And as it constitutes the most organised and visible exponent of the broader (anti-)globalisation movement, it should exhibit characteristics associated with that movement as a whole, in particular innovative action repertoires, prominent use of new technologies, and disruptive strategies.\textsuperscript{21}

Given such remarks it could be argued that Attac does indeed constitute a crucial case for testing the theoretical suggestions above.\textsuperscript{22} The novel characteristics present in the organisation should lead us to expect it to confirm the idea that collective action is undergoing a qualitative change, and to exhibit a global orientation in demands and tactics, while promoting new forms of political behaviour. Should it, on the other hand, show itself closer to the more sceptical predictions; targeting national institutions, mixing global and more immediate demands, using traditional tactics, this would deal a blow against the ideas about the changing nature of collective political participation.

The present study in that regard focuses on some particular aspects of the group and its actions. It looks at the demands that Attac makes, against whom such demands are made, and what strategies are used to process the demands.\textsuperscript{23} Regarding the first dimension the question is thus the extent to which the demands can be said to represent a global constituency, i.e., if they relate to issues affecting persons beyond the national or local level. The second dimension, target of demands, asks against which institutions such demands are made; is it

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Vincenzo Ruggiero, ”’Attac’: A Global Social Movement?”, \textit{Social Justice}, vol. 29, no:s 1-2, 2002, pp. 48-60
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Danielle Tartakowsky, ”Associations et champ politique” in Claire Andrieu, Gilles Le Béguec and Danielle Tartakowsky (eds.) \textit{Associations et champ politique} (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2001), pp. 47-64, p. 56f.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Attac-France, \textit{Attac au Zénith} (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2002), p. 103.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Jackie Smith, ”Globalizing Resistance”.
\end{itemize}
against authorities at the global, national, or local level. Strategies, finally, can roughly be separated according to their use of institutional channels, their degree of innovation in the action repertoire, and whether they are internationally coordinated.

DATA
As shall be noted below, data here is to a high degree derived from the communiqués that the group itself emits in France and Sweden. Over the years, Attac has emitted some 140 communiqués in France, and about 60 in Sweden, the entirety of which are included in the sample used in this study. These communiqués are published on the web pages of each group, and are thus accessible to adherents, opponents and interested observers alike. In that sense they represent how Attac want to present itself and its actions.

This source of data can be questioned, of course. A related and more common procedure is to turn to press reports concerning contentious events. That method has two advantages. First of all, it captures even those events that the organisation is not likely to stress itself, such as riots, attacks on opponents, and so on. Second, focusing on media reports presents a clearer view of the organisation’s political position, which may actually be rather far removed from its own ideas in this regard. After all, it is through media reports that citizens and politicians become aware of most contentious actions, and the former may therefore be better indicators of the political importance of a group than the picture that it strives to paint of itself.

For the present purposes, the press communiqués of the organisation itself appears a more reasonable focus, though. The idea here is to take a closer view of the organisation itself and of the position that it actively aspires to. Limiting the study to media reports introduces the element of media selection processes, which may eschew the data in this respect. Second, although Attac has been at the centre of a number of violent episodes in France and Sweden

26. Ibid.
alike, these are actually not omitted from the communiqués. Instead, the group generally appears quite anxious to present its own version of these events.27

One other caveat: These communiqués are emitted by the national chapters, which should make them susceptible to a bias towards a national tendency at the expense of more global inclinations. This need not be so, though. As will be noted below, there is actually no international organisation of Attac; the national chapters are the highest organisational expressions in that regard. Two alternative interpretations can be made of this structure: On the one hand, one may choose to see in this a priori proof of the staying power of national politics. But an alternative would be if the national chapters merely act as outflows of the international (or trans-national) movement. This would be the case if communiqués were constantly referring to international campaigns and the like. If that were so, documents emitted by the national chapters could be seen as merely an adaptation of such campaigns to the linguistic (and/or cultural) realities of each country.

Summing up, then, the communiqués will be taken as evidence of Attac’s actions and of the political position that the group aspires to. Combined with observations of a more general nature, this material should offer a general picture of the organisation, and allow us to assess some of the propositions above.

ATTAC AS A NOVEL STRUCTURE:
The origin of Attac can be traced to an editorial in *Le Monde Diplomatique* in December 1997, in which the director of the monthly called for the establishment of an organisation under this name to advance the idea of a Tobin tax, i.e., a levy on global financial transfers. According to the official history of the organisation, this call was met by an avalanche of support from the readers of the magazine and a couple of months later Attac was founded by individuals, organisations, and some political magazines. At the end of 1998, the organisation claimed to have some 5,000 members and began a nation-wide petition to bring about taxation of financial transactions.28 Over the coming years, the organisation would figure in the planning of counter-summits and the so-called social forums in Brazil (and later in Italy, France and India). Simultaneously, the organisation spread from France as national chapters began to appear. These maintained an independence from the original chapter, though, and the degree of organisational coordination between the different groups is actually limited to a

couple of meetings a year. (As remarks one activist, “Everybody is aware that we cannot create a super-structure, it would not work. It would create more problems than it would solve.”) In Sweden, Attac was officially founded at the beginning of 2001.

On the face of it, Attac does indeed incorporate numerous novel elements. For instance, it has extensively made use of the Internet as a channel of organisation and mobilisation: web pages such as [www.attac.org] and [www.attac.info] are prominent features of the communication structure of the organisation, and enable visitors to participate in debates, receive information, keep an update on activities, and – important for the rather technical demands the group is prone to – learn about the subjects at hand. Even so, a critical study of this aspect of the group remains sceptical as to the extent to which the Internet is transforming activism. As it notes, while this technology allows extensive discussion and documentation, it cannot substitute for traditional administrative decisions and elections of representatives.

A second novel aspect consists in the close association between the organisation and the social forums that are becoming an increasingly visible feature of today’s alternative movement. It should be stressed that the link is indeed one of a rather close relationship; Bernard Cassen (the first president of Attac-France) was also one of the co-founders of the 2001 social forum in Porto Alegre, and even as there is not organisational unity between the two phenomena Attac groups are prominent among the organisers and panel discussants of the forums, and so on.

Third, Attac obviously promotes new themes. It begun as an organisation devoted to the cause of the Tobin tax, but as one leading representative of the movement states, “Our problem is not with the Tobin tax, it is with [economic] liberalism.” Indeed, and as shall be shown below, the organisation has shown a remarkable capacity for incorporating new demands and issues.

Finally, some national chapters operate in a highly non-hierarchical manner. Attac-Sweden is a good example of this; the group lacks chairperson, official spokesman, and is generally very prone to a direct democratic approach. In contrast, Attac-France has a markedly

31. Ibid., p. 91f.
32. Bernard Cassen, Tout a commencé à Porto Alegre... Mille forums sociaux! (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2003).
34. As one representative from the organisation would later note, this structure would incur costs, though. “We always thought that ‘we shall not do this their way’, we would not professionalise our media relations, we would do things our way, and that would be enough. … Naivety … A bit more of intellectual dishonesty, political
hierarchical structure, with a high degree of importance attached to the non-elected members of the “collège de fondateurs”, and relatively little room for influence from members or local groups.\textsuperscript{35}

NATURE OF DEMANDS
To what extent do the actual activities of Attac represent the trends that some observers wish to see among current social movements? Turning first to demands, the question becomes what kinds of issues are dealt with; are the goals of the organisation located at the global or the national level? The separation here is thus between demands such as the introduction of a Tobin tax or criticism of the WTO negotiations on the one hand, and such as the curriculum in national schools and the proposed law on internal security in France on the other.

In Sweden, global demands are clearly dominant; three quarters of all communiqués treat such issues. By contrast, national issues appear in less than a third of them, and questions at the EU level at hardly a fifth (note that issues at different levels can appear in the same document, wherefore the sums do not add up to 100 per cent). This largely confirms the idea that we have of Attac as a movement primarily aimed at the abstract concept of “global justice”.

\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|}
\hline
Level of issues mentioned: & France: & Sweden: \\
\hline
Global & 34 \% & 75 \% \\
Other country & 16 \% & 7 \% \\
European union & 13 \% & 18 \% \\
National & 47 \% & 29 \% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

Interestingly enough, that is not the case in France. Among the communiqués of Attac-France, truly global themes appear in only a third of cases, whereas national issues feature in almost half of them. Among these latter issues are the themes of social security, labour conditions, and education.

But this is not the end of the story. In Sweden there are no significant changes in the kind of questions treated over the years. There appears to be a tendency to substitute discussion of issues relating to WTO for those that relate to the Tobin tax, but only the former part of the equation is statistically significant. At the beginning of 2003, anti-war demands made an appearance in the Swedish movement. This was however momentary.

\begin{flushright}
\textit{dishonesty would have protected [us]. Instead we lost momentum.”} (Helena Thagesson, Attac-Sverige, in interview with author, October 28, 2003.)
\end{flushright}
In France, some significant trends can be traced. Most notable is the fact that the Tobin tax has largely disappeared from the organisation’s agenda. Indeed, there is a strong and significant negative correlation between demands for this provision and date (Pearson’s r = -.427). The gradual evaporation of this demand (which did, after all, give the group its name) has not been lost on the other Attac chapters. At a joint seminar for the different Attac groups in Europe in October 2003, several of them expressed their misgivings about the lack of attention to this particular issue. The French chapter replied that after the decision of the Assemblée nationale on the question (in November 2001 l’Assemblée nationale took the extra-ordinary step to introduce an amendment concerning the Tobin tax in the budget for 2002; as the amendment also spelt out that the introduction of such a tax hinged on similar measures being introduced in the European Union at large, this was an entirely symbolic measure, however this was not longer a priority for them.

But in fact, the dropping of the question of the Tobin tax actually reflects a more general tendency within the French chapter of the organisation. Indeed, there is a significant tendency to talk less about global themes in general (Pearson’s r = -.281, significant at the .01 level), and a corresponding tendency towards issues at the national level (Pearson’s r = .239, significant at the .01 level). In short, the most advanced, senior and politically powerful Attac group appears to be substituting national demands for global ones.

Given the origin of the group, this tendency is indeed surprising. Still, there is a certain logic to it, and it can be interpreted in light of declarations from group representatives. In France as in Sweden, Attac representatives express their concern for finding concrete demands that allows it to draw adherents and attention. “We need demands, clear demands, clear strategies, and we are quite weak in that.” In both cases, activists thus stress their anxiety to broaden their adherence to less well-to-do groups in society, and a recent document from Attac-France ties this to the question of strategic priorities. Accordingly, particular weight is given to themes such as social security and education along with the more

38. Author’s interviews with Olav Unsgaard (Attac-Sverige), August 22, 2002, and Christophe Aguiton (Attac-France), September 26, 2002.
39. Author’s interview with Christophe Aguiton, September 26, 2002.
traditional priorities of the group. Thus, recent communiqués of the organisation attack the French government’s stances and projects in areas such as health insurance and unemployment benefits.\textsuperscript{41} Similarly, themes such as the closing of hospitals and privatisation of the water and electricity provision featured prominently at the recent annual meeting of the Swedish group.

This development goes against some earlier interpretations of the group. For instance, Marcos Ancelovici, while noting the primacy of national political institutions as targets for demands, presupposes that demands will anyhow be global in nature. “A priori, the collective goods to which ATTAC aspires are remote and conducive to free riding and thus cannot by themselves constitute strong incentives to mobilize.”\textsuperscript{42} This was certainly so at the beginning of the group’s existence, but signs are that the activists themselves are trying to lesser this shortcoming by devising demands that promise more immediate gratification to potential members. In the process, it may be dropping its stress on global demands, a trend which becomes very clear in graph 1 which traces the percentage of communiqués relating to global demands over the years of existence of Attac-France. (Note that part of the upturn during 2003 to a high degree corresponds to demands expressing opposition to the war in Iraq.)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{graph1.png}
\caption{Graph 1, Global demands as percentage of Attac-France’s demands.}
\end{figure}

\textbf{TARGETS OF DEMANDS}

The demands of the group are only part of the story, however. Another question is against what institutional level they are directed? As shall be discussed below there is no automatic connection between the two aspects; demands that relate to a global constituency may actually be directed against institutions at the national level, and vice versa. In the following, three levels will be discussed: the global one, which in practice means institutions such as the

---

UN or the WTO; the European one with the component institutions of the European union (the Commission, the European parliament, the Ecofin and so on; and the national one. The last category can be further separated into three parts: official institutions (bureaucracy, government, parliament) in one’s own country; institutions in another countries; and demands/criticism against opponents and other actors (for instance, employers’ associations or the media).

One assumption in this regard is that globalisation could result in international political institutions becoming more accessible (and important as targets for demands). If that is so, one would expect an high number of demands to be levelled against institutions at the international level, while a decreasing number would target institutions at the national level.

Such expectations find very scant support in the material. Indeed, in both countries, national institutions (parliament, government) absolutely dominate as primary targets for the group’s actions, and amount to around half of those. In contrast, global institutions are only rarely (7 per cent of the Swedish cases, and 12 per cent of the French ones) targeted as is demonstrated by table 2. (As before, sums do not add up to hundred per cent as several levels can be targeted in the same document.) (Furthermore, in Sweden there is a clear and significant positive correlation between demands raised against the national level and date, i.e., the national institutions are becoming increasingly important as targets for demands.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Against what level are demands raised?</th>
<th>France:</th>
<th>Sweden:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global institutions</td>
<td>12 %</td>
<td>7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Union institutions</td>
<td>20 %</td>
<td>27 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other country institutions</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National institutions</td>
<td>50 %</td>
<td>46 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other opponents (national)</td>
<td>10 %</td>
<td>20 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This distribution clearly bears some relation to the previous category; the actual demands made. As national demands are becoming increasingly prominent, this probably has an impact on the level at which their target is located. But too much should not be made of this association. Even among the communiqués that make global demands, almost half of them raise these demands to the national institutions.

For instance, when Attac-Sweden protested against the war in Iraq, it put as its “main demand that [the late minister of Foreign Affairs] Anna Lindh and Sweden’s government not only distance themselves from the war in words, but also through action – for instance by trying to convene the general assembly of the UN.”\(^4\) Attac-France in turn, made use of exactly the same claims in protesting against the Iraqi war, demanding that “France, which will chair the security council of the UN from Jan. 1 [2003], take all possible measures, including the use of its veto, to stop the war.”\(^5\) These examples show the logic of these actions; the national level constitutes an indirect mechanism through which the global level can be targeted. Similarly, it is common to direct pressure on national politicians to act in the European Union; for instance, by petitioning finance ministers to support a discussion of the Tobin tax at that level.\(^6\)

The strategic focus on national institutions can easily be explained with reference to the argument above; that it is only at that level where the necessary accountability exists that makes politicians respond to the demands of a challenging group. Thus, the strategic choices made by Attac amount to a process of ‘domestication’ whereby international demands are treated at the national level.\(^7\) Institutions such as the OECD, the WTO, and the UN are accountable to member countries (which in practice means their governments), not to any global citizens. True enough; they are growing increasingly sensitive to popular protest, but this is allegedly because of the indirect link that national institutions provide between such opposition and the operation of these global institutions.

In this regard, the European union is particularly interesting to consider, as it should occupy an intermediate position here. On the one hand, the union possesses institutions whose relation to the citizens of its member countries is indirect at best; the commission is a clear example of this. On the other hand, other union institutions, the parliament in particular, have a direct relationship of accountability to those citizens.

---

47. Imig and Tarrow, “Mapping the Europeanization of Contention”, p. 36. There is an additional mechanism at work at this; in some cases, operations aimed at international or global issues give rise to a sequence of events that forces the organisation to direct its attention to the national level. The best examples of this are probably the aftermaths of the Gothenburg riots and the arrest of José Bové. In both cases, protest aimed at events at the international level (President Bush’s visit and the EU summit in Gothenburg, and a local protest against US tariffs imposed as part of a trade war between that country and the EU, respectively), would eventually force the organisation to turn its attention to the finer details of the national judicial system. (See, for instance, Attac-France, ”Après la décision de la cour de cassation. Attac, solidaire des militants paysans condamnés, s’adresse au Président de la République”, public communiqué, Nov. 20, 2002.)
In France as in Sweden, the institutions of the European Union are targeted in between a quarter and a fifth of the communiqués. In both cases, such demands exhibit a negative correlation with date, however, indicating that the EU is actually becoming less important as an object for political action. Only in France is this trend significant, though. Nevertheless, this is interesting as it runs counter to other studies that indicate that the EU is becoming more important as a target of contention.

STRATEGIC INNOVATION

The tendencies discussed above appear to refute the ideas of Attac as an organisation that represents new trends in terms of contents of demands and targets of such demands. But even if this may not be so, there is yet another aspect of novelty that remains to be treated. This concerns the actual actions of the organisation; to what extent is it possible to find a degree of innovation or novelty in this area. Attac is quite happy to characterise itself as a “movement of popular education oriented towards action”. What does this mean in practice?

In this regard, different dimensions can be discerned. In the first place, a distinction can be made between institutional and extra-institutional actions. To the first category belong meetings with politicians, petitioning, litigation, i.e., those actions that make use of the channels provided for by the institutional system. (In addition, debates involving politicians and bureaucrats are also included in this category, as well as in the educational category below.) Extra-institutional actions, in turn, can be separated into those actions that are aimed at politicians (manifestations for instance) and those that aim at other groups and the general public. Educational activities fundamentally belong to this latter set of actions (as do debates).

In the first place, it should be noted that Attac does indeed appear live up to its reputation for extra-parliamentary action. In both cases, about a quarter of the communiqués announce or relate to manifestations of one kind or another. (As above, certain communiqués may either announce a program of different actions, or not announce any action at all, which accounts for the difference in sums.) Beyond this similarity, however, there is a clear difference between

48. On the other hand, actual proximity to EU institutions and politicians do not seem to matter at all. In neither case did demands regarding or towards EU increase while the country was holding the chairmanship of the union (France, second half of 2000, and Sweden the following six months). The fears that the the end to nationally based summits and meetings would further withdraw the institutions of the union from its citizens, appears overdrawn on the basis of this evidence. Judging from this example, there never was such an association in the first place.

49. Imig and Tarrow, "Mapping the Europeanization of Contention".

the two national chapters in terms of communicating the use of institutional and educational actions; such activities appear much more frequently in association with Attac-Sweden. In contrast, when French communiqués actually mention concrete actions (as can be seen, this is often not the case) these tend to be in the form of manifestations, strikes, and similar kind of protest.

Table 1. Different kinds of actions taken by Attac.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Attac-France:</th>
<th>Attac-Sweden:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extra-institutional</td>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>26 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>42 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>46 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures should be treated with considerable caution. It is perfectly possible that most of the organisation’s educational work is never communicated in a way covered by the present analysis. Additionally, one should note that most institutional strategies are actually quite controversial among the organisation. In France, the question of relations to politicians has caused a rift within the organisation, and in Sweden similarly paradoxical situations has arisen; such as when Attac-Sweden met with PM Göran Persson but refused to have their photograph taken with him.51 (The reasons for this should possibly be found in an overriding fear of becoming too closely associated with the political establishment. Christian Losson and Paul Quinio quote one French member as complaining that, “[t]he discredit of the politicians is precisely the origin of Attac’s development. The more elected [politicians] there are within the organisation, the greater the risk that this discredit begins to affect us.”52)

Finally, it should be noted that there seems to be some positive association between institutionalised strategies and the targeting of national institutions. In both cases, this association borders on significance (sig. (two-tailed) = 0.53 (Sweden) and 0.52 (France). Too much should not be made of these figures, but they do seem to indicate a tendency towards lobbying when such strategies appear more possible, i.e., at the national level where access to politicians should be easier.

As was mentioned above, in discussing its actual actions, Attac is fond of indicating a mixture of tradition and innovation; on the one hand it draws on action repertoires familiar to social movement history in Sweden and France alike, most particularly the stress on popular education. On the other hand, the movement that it belongs to is often associated with a rather

51. Losson and Quinio, *Génération Seattle*, p. 140f; Author’s interview (taped) with Johanna Sandahl (Attac-Sverige), Stockholm: Sept. 3, 2002..
52. Losson and Quinio, *Génération Seattle*, p. 141.
great deal of media-savviness and cunning in devising actions to draw attention to their demands. Thus, Attac activists staged a mock invasion of Monaco to protest against financial havens, performed street theatre at the EU summit in Norrköping, challenged Swedish politicians to a quiz show regarding the same issues (the politicians, wisely, refused to be publicly humiliated and, to Attac’s earnest consternation, did not turn up\(^{54}\), and so on.\(^{55}\) Presently, Attac-France plans to use this year’s *Tour de France* as an opportunity to reach the public agenda.\(^{56}\)

The extent of this aspect is relatively hard to trace through the communiqués, and frequently moves into a subjective field. Here, reported events have been coded as such if they employ aspects of drama or innovation, but this is ultimately a highly subjective judgement to make. What is clear, however, is that elements of dramaturgy such as the ones cited above are actually relatively rare. In each case, only perhaps a dozen such events are announced over the entire period covered here. Whether this is a lot or very little, it is clear that such actions are far from dominating the actions of the organisation.

Above, domestication strategies were discussed, i.e. the directing of global demands against institutions at the national level. Another strategic alternative consists in “transnationalisation”, which is here taken to mean the coordinated use of actions in different countries for a common purpose. (In fact, trans-nationalisation could be seen as an internationally coordinated form of domestication.)

Attac’s character as a trans-national network is often taken for granted.\(^{57}\) As was noted above there are instances of coordination between the different national chapters, principally through meetings (either at social forums, protest events, or at special meetings) and through Internet and email contacts. However, the degree of actual coordination and the form it takes can be discussed. (Indeed, this is a bone of contention within the movement as well, with some chapters resisting what they see as a French drive to domination.\(^{58}\)) At the present, there are efforts to increase coordination, but as one activist working with this theme notes, “it is easy to think about, but what it means concretely and in practice is not always easy to define. We have different national and local contexts in which we express ourselves and from that

\(^{53}\) Smith, "Globalizing Resistance", 219f.

\(^{54}\) Attac-Sweden, “Verksamhetsberättelse”, internal document to be presented to Riksårsmötet in Malmö, March 2003.


\(^{57}\) E.g., Kolb, "The Impact of Transnational Protest".

[fact] different needs arise. … We are trying to define the issues on which we can work together, but they are quite limited.  

In order to study the actual extent of trans-national action in Attac, a distinction was made between those messages that explicitly mentioned actions in other countries, and those that did not. There are actually several examples of the former category, for instance a joint petition to the EU demanding action against “financial havens” and a co-ordinated campaign along with other social movements to rally national and European parliamentarians to oppose certain aspects of the GATS part of the WTO negotiations.

In spite of the misgivings quoted above, trans-nationalisation as a strategy appears to be quite frequent. In Sweden and France alike, over a third of the communiqués contain information on international activities, lending credibility to the interpretation of Attac as a global network or a trans-national advocacy coalition. Beyond this similarity, however, there are contrasting trends in the two national chapters. While there is a significant negative tendency in France in this area (Pearson’s r = -.227), there is a positive correlation between time and information on international activities in Sweden. In other words, it appears that while the degree of trans-national coordination is constant or even increasing in Attac-Sweden’s activities, it is becoming less important for Attac-France. It seems reasonable to associate this trend to the declining attention given to global demands in the latter country. Thus, it could be argued that it forms part of a general tendency towards a trend towards a “nationalisation” of the organisation in the French case.

Indeed, the set of communiqués indicates a duality that is particularly prominent in the action of Attac-France. On the one hand, there are actions targeting national issues through national institutions. On the other, there are activities undertaken in coordination with other chapters that to a much higher extent aim at global institutions and issues. One could possibly argue that these alternatives represent a more idealistic as opposed to a more pragmatic approach from the organisation in question. Of these, the latter tendency seems to be in ascendancy. Indeed, there is a significant trend towards less internationally coordinated actions in the French case, just as global demands and issues appear less frequently in the organisation’s communications.

It is impossible to discern a similar pattern among the documents circulated by Attac-Sweden, however. Some aspects, most notably the decreasing attention paid to global

---

demands do appear, but are statistically insignificant. Instead, the communiqués emitted by the Swedish chapter gives a much more random impression in general; often mixing different demands without directing them at a clear recipient. (An example: one communiqué prior to the EU summit in Copenhagen (Dec. 2002) managed to simultaneously deal with internal mobility within the union, object against perceived repression of protesters at the summit, question the enlargement of the union, attack the privatisations undertaken under the so-called Lisbon criteria, and, finally, protest against the impending war in Iraq. These demands were explicitly levelled at “politicians at the European, national, and local levels”. The communiqué was just over one page long.)

CONCLUSION

The present study has tried to show that in its actual operation, Attac does not entirely live up to its reputation for novelty. True enough, there are a number of new elements in the operation of the organisation and among its activities; examples of them include the use of the Internet as a communicative tool, the group’s involvement in the social forums mushrooming around the world, and so on. Additionally, it is certainly true that the organisation has taken a prominent position in an emerging movement that has managed to land a number of new themes – the WTO, the disruptive effects of quick financial transfers – on the political and public agenda around the world.

But parallel to such features, one can also trace a political logic that conspires against the creation of the truly global movement that some observers claim to be in the making: As do all groups, Attac essentially depends on working with and through sympathetic allies, direct relations with politicians, and public opinion; none of which is very abundant at the global level. On the contrary, Attac spokesmen often express deep misgivings about working beyond the nation state. As states one representative of the French chapter, “I think that fundamentally the answers are [to be found] at the local and national levels … I don’t think one can do anything at the international level. … The camp of action to do things is close to the governments.”

64. Christophe Ventura in interview with author, 2002.
In order to achieve political clout in national politics, Attac needs to appeal to a public opinion that often find global issues too remote to inspire much attention or support. The result is a search for demands and questions that will serve to mobilise supporters and attract additional adherents. As the former general secretary of Attac-France puts it, “I believe that Attac is capable […] of having an influence on the political agenda when its concerns are among the concerns of the public opinion. […] It’s not the tail that wags the dog [and] Attac is the tail.”

In practice, such concerns are likely to be issues that are to a high degree located at the national level. This is clearly seen in Attac-France where national demands have virtually crowded out global ones, a tendency that is parallel to the decreased weight allotted to coordinated action at the international level. (Some representatives from Attac-Sweden argue for a slightly different strategy consisting in the coupling of global and national issues. As one of them note, ”we try to think [about] local things like the closing-down of companies, GATS, privatisation as natural ways [to make people thing about] the global economic system.”)

The observation that Attac remains highly centred to the national level in terms of political action is consistent with earlier suggestions that have presented social movements as largely tied to the national level of governance. However, the fact that Attac is exhibiting this trait in spite of its alleged globalised character should add to the scepticism regarding whether a fundamental reorientation in the nature of contentious action is taking place. In addition, the observation above that global demands seem to be decreasing over time as their place is taken by more immediate goals at the national level, indicate how practical considerations may in fact make the movement increasingly conventional.

SPECULATION

Looking beyond these conclusions, what can be learnt from the discussion above? The most obvious suggestion is that national politics appears to retain its importance even if institutions such as parliaments and political parties lose the confidence and support of an increasing number of individuals while abdicating an increasing part of its power to political institutions beyond its borders. In this sense, the changing nature of political participation may not have

65. Author’s interview (taped) with Pierre Tartakowsky (General secretary, Attac-France), Paris: September 24, 2002.
67. Imig och Tarrow, "Mapping the Europeanization of Contention", Smith, "Globalizing Resistance", p. 221; Koopmans, "Globalization or Still National Politics?".
so large consequences as might be assumed, as its results are mediated by a more static or conventional structure of collective intermediation.

Furthermore, some of these points are reinforced if we look at the attraction of Attac in terms of membership (see table three below). In the first place, the group has not been very successful in attracting members. Secondly, membership figures show a stagnant trend in France, and a sharp decline in Sweden. These facts could be interpreted as evidence against the view of changing patterns of political participation; at the very least it seems safe to say that Attac has reaped very limited benefits from such changes.

Of course, one reason for this may be that Attac, as was demonstrated above, does not actually correspond very well to the expectations of novel behaviour that has been attached to the group. Thus, it would be naive to expect citizens interested in global issues and distrustful against national political structures to choose Attac as a vehicle for their participation.

This is possibly so, but that in turn may indicate a problem of a more general nature. Evidence on changing behaviour at the individual level appears rather clear. However, what is not very evident is whether there are actually any institutions or organisations that may serve to channel such new kinds of behaviour. Instead, one might find a growing disjunction not only between established institutions and new forms of political behaviour, but between such behaviour and all institutions for collective behaviour, including protest groups such the one studied in this paper. If even an organisation such as Attac appears unable to provide collective expression to the changes in political participation that are taking place at the individual level, the question is what other alternatives exist?

**Table 3, Membership figures for Attac.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Membership, Attac-France</th>
<th>Per 10,000 of 1998 population.</th>
<th>Membership, Attac-Sweden</th>
<th>Per 10,000 of 1998 population.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>5.411</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>15.049</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>23.277</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>27.635</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.500</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>29.782</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.750</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>28.950</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1.850</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sources: Attac-France, “Quelle nouvelle dynamique pour Attac?”; public internal document dated Nov. 24, 2003; Attac-Sweden, “Verksamhetsberättelse 2003” and “Verksamhetsberättelse för Attac-Sverige 2001-01-07 till 2001-12-31” public internal documents.)
REFERENCES

Aguiton, Christophe (Attac-France) in interview with author, September 26, 2002.

Ancelovici, Marcos,”Organizing against Globalization: The Case of ATTAC in France”,


Attac-France, Attac au Zénith (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2002).


Cassen, Bernard, Tout a commencé à Porto Alegre... Mille forums sociaux! (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2003).


Sandhåll, Johanna (Gemensamma arbetsgruppen) in interview with author, September 3, 2002.


Tartakowsky, Danielle, "Associations et champ politique" in Claire Andrieu, Gilles Le Béguec and Danielle Tartakowsky (eds.) Associations et champ politique (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2001), pp. 47-64.

Tartakowsky, Pierre (general secretary, Attac-France) in interview with author, September 24, 2002.


Unsgaard, Olav (Attac-Sverige) in interview with author, August 22, 2002.

Ventura, Christophe (Attac-France) in interview with author, 2002.