

1. The origins of protest cycles: an introduction

The unexpected emergence of cycles of protest is certainly not new. On the eve of ‘68, social scientists and politicians alike lamented the “end of ideologies”, the institutionalization of the labour movement and the consumerism society. At the turn of the millennium, the debate focused on the disappearance of a sense of community, the institutionalization of the “new” social movements, and the antipolitical stance of the new generations. The emergence of a new cycle testifies to a rupture in the prevailing forms of collective action, organizational strategy and collective identities. In this sense, the perception of a sudden break reflects the challenges that cycles of protest pose to existing repertoires of collective action. During protest cycles, new organizational structures emerge with new styles of activism (Tarrow 1989; della Porta 2004). What seems established is questioned anew.

Waves of protest do not however emerge from nothing. In the sociology of social movements various concepts have been used in order to depict movement survival beyond protest mobilization. Alberto Melucci (1996) has described the alternate stages of visibility and latency. Verta Taylor (1987) has analyzed the functioning of women organizations “lying in the doldrums”. It was observed that, even in low ebbs, social movement organizations do not really transform themselves into interest groups or charities (della Porta 2003). Social movement organizations from previous waves of mobilization assist the rise of protest, insuring continuity with the past.

Whilst often unexpected, the emergence of a protest cycle is indeed not as sudden as it appears. Protest requires existing organizational structures able to mobilize resources, and also less visible processes of networking and the construction of justification for collective action. Protest rises inside institutional actors and arenas: the ‘68 movement developed inside student unions as well as party structures (Tarrow 1989). The emerging movements are therefore influenced by the characteristics of the organizations that “host” them in their infancy, and their evolution is the product of a mix of traditions and challenges to those traditions. The perception of a sudden rupture is in part an outcome of the natural conformism in the social sciences, where the confirmation of general trends (such as the bureaucratization of labour unions or the institutionalization of social movement organizations) is often facilitated by the choice of adequate objects (such as the union leadership or the more visible and better structured NGOs). Vice-versa, the singling out of counter-
trends seems to be discouraged by their lack of visibility or of relevance within the dominant paradigm.

This emerges even more incisively in the movement for globalization from below, known as the “movement of movements”. Both data on activists related to the movement (della Porta, Andretta, Mosca and Reiter forthcoming; Agrikoliansky et al. 2005; Agrikoliansky and Sommier 2005) and on the organizational networks (Andretta, della Porta, Mosca and Reiter 2002 and 2003; Agrikoliansky, et al. 2005) show that, from Seattle onwards, many organizations formed in previous waves of mobilisation have reactivated. Although this mechanism of resource “reactivation” is not an absolute innovation, it does seem to have assumed particular relevance in the recent cycle of protests. In fact, on the one hand, the emergent movement has re-mobilised various pre-existing movements by interlacing several issues in an impressive piece of frame bridging. On the other hand, it has operated in the context of high organizational density, involving groups formed during several previous waves of mobilisation.

In this paper, we want to focus on these mechanisms of reactivation by observing the opportunities (and the limits) that they pose to protest. From a descriptive point of view, we aim to shed light on a stage of the life of organizational movements that often remains in shadow: reactivation. Research on the organization of social movements seems to focus more on the moments of “disclosed” protest and on those of institutionalization “in retreat”, often forgetting about the sequence of smaller steps that precede more visible transformations. Our attention will therefore be devoted to the second half of the 1990s, by looking at those phenomena in counter-tendency to the dominant images of protest institutionalization.

From an analytical point of view, we would like to look at the mechanisms that may explain the apparently sudden shift from institutionalization to protest; i.e., in our case, the shift from single-issue mobilisations to the “movement of movements”, from organizational fragmentation to the network, from pragmatism to “another world is possible”. Of course, the emergence of a cycle of protest has various causes which are normally framed in the research on social movements as resources to mobilise and opportunities to take, but also structural challenges of various types (see, for example, Smith 2001 on transnational movements). With more or less awareness, the research on social movements has gone beyond casual macro-macro inferences and has identified a series of mechanisms that James Coleman (1986) would define as macro-micro-macro links intervening in the process: the construction of identity (Melucci 1996), the processes of networking (Diani 1995), framing (Snow et al. 1986) and the escalation of action-strategies (della Porta 1995) represent some of them. Recently McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) have theorized the role of mechanisms aggregated in processes in the development of social movements.

In macro-analyses, causal mechanisms have been linked to systematic process analysis (Hall 2003) and “causal reconstruction” that “seeks to explain a given social phenomenon—a given event, structure or development—by identifying the process through which it is generated” (Mayntz 2004: 238). Adapting Renate Mayntz’s definition (ibid., 241) we shall consider mechanisms as concatenation of generative events linking macro causes (such as contextual transformation) to aggregated effects (cycle of protest) through transformation at the individual and organizational levels. Mechanisms refer therefore to intermediary steps between conditions and outcomes. Although in principle mechanisms could involve macro, meso and micro levels, we shall focus on the individual and organizational levels linking the macro to the meso and the micro. Since social mechanisms are recurrent processes taking place in time, we should pay attention to the various steps of (re)mobilization campaigns.

In this contribution, we will give attention particularly to the mechanisms employed in the course of action, and try to suggest an emergent character of protest campaigns. Through a conception of “eventful temporarity” (Sewell 1996) that considers the capacity of some events to interrupt or challenge the existing structures, we will in fact try to reconstruct the processes of protest-emergence. For this purpose we will focus on a sort of cross-fertilization (“contamination” in the Italian neologism) in action that will allow us to observe some of the emerging characteristics of
collective action. We will observe that action-campaigns and the networking structure of the globalization movement produce a situation of intense interaction between various individuals and organizations. This creates a process of contamination in action through mechanisms of multiplication of individual belonging and organizational networking, which in turn facilitates frame-bridging, the transformation of identities and the creation of informal links.

The emergence of new protest waves is normally explained by focusing on structural changes of a social or political type (figure n. 1). The (non) available organizational resources may however limit both the adaptation ability of existing organizations and the emergence of new ones. What we would like to emphasize in this article is that, beyond the available structures and the resources of particular movements, protest cycles activate specific organizational dynamics: a process of contamination in action is generated through participation in common campaigns. This process is displayed through a series of mechanisms such as the multiplication of individual belongings and organizational networkings that contribute to the formation of confidential links, frame bridging and identity shift. Hence, we will try to characterize some of the mechanisms of “contamination” between various experiences, moving beyond causal explanations.

Figure 1 – Mechanisms of contamination in action.

In particular, our focus will be on two areas of the movement, quite distinct and apparently in considerable tension with each other: the area of trade-unions’ protest and the area of solidarity with the global South. Comments on the protests against the WTO in Seattle had already emphasized internal elements of contradiction by juxtaposing the nationalistic protectionism of trade unions with the cosmopolitanism of ecological and peace movements and movements of solidarity with the third world. Sociological research also considers the two areas of mobilization as dominated by opposite values and dynamics: materialist values in the trade unions, postmaterialist in the movement on the third world; egoism among the former, altruism among the latter; the defense of self-interest as opposed to solidarity. However, as we will see in our analysis of the Italian case, large waves of mobilization have brought about in both organizational arenas the emergence of new strategies. Contacts between the various areas of the movement have been intensified and accompanied by processes of contamination in action.

Our empirical foundation is constituted mainly by in-depth interviews with representatives of 20 organizations, equally subdivided in the two areas. Interviews were conducted in Milan by Lorenzo Mosca. Despite the local scale of the research, many of the interviews cover leading or coordinative roles also at a national level, allowing interviews to be conducted on both territorial levels. The interviews were collected between May and November 2004, using a structured questionnaire focusing on the associations’ history, their organizational structure and their decision-making methodology, modalities of action and framing, as related to globalization processes and to the anti-
Our methodological preference entails a number of advantages and limitations. Half-structured interviews encourage the emergence of interviewees’ memories without placing them into a too strict framework. Moreover, the number of interviews is high enough to allow the reconstruction and comparison of various organizational processes. Obviously, the data found refer to subjective memories; this means that rather than “an objective” reconstruction of different organizational processes we have the perceptions of some of the activists involved, clearly central for a deeper understanding of the mobilization process.

2. Disaggregations and re-aggregations: at the origins of protest

At the origins of protest lie a number of organizational processes of dis-aggregation and above all re-aggregation. In the movement for globalization from below, the field of active organizations dealing with work issues includes at least three elements: critical trade unions, traditional trade unions, and new organizations. As we will see, the critical trade unions already emerged during the nineties from a series of mobilizations which took place in the working environment. In their forms of action, organizational formulas and argumentation, these organizations differed from the confederate trade unions in that they cultivated the ideas of direct action, participative democracy and “class identity”. During the mobilizations for and after Genoa, some of these ideas re-penetrated, through mechanisms of “social appropriation” (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001), the traditional trade unions, especially in some of the conventionally more radical areas (such as metalworkers). However, labour issues (especially concerning temporary work) have also been raised by groups born within the trade-union world.

In fact critical trade unions (also called bases, or rank-and-file trade unions) emerged from within the traditional trade unions, through inter-organizational competition during waves of protest against what was perceived as a betrayal of the traditional trade unions. The origins of the Comitati Unitari di Base (Basis Unitarian Committees – Cub), founded in 1992, are marked by the presence of a group that abandoned the metalworkers trade union Fim-Cisl and moved from “an area of delegates, factory councils and corporate structures that promoted self-convened assemblies” in order to refute the contract signed by the confederated trade unions (int. 4, pp. 1 ff.). During the same mobilization against the pension reform proposed by the Amato government, another critical trade union, Slai Cobas, was founded at Alfa Romeo and at Fiat. As a representative of the organization remembers: “the Duomo square was full and Carniti [former secretary of the Cisl, catholic trade union] and other trade unionists could not speak, and we, the people of Alfa, organized a counter-meeting by gathering together 100,000 people on the Duomo-square. All this was because the trade unions agreed to the pensions’ cut” (int. 3, p. 1). During those years, protest cycles developed also in the public sector. The Cobas school arose from the conflict in the public education sector that produced scissions in the traditional trade unions: “at the beginning it arose not as Cobas itself but as an assembly of schools struggling ... there were persons who firstly joined and then abandoned the Cgil-tradition and who were authentically engaged in the movement.”(int. 5, pp. 1-2, passim). Similarly, Slai Cobas in the transport sector gathers “the inheritance of what was the left wing of trade-unions broadly speaking, because the majority of those who founded Slai Cobas in Atm [public transport company in Milan] come from the Cgil and belonged to the left faction of the Cgil” (int. 6, p. 17). One characteristic of critical trade unions is their fragmented, though consistent, presence in working places. As one of the founders of Sin.Cobas reminds, “it is not that all the basic trade unionism was fragmented at a certain point. It is the very act of birth that has been fragmentary, because they arose from below and in various categories and starting from workplaces, it was the constituent process of basic-trade unionism that did not generate a unique thing but an archipelago” (int. 2, pp. 1-2).

The movement involves however even more traditional trade unions. Fiom was present from the very beginning in the Genoa Social Forum against the G8. Its representative emphasizes the particular openness of the organization to movements with a deep sensibility for the dynamics of participation from below, as well as attention to democracy in the workplace: “there was a stage, in
the seventies, when the metalworkers trade union became a really unitary one... It has always been clear to the metal-mechanics that unity is first of all unity among workers” (int. 1, p. 6). However, blocs of more traditional trade unions were also present in Genoa. As the Cisl representative reminds, “there certainly were youngsters from the Fim and people of the Cisl, even if not the trade union itself. There were single leaders and members that decided to go in a private capacity” (int. 7, pp. 5-6). These factions were in fact followed, although with many uncertainties, by the Cgil whose left wing was already present in Genoa and which afterwards supported the European Social Forum of Florence by undertaking considerable organizational costs.

Finally, the movement generated active organizations on labour issues which were, however, immediately linked to a re-definition of the very concept of worker (this is the case, for example, with the campaigns on temporary labour maintained by MayDay and San Precario).

A similar analysis to the one concerning trade unions applies to the organizations engaged in solidarity projects with the global South. However, in the latter case, reference to the transnational dimension precedes adherence to the movement in favour of the globalization of rights. Some of these organizations were present in the seventies and remained active in the latency decade of the eighties, gradually moderating their claims and strategies of action and progressively institutionalizing (della Porta 1996).

The area of organizations engaged in campaigns of solidarity with the Third world also includes various elements: traditional associations (Acli, Arci and Manitese), organizations for international cooperation that have arisen during the nineties (Emergency -Life Support for Civilian War Victims and “Un ponte per” [a Bridge for]) as well as new groups active on the issue of fair trade and life-styles (the Chico Mendes Cooperative, Acea, The Forum on Critical Consumerism, The Group on Critical Consumerism and Lilliput). It is interesting to notice that many of the analyzed organizations deal with several issues at the same time.

As far as the new social movements are concerned, the solidarity movement has its origins at the end of the 19th century, in the League for Human Rights in France and in the English humanist clubs against colonialism and slavery (Passy 2001: 9). However, one had to wait until the end of the seventies before a significant movement able to articulate politically the issue of human rights and put it in a coherent framework emerged in Europe (ibid.) and before the Italian organizations could abandon its traditional philanthropic and charitable orientation (Ranci 2001). Mobilizations on globalization represented a moment of discontinuity that pushed these organizations to return to the territory of protest, to reconsider their own organizational modalities and to reshape their own identity. Moreover, the nineties also marked the emergence of organizations and groups indicating new organizational formulas (the network, the method of consensus), new issues (political consumerism) and new forms of action (centred on life styles and symbolic elements).

As far as more traditional associations are concerned, an interest in the international dimension emerged already during the seventies and became stronger during the (modestly visible) antiwar movement of the nineties. The representative we interviewed from Acli identifies the emergence of the international peace sector in his organization towards the “end of the sixties / beginning of the seventies, at the turning point and distancing from the linkages with the Christian Democracy with a strong fracture from the church and an internal one that generated the Christian Workers’ Movement [which leave Acli for not sharing the association’s ‘socialist turn’] and in that environment a greater interest towards the international dimension, which at the time meant the internationalist movements related to Vietnam, was developed” (int. 16, pp. 1-2).

Also the Arci, already present in the first World Social Forum (WsF), has engaged in international issues for a long time. In the words of a representative of the association: “the involvement of Arci was strongly coherent with its previous engagement ... Arci has always had an internationalist tradition, starting with Chile, Vietnam, etc., so it was no big effort to accept the challenge and engage in the territory of a different globalization. Obviously it did it with greater energy, because the new impetus is that there is a greater demand for change in society, which was not so strong earlier” (int. 17, p. 6). If “the end of the socialist countries, the fall of the Berlin wall
and then of the Soviet empire” initially frustrated the request for change, “the failures of neoliberal globalization came to show that that model, those principles, those values were wrong; young people were the first protagonists of this different perception of reality. And when the mobilization started, Arci was a protagonist of the construction of the way to Genoa” (ibid., 4).

Founded in 1964, Manitese suffered a fracture in the seventies and then a re-foundation “as a movement with a leftist catholic stamp” (in Cedroni 2004: 295). The association has a long experience of international involvement which has brought it “naturally” to the movement on globalization: “for many years we have been part of European and international networks that operate mainly on development issues ... the social forum movement was something we were naturally going to be a part of, although there may be things that we do not share” (ibid.).

The protests against the first Gulf war and then in the former Yugoslavia have contributed to the emergence of some organizations founded during the nineties which operate specifically on development cooperation issues. Created in 1991, “Un Ponte per” has been part of the movement since 2000 and participated in the counter-summit of Prague [2000] by remobilizing “people that came from a political background dating to ‘68”. The organization arrived at the second Porto Alegre gathering with a campaign on date palms: “Un Ponte per had a recognized role also because at the time we were the only ones that talked about Iraq, therefore we have always been recognized precisely because of the continuous campaigns and the job we have done in Iraq through a number of actions” (int. 11, p. 4 and p. 6). Similarly, Emergency was created in 1994 with the objective of “bringing medical-surgery health assistance which at the beginning was mainly urgent surgery for war victims … direct victims and, even more indirect victims of poverty; or in Afghanistan now we pursue projects concerning the health of prisoners” (int. 18, p. 1).

New active networks on the issues of critical consumerism and life-styles have emerged since the Seattle protest and obviously refer back to the Wsf of Porto Alegre. An example is the “Lilliput network for a just economy” which unites a number of secular and catholic associations, environmentalist and charity groups active in the fields of international cooperation and voluntary service with the objective of “joining with one voice our multiple forms of resistance to the economic choices that concentrate power in the hands of a few and prefer the logic of profit and consumerism to the protection of life, human dignity, health and the environment” (AA.VV. 2001: 202). Close to the Lilliput network, the “Patto per la Pace” [Pact for Peace] produced a new organizational dynamic, combining a considerable part of the pacifist-environmentalist sector of the Italian anti-liberal movement. This happened when “a number of associations, some of which participated to the social forums and others that remained outside, decided to work on the issues of globalization and created a manifesto which was the product of a long process of participation, since we divided into working groups and each elaborated different proposals. At the end we wrote a manifesto called ‘Globalizzare i diritti’ [Globalizing rights] focused on the issues present in Porto Alegre: war, the environment, the economy, etc. It was meant to be a relationship between networks, able to produce a more meaningful impact on society with regard to these issues ... So we managed to involve the Cisl and subsequently the Cgil, which did not participate immediately in this process, and there were Acea – also part of the Forum on Critical Consumerism – Manitese, Emergency, Pax Christi, Arci, Acil, Legambiente, Lilliput. So the pact emerged as a network of decentralized cooperation aiming to have a better impact on society and to disseminate the issues of Porto Alegre”(int. 17, pp. 7-8). Similarly, the Forum on Critical Consumerism was created in 2002 “as a result of the decision of a series of analogous actors to work on the issue of alternative consumerism: the cooperative Mag2, the cooperative Chico Mendes, etc. Among the members of the forum on critical consumerism there is also the former working group on critical consumerism of the Milan Social Forum, which has not been fused with the forum and continues to meet promoting independent initiatives as well” (int. 14, p. 1).

The new protest cycle against war has also been characterized by conglomerations that manage to hold together entirely different groups. As a representative of the Arci reminds: “to mention something of a miracle that happened ...when we protested after the beginning of the Iraq war with
a participation of 150,000 people in Milan, Dax [antifascist militant from a Milan social center] was killed two days before and we all agreed that the social centers’ march in his memory would merge in the antiwar demonstration. This is extraordinary for Milan! Dax’s mother talked from the stage: it was the only external intervention, something quite significant” (int. 17, p. 11-12). Even the Acli sectors involved in the movement have participated in the various demonstrations conducted in Italy and Europe: “in these events we are generally always present, from Genoa to the Perugia-Assisi marches to city demonstrations, but also those outside Italy such as Nice or other mobilizations similar to the ones of the 15 February and 20 March... we do not miss any of these appointments. We were there, we were in Genoa” (int. 16, p. 2).

3. Organizational transformations: from latency to campaign mobilization

The pre- and post-Seattle protest campaigns have reactivated repertoires of the past and created new forms of action. If during the nineties moderation and institutionalization prevailed in the labour world, the little-known experiences of the critical trade unions preserved a number of tendencies that became visible during the protest cycles of the new millennium. Our interviewees emphasize direct forms of action, organizational structure “from below”, and “class” identity. During the protests, some of the frames and strategies proposed by critical trade unions found resonance in more institutional organizations; both actors would then be influenced by their encounter with new emerging organizations. Moreover, many organizations committed to international solidarity have since the seventies reactivated on globalization issues and introduced a series of innovations in the repertoires of action (diversified and media-related), in the organizational formulas (towards more participative structures) and in the framing. They have also been approached by new organizations challenging the traditional ones by proposing new organizational models and forms of action and identity.

3.1. Transformations in the repertoires: between conflict and witness

Starting from the mid-nineties, protest cycles in the labour world became visible in the strikes of workers from the public sector in Great Britain (mail and transport), France (public transport), Spain and Germany (della Porta 2006). Like the Italian case, however, these waves of protest were accompanied by other typical instruments of industrial conflict such as boycotting campaigns or general strikes (Piven and Cloward 2000). Participation in the globalization movement seems to have widened further the trade unionist repertoires of action by bringing greater attention to forms of direct action (McNally 2001: 81; Tait 2005: 48). While discussing critical trade unions we have already mentioned some of the protest cycles in the workplace, presented by their protagonists as acts of resistance to concertation (regular consultation by the leaders of peaks organizations, especially those representing labor and management, both with each other and with government representatives) in the name of conflict. First of all, these mobilizations mark a return to forms of collective action in the factories through more “radical” forms of strike: “practice means to strike, which is the main tool, and I have the impression that in recent months, due to what the railway workers did in Melfi [Fiat factory in the South of the country], etc. it has been re-valued even inside the movement. Earlier there was a critique from within parts of the movement that said ‘it is old stuff...it does not help anymore’” (int. 2, p. 21).

Some forms of strike openly challenge the regulation norms approved during the nineties, following the agreement of traditional trade unions. Despite criticism from institutional trade unions and center-left parties, the “wild-cat” strike was used during the nineties in schools (int. 5, p. 6) and also in other areas of public services such as the transport. As the Slai-Cobas representative of the railway sector explains, spontaneous strikes in several Italian cities during December 2003 had been preceded by similar initiatives in the second half of the previous decade. An example concerns “the public sector workers in Rome during March ‘97 that violated the law. That strike was strongly demonized by everyone and five drivers were singled out with calls for them to be fired (later sanctioned with 5 months of suspension from work). The former mayor of the capital city Rutelli
[then leader of the center-left coalition] asked for them to be fired and the former secretary of the Cgil Sergio Cofferati supported the request by criticizing the strike” (int. 6, p. 10).

These often radical forms of strike were accompanied by direct action such as street blockades, often used during the mobilizations against industrial restructuring: “we, the people of Alpha Romeo, blocked the motorway about 50 times during the last year and a half … when 500 policemen went to Melfi, we heard of it at seven in the morning, and at ten o’clock we were blocking the street in a sign of solidarity. … We have tried everything: we blocked motorway, we went to Malpensa [airport of Milan], to the central station and so on, but three or four times we also went to see the Cardinal. So, we tried many different things” (int. 3, p. 9). The forms of action became more radical on some concrete claims during major conflicts in the factories: “especially in Cassino [where a Fiat factory is present], we organized street blockades with burning barricades but we never clashed with the police, we blocked the traffic on the highway or created a mess so that no one could enter the factory” (int. 2, p. 21).

During protest cycles, the “return to conflict” is also often claimed by traditional trade unions or at least by some of their members. As an example, the “harder” forms of action are also defended by the Fiom, whose representative emphasizes the “return to conflict” through “types of struggle such as the blocking front desks, strikes etc. which were abandoned in previous years” (int. 1, p. 6-7). These and other forms of action determine a conflict shift from the factory to the territory, with a return to repertoires of labour struggle developed during previous protest cycles (cfr. Piven and Cloward 2000). As our interviewees puts it, action on the ground involves “a common denominator which is spontaneity and … solidarity” (int. 6, p. 12).

Boycotting is another innovative (or at least little used) campaign. The Cub representative emphasizes the role of boycotting campaigns, “such as that against Danone and the one against Siemens in order to fight externalization” (int. 4, p. 11). Moreover there has been a rise in spectacular demonstrations such as MayDay, the demonstration against job insecurity taking place on the 1 of May. The initiative emerged outside the trade-union world but has now partially involved it and constitutes a perfect illustration of strategic innovations allied to traditional actions such as marches. Like in Seattle, allegorical carriages are constructed during MayDay and, similarly to the tactic of the Critical Mass, processions of bicycles cross the city through unexpected paths:

“there is such a variety of elements and the procession is so different from classic conformations… the Critical Mass precedes it and includes about 500/1000 bicycles that move back and forth, cross the city and join the march, there is –in front of the carriage– a joyful and playful pink section of clowns and percussionists … and then I think there is a little bit of competition regarding who makes the nicest carriage, a little bit like a carnival in the sense that in previous years everyone characterized in a specific way its own carriage…imagine 50 very eye-catching carriages, each focusing on different forms of insecurity (housing, life, Co.co.co [atypical form of contract]), the carriage with a guy wearing a top hat and a jacket and that holds in chains the workers-stilts” (int. 8, p. 5).

On the other hand the new organizations have adopted traditional forms of unionist action and have adapted them to a different environment. For example the picketing campaigns which precede MayDay and which are conducted in front of commercial chains of stores that use temporary labour and seek to stay open even during the public holiday of the first May. Protests aim at symbolic impact: “To do this in the cathedrals of consumer goods… it is an action of sense production … to enter a shopping centre and to contest its institutional standing certainly not because of its being a supermarket but as an assembly point, as a social environment, as a public environment. And this creates immediate competition: in fact the Metropoli shopping centre was closed after our action, certainly not because it stopped making profits or because the economic damage was so great, but because in that ‘sacred’ moment, the social peace that the shopping centre really sells … when it is a realm of the customer, a cathedral, a sacred place, in that moment it totally breaks down. The shopping centre cannot afford to lose that sense and therefore it prefers to shut down. You have polluted that atmosphere and everything that is associated with it” (int. 8, p. 8).
Protests undertaken by the new organizations (which include both traditional and critical trade unions) are characterized by attention to symbolic messages through a process of “naming and shaming”. An example is the temporary occupation of shopping centres, sometimes accompanied by a symbolic appropriation of goods: “We went to organize an action at Esselunga [an Italian supermarket] and set stands with the logos of Saint Precario in front of the tills, we also distributed leaflets and spoke to the workers, then one of the Esselunga employees told us of his working experience. There was no expropriation in the sense that nobody went in, took stuff and went out, there was just a toast because we opened a few bottles of sparkling wine and offered something to eat but we remained within the shop. So we never thought of the value of the goods because we were interested in both polluting and subverting the image that the company tries to provide - that nice Esselunga, caring about the consumer – and awaken the consciousness of the workers in that place” (ibid., 12-13).

The new organizations also devote considerable attention to the effects of raising awareness among workers (especially temporary ones) and among the public. Interviewees of the group Chainworkers talk about the aggregative but also culturally explosive function of the so-called Saint Precario points. These are presented as aggregative moments through “a review of contemporary media broadcasts that refer not only to labour issues but also to a narrative of reality through documentaries which have been very successful from Michael Moore on … The point is to bring people together around a certain issue, like labour conditions … it is difficult to rent a house for less than 800 euros, it is hard to find a job, it is difficult to have children because if you are pregnant you are fired … so it’s all like this. The fact of having people that come here and feel like talking about it is already a large success because one always learns about the real situation and because one often thinks ‘well I’m a loser, I’m not even able to pay the rent, I do not succeed in finding a job, I can’t have a family’. Instead, the problem is wider in the sense that a lot of people like you are living under the same conditions and if one does not get moving, if one does not go out and cause a fuss and if one doesn’t make claims in the workplace, things just don’t change. This is the concept” (ibid.).

In the most common campaigns of mobilization, trade unions – both critical and not - have imported symbolic and innovative forms of action. As an example, the representative of the Sin.Cobas emphasizes “a meeting in front of the McDonald’s in the Duomo square … we were there with several social centres, such as the Bulk. The Bulk unloaded there a whole truck of debris, blocking the street for four hours. What was the point? The point was that the next day a general strike was planned and temporary workers could not exercise this right because they feared some act of revenge on the part of their employers. When you are a temporary worker, article 18 [of the Workers’ Charter, that limits the possibility of firing] does not apply to you because you can institutionally be fired. The message was: all workers are temporary and they cannot strike tomorrow, so today we strike on their behalf and stop activities for a few hours so that their employers are damaged. So this is also a new experience, intervening in a workplace where there are only temporary subjects that cannot therefore exercise their rights although they formally possess them, and so you intervene from outside. This is somehow a new experience, an action that rediscovers an old way of being a trade-unionist, that refers to almost a century ago when the camere del lavoro [labour chambers] and the new labour unions acting on the ground emerged” (int. 2, pp. 22-23).

If, on the one hand, trade-unions introduced repertoires of action linked to conflicts in the workplace, solidarity organizations emphasized the importance of witness meant to persuade rather than conquer. Passy has underlined a change in the repertoires of action used by solidarity organizations: “their traditional assistance- oriented praxis is now paralleled by a political praxis based on the same political cleavage in which the other new social movements are anchored” (2001: 10-11). In this area, more traditional organizations tend to use demonstrations in public squares in order to sensitize the public. Among traditional organizations, the Global March against the exploitation of child labour is as an example of a characteristic action by Manitese, which is
inspired by the Indian tradition and has a symbolic meaning: “every year we organize a procession composed of school children and a hundred up to a thousand people. Therefore it is not a real protest procession in its slogans, symbols and participants, but rather a demonstrative one, with short distances and a headquarters in a public square where informative material is distributed and events are organized … I think that it is almost symbolic. The Global March in India has a quite particular meaning because the movement started in India and has been proposed as a march in Europe as well but I would say that it has more of a symbolic value rather than a protest one” (int. 13, p. 12).

Moreover, the new organizations active in the field of social solidarity propose and diffuse forms of action based on the practice of alternative lifestyles in order to show the possibility of a completely alternative economy that escapes the imperatives of the neoliberal model: “what is interesting for us concerns the different lifestyles, to change one’s own lifestyle. Critical consumerism does not only mean boycotting campaigns but also to propose an alternative … If you only tell people ‘critique! critique! critique!’, then they will answer to you ‘ok, but what am I supposed to do?’ You must show them the alternatives and so you have the Gas [Groups of solidarity purchase] and then the fair trade and the biological food etc. because you cannot only criticize... it is not by chance that a proposal to create a District for Solidaristic Economy has been launched because this means providing an economic alternative to the problems of consumerism” (int. 14, pp. 7-8). Other organizations also emphasize the pars construens of action. The Acea representative underlines that: “there are investigations, surveys and research, according to us this means consumer protection ... this is one part of Acea. Then the other part is ‘public squares of solidarity’, because we are not there just for a ‘no’ politics but we stand for a ‘yes’ politics, we stand for a politics of pro-posal, not only of pro-test! As far as our proposals are concerned we work on ethical and alternative consumerism because we think that they represent the main way to modify some aspects of globalization that we do not like, in the field of consumer treatment... we stand for working modalities that provide consumers with tools for the interpretation of reality, we want to teach responsible consumerism and therefore we organize training courses, conferences, exhibitions, information leaflets and public square initiatives” (int. 20, p. 1 and 3). The importance of practicing concrete alternatives that go beyond public square events is emphasized also in other cases: “one of the characterizing elements of the Lilliput network in the movement has been to practice concrete alternatives... this is also a bit the nature of the network because it has been created by the fair trade, by the ethical finance, by the responsible consumerism, by the groups of solidarity purchase etc. So on the one hand concrete alternatives are practiced and on the other the tendency is to participate in specific campaigns ... from banks involved in weapons-trade, to environmental issues” (int. 12, pp. 10-11).

A different strategy characterizes organizations active in “project-cooperation”, in development projects ‘from below’ strongly linked to the territory. “Un Ponte Per” for example bridges the critique of globalization with cooperation plans: “we are of course an association involved in politics but we are above all a humanitarian association. It is the choice that you make on projects (a political and an ethical choice), it affects the territory where you operate. Let me give you an example: the programme on education that I was following in Iraq was based on construction from below and on consensus, restructuring some schools that we agreed should be made starting at the local level, from the district, and you tried to find resources for restructuring there. So I didn’t go looking for a big enterprise or a company but the important thing was that everything could return to the local territory, from an economic and reinvestment point of view, from the point of view of professionalism, of professional acknowledgment. So through action, in our case through ‘project-cooperation’, we show that we do not share the whole globalization discourse because our method is a work of reconstruction and research from below, re-affirmation and return to the territory” (int. 11, pp. 8-9). According to these organizations: “we believe that if cooperation is really to empower what we define civil society with some tools, you must put yourself in the place of the people who have the right to possess in a very short time the tools that can help them” (ibid., 3).
Hence, in the two cases of trade unions and associations active in the field of international solidarity, the movement for globalization from below emerges both as a reactivation of protest in terms of repertoires specific to each area (conflict in the case of the trade unions; witness in that of solidarity organizations) and in the emergence of new repertoires, more adequate to involving insecure workers and citizen-consumers.

3.2. Transformations in the organizational structure: between spontaneous action and the network

From an organizational point of view, in the period previous to the big waves of protest of the new century, alternative formulas to the institutionalized ones that dominated the movement have been maintained. In the countries characterized by a representative system of corporative interests, transformations involved mainly certain trade unions in the public sector. In the countries with a pluralistic tradition, instead, new critical trade unions emerged (Solidarie, Unitarie, Démocratique in France, see Béroud, Mouriaux and Vakaloulis 1998: 49; on Spain, Moody 1997). Common to all of them is the critique of the bureaucratization of traditional trade unions and the move towards a more participative model, plus a tendency to “externalize” conflicts emerging out of the working place, where trade unions tend to be weak (Denis 2005: 287). Critical trade unions maintain a style of organization which is alternative to the bureaucratization of official trade-unions, in the name of unionist democracy. Action in the community has been adopted by some American trade unions as a good strategy for mobilizing a fragmented base of reference (Tait 2005: 85; Chris Tilly 2004).

Our research also confirms the emergence in the critical-trade unions of a strong critique to delegation, in the name of direct worker participation as a forgotten form of democracy in the workplace. The Slai-Cobas interviewee underlines this with an example: “We have not grounded our trade union on the basis of a workers’ charter where representation is conferred by the law. This is the first point, the second point is that all our proposals have been checked beforehand by the workers. This is also the meaning of democracy in the workplace –you start and when you introduce a platform, before discussing it with companies, you present it to the workers and you vote on it in a referendum … absolutely … re-fe-ren-dum and this must concerns all the rest: the national contract, local agreements, etc. they must be voted on in a referendum and it must be a binding referendum” (int. 6, p. 9).

The critical trade unions challenge the organizational conception of the confederative ones also with regard to their relationship to the worker, who is considered an activist rather than a member. As the representative of the Cobas school remembers, “We started to prepare cards in 2000 in Milan; before that we had never made them. I remember that in several assemblies many teachers who had participated in previous movements and many ‘comrades’ refused this idea of constituting an organization, of enrolling and having cards. Some said ‘What!? We tore the Cgil cards and now we do it ourselves?’ This denial was strongly present... We still have entire schools that maintain this tradition and that, from the very beginning, were part of the formation of grass-roots committees, they refer to them, they participate in the assemblies and even have the Rappresentanze Sindacali Unitarie [Rsu –Unitary Union Representations that is the institutional organism elected by the workers for their representation within the workplace], but they are not enrolled!” (int. 5, p. 8).

Although with different emphases, the critical trade unions are also political subjects which, instead of being corporative, frame their specific interventions on labour issues in a more complex vision of society. As an example, “the challenge for Cobas ... was to succeed in uniting the political and trade-unionist project within the same organization ... Basically the Cobas’ initial idea was: we must succeed in presenting trade-unionist claims as a category, as a political claim, we must say that today trade-unionist claims in a specific sector are immediately political … we must unite the political and the unionist and overcome the classic trade-unionist organization whose political reference is elsewhere and is therefore differently structured … it was our understanding that it was necessary to avoid a model in which unionist claims only concern your salary and then leave to
political representation the issues of what kind of school you want, what its perspectives should be, what the social function of your work should be. This classic labour division between what pertains to the trade unions and what pertains to the role of political parties in parliament was challenged” (ibid., 3).

In this context, the cycle of protest did not bring critical and traditional trade unions closer together, nor did it result in uniting the traditional trade unions. However, what did take place was an encounter with organizational models external to the labour world. The new associations, emerging directly from the movement, have an organizational structure which is in fact extremely reticular, privileging decentralized initiative around common symbols. This is the case, for example, of the network active on temporary work and coagulated around the symbol of San Precario: “several groups that we do not even know have created events on the territory around this metaphor ... for example they organized, in the South, a procession with the saint because the coast is being privatized, in the sense that there is no more public access to the beaches, and so they brought the saint to the beach. I do not know the people who organized this action, but they felt like taking the saint and carry him in a procession. The fact of creating a metaphor, something that allows people to join each other and bring together their claims in a certain territory, I see it as a big success” (int. 8, p. 12).

Solidarity organizations are also confronted constantly with the issue of democracy and this generates more or less significant organizational changes. With regard to the old solidarity associations of the late 20th century, in more recent organizations “a decentralized and more democratic organizational structure has replaced a hierarchical and centralized structure” (Passy 2001: 11). Organizations with a long history, although not modifying radically their own structures, have introduced several innovations in order to favour and advocate a larger participation of their members, whilst new organizations have adopted decisional methods and structures that radically break with a representative conception of democracy.

Some of the older organizations, where more hierarchical organizational models still prevail (int. 16, p. 8), react to mobilizations by bringing more attention to their base. Manitese, for example, has started to reflect on its decisional methods, producing several changes, although limited to “a passage from a hierarchical management determined by the past to a shared formula with several units within Manitese that cover an advisory, controlling role etc ... The directive council is supported by the committees which refer to internal and external activities, and developmental education, and the different projects are supported by voluntary commissions tied to the different continents, so there are several branches, and this is already a particular way of power-management within the association. In a generalized manner for Manitese, and more and more in the most recent period, the effort is to arrive at decisions with collective consensus” (int. 13, pp. 6-7). Generally speaking, Manitese has recently tried to arrive at collective, consensus-based decisions (ibid.).

In the case of more recent organizations engaged in international cooperation such as Emergency, the movement has brought on a growth-crisis, provoked by the exponential increase in “the demand for information but also for participation, for wanting to help not only in economic terms, but really wanting to do something” (int. 18, pp. 1-2). This challenge leads to a more participative conception of the organization. As a volunteer puts it: “we have often organized meetings with the volunteers so that we could confront and understand each other; it is as if a little baby suddenly became an adult and took steps forward too quickly, so we have almost collapsed in our offices, we have had moments of great tension because of the work load or because of the pressures we have felt on us, because it felt wrong to say ‘no, we can’t do it’, ‘we can’t manage to be present’, ‘we’re not succeeding with this’. And this has been the impulse for all changes... one year ago we created the territorial groups... the associates’ assembly has also increased” (ibid., 13).

However, the more relevant organizational innovations come from the new groups on lifestyles, born as a result of the mobilizations on globalization. In only two years of existence, Lilliput has tried to improve its internal democracy through structures able “to facilitate” interaction: “an organism called ‘subnodo’ [sub–knot] has been created, with the function of joining and not
coordinating but facilitating the local junctures, issue-working groups and so on” (int. 12, p. 2). Lilliput has also brought to the Italian movement new decision-making methodologies such as the method of consensus, initially received with scepticism but then adopted by the movement at various levels: “Lilliput was already using completely different methods, some more effective, some less so, but with great emphasis on the consensus method ... a horizontal approach and the attempt to avoid ‘assemblearism’ by adopting some precise rules with regards to debates and the decision-making process. These things have also created dissent because they were not yet accepted in the movement whilst later they were accepted even in other areas such as the ‘Stop the war’ committee” (ibid., 3). Although slowing down the decision-making time (and being criticized for this by the representatives of the more decisionist organizations like Acea, int. 20, pp. 5-6), the consensus method appears legitimating: “of course all this requires a long time but I think that it has the advantage of making comparisons easier, respecting more the positions of all and often managing to produce more effective decisions in the sense that they are more shared. So we believe that in the long term it has proved to be a good thing” (int. 12, pp. 5-6).

Hence, in both areas, the organizational structures of the movement appear flexible and mutable, with a “variable geometry” configuration (Castells 1996) made of decompositions and continuous reframing in which the end of an experience often constitutes also the seed that leads to the generation of new groups. As an interviewee put it: “even if the social forums’ structure did not resist, a thousand things arose in other places and, in any case, we have known each other at least on a personal level and we carry on meeting so it has certainly started a participative process” (int. 15, p. 5).

3.3. Transformations in the definition of identity: globalization and neoliberalism

Even though during the eighties and nineties the movements’ visible evolution was oriented towards specialization on single issues (see Ranci 2001 for solidarity), some more general frames, later inspiring the discussion on “global social unionism”, were being maintained (a Josselin 2002: 179). Alter-mondialist frames emerged for example in France during the December 1995 wave of strikes in the public sector (Contamin 2005: 247). Even in the organizations of the peace movement, a passage from single-issue frames to multi-issue frames has been emphasized (Marullo, Pagnucco and Smith 1996). The “poor workers’ unions” have played a particularly important role in linking the claims of the workplace with public-sector claims, “jobs and justice” (Tait 2005). In Italy, critical trade unions have proposed an old worker identity based on “class”. As the Sin.Cobas representative puts it “class means clashing with the concertative regime, which means top-down collaboration and the approval of neoliberal politics, and I refer to conflict, defence of the workers, independence from employers, governments and parties” (int. 2, p. 2).

During the cycles of protest, identification with the working class and with citizens more generally has been strengthened. According to the Slai.Cobas representative, in the transport sector of Milan the “wild” strike of December 2003 produced solidarity because the drivers were also striking in the name of workers who did not have the same possibility: “We, the public-transport workers have been a bit of a bastion, conducting revenge on behalf of all those categories of workers who suffer in their workplaces and who would do the same as us but cannot afford to because of all the world of temporaryness, of newly hired people, of people who cannot afford to strike without losing their job, they lose the only support they have in life, it is just a survival thing ... the worker does not have the minimal possibility of protecting himself, of protecting his salary, the rights he has obtained etc. so we, the people who were breaking that system have been seen as instituting revenge, as if ‘finally someone tried it’ and the citizens have been even stronger than the media: that was an exceptional thing” (int. 6, p. 5).

Apart from recalling class identity, there has also been attention to a redefinition of the concept and the function of labour. This innovation is particularly visible in the organizations that emerged from the movement, combining labour issues with society ones. In the Chainworkers discourse,
with the diffusion of temporary work in the commercial chains (Blockbuster, McDonald’s), “we started to talk about social temporaryness” to the “whole working class”, “not just workers of the commercial chains, this was something much larger. The message was extended to all working categories because we realized that this process of increasing job insecurity was involving not only the commercial chains but all the companies too, in the sense that the new workers were not hired but signed Co.Co.Co contracts etc. Generally speaking the persons were between 25 and 30 years and did not say ‘I have been hired, I found a job’ but ‘I have a temporary contract’” (int. 8, p. 1).

The action on temporary work was extended from labour issues to everyday life: “Saint Precario has five axes of security which are: income, house, love and friendship, access and services. So within these five themes there is always a kind of affinity with others, not only in Milan” (ibid., 11).

The challenge to the conception of labour is also perceived in more traditional organizations. For example, as the Fiom representative emphasizes, meeting temporary workers challenges the traditional approach to labour: “the impossibility of planning one’s career development is the new issue involving many spheres: firstly the sphere of the meaning of labour and of one’s proper professionalism. Previously social status was also linked to professional growth, to the ability to learn ... nowadays work does not seem to provide this possibility anymore because it might happen that one is forced to change job every year. Therefore, a hot topic is the meaning of labour both from a professional and from, I would argue, a political point of view, from the viewpoint of representation in society. We used to say that some parties represented the working class or the workers from the point of view of their social rank. Today we must ask ourselves what workers really are. Do they constitute a homogenous social entity or are they something less than a social entity, a variable status throughout time? ... So there is this big problem of what labour is and such problem is reflected in both labour organization and in trade-union activities ... Many of our reference points, especially young people, with whom we are working on these issues, have a different opinion. For them the main question is not fighting temporary work and having a stable job but rather stable security in a temporary situation, so income becomes even more important than the work” (int. 1, p. 3).

Identity shifts also involve the galaxy of organizations engaged on the issue of international solidarity. Firstly it should be emphasized that “these organizations have a genuine political orientation. Behind their demands – for the respect of human rights, against racism, for helping the third world, in defence of immigrant workers and political refugees – there is a quest for individual emancipation and a deep democratization both of Western and non-Western society” (Passy 2001: 10). In the more traditional associations this transformation has involved clear innovations in organizational structure. For example Arci was founded in 1957 as a collateral association to the Italian Communist Party but became autonomous over time. Although before “autonomy was declared but never practiced, from the eighties on the association has developed independently and even with little relationship to the political system” (int. 17, p. 1), the redefinition of its identity has entailed a strong commitment to the issue of peace: “already in 1991 with the Iraqi question and then with all the former Yugoslavia issue there has been a considerable difference [with some left-wing parties]. Certainly the question of war and solidarity that emerged with the war in Yugoslavia has been an extraordinary guide leading to positions very different from those of some leftist parties. If earlier there was a sort of indifference, in 1999 with the whole issue of Yugoslavia and Kosovo there has been a real rupture” (ibid., 3). Manitese also has a long history and, throughout time, the generational and territorial heterogeneity of the association has substantially increased. Here also the organizational identity has been recently re-elaborated. A dimension still protectivist and therefore less sensitive to the whole globalization discourse, apart from its more charitable aspect, has been accompanied by local perspectives “very committed also from a political point of view and working in contact with Zapatist movements, which means that they reflect more deeply on globalization issues” (int. 13, p. 5). Generally speaking the process of neoliberal globalization has become a reference point for a definition of the group’s identity. As our interviewee adds: “it is obvious that whenever you reflect on issues such as cooperation, North-South inequality, the
exploitation of child labour... in fact globalization is the context... Manitez has always worked on a double logic of micro-macro, so it is difficult to propose abstract or general reflections on the system in its complexity, but these reflections are always linked to concrete and small experiences and vice versa: small initiatives only make sense because they are framed within a wider context" (ibid., 4-5). This conception also clarifies the relationship between the global North and South: “obviously starting from a critique of inequalities leads to a more critical vision of the actual economic relationships which are the basis of these inequalities, with a double dimension: not only development in the global South – and a rather critical conception of the very notion of development - but also a much stronger critique to the model of consumerism in the North, and therefore the classic motto of Manitez is sobriety, slowing down growth, even with regard to sustainable development there are rather cautious positions in the sense that however you look at it, the idea of development as growth is somehow criticized by Manitez, so this can perhaps be the key to the whole understanding of globalization: at the basis of everything there is a critique of the economic system as entailing growth without limits, and so not just a critique of inequalities ... but a critique to growth as such and to development, from here it arose the links with cooperatives that practice recycling and re-using, from here emerges the attempt to provide a more systemic vision of the problem ... the problem of the South is also the problem of the North, it is not simply the problem of how to make the South better but it is somehow the North that should also be better” (ibid., 5-6).

In many other cases the identity of solidarity organizations has been modelled on opposition to the processes of neoliberal globalization and to war. The very issue of opposition to war provides the links to more moderate organizations; as the Acli interviewee puts it, “This focus on peace is widely supported but the positions from within are certainly not homogenous. We never reach high levels of contestation because we have to bear in mind and in our hearts the fact that we are a big association in which even the leaders cannot bring Acli to extreme positions if they are not shared by the base ... But we are present on the big issues” (int. 16, pp. 2-3). Similarly, the president of the Chico Mendes cooperative declares, “nowadays, to say that one is against globalization is simplistic ... there is an already globalized economy and we say that it should be globalized in a certain way with our preferences so we work in order to influence the market economy in this sense. Then of course if being against globalization means to be against the globalization of an armed world, of course we are against it!” (int. 19, pp. 9-10).

With certain differences, in both the organizational arenas analyzed the outcome of participation in the big waves of protest accompanying the emergence of the movement is the singling out of a global stake in opposing neoliberalism.

4. Contamination in action: the mechanisms

In the interpretations of the activists interviewed, transformations in the organizational structures and strategies are explained in terms of adaptation to a series of structural challenges. In the case of the trade-unionist movement, these challenges become concrete in many laws that were approved during the nineties that aimed to contain salaries and bring flexibility to the labour market, as well as regulating in a restrictive direction the right to strike and the internal mechanisms of representation. According to the organizations active in the solidarity field, the wars of nineties and the ones following September 11 constitute an extreme representation of egoistic policies, indifferent to the sufferings of the global South. In both cases, the critique involves parties (and governments) of the centre-left, considered to be subjects of and accomplices to these choices. Although social and political opportunities certainly do have an impact on the forms and questions of the movement, as already mentioned, in this paper we want to emphasize the mechanisms intervening between macro-causes and macro-effects by underlining the structuring ability of collective action. As we will emphasize in this paragraph, transformations emerge through a process of contamination in action, which involve mechanisms of intensification of individual belonging, organizational networking, diffusion of trust, frame bridging and identity shift.
4.1. Overlapping membership

Contamination in action entails a multiplication of individual membership. During the protest campaigns on globalization issues, multiple membership is extended even in organizations of a different kind and active on different issues. At the same time, the awareness of a base of reference characterized by multiple membership emerges among the leaders of the organizations. Not only do the activists interviewed speak of plural belonging in the present and in the past, often with regard to different issue-areas, but also many surveys on participants in initiatives on globalization from below show experiences of multiple and intense participation (Andretta, della Porta, Mosca and Reiter 2002 and 2003; della Porta, Andretta, Mosca and Reiter forthcoming). This plurality of associative and thematic commitments acts to link different organizational processes and represents an important precondition to the emergence of the movement.

Multiple membership is mentioned in the case of Cobas-school, joined by the end of the nineties by activists from the social centres: “in fact it is not the school that pushes but some of the Cobas health sectors or areas that were formed in the social centres and that refer to the Cobas concerning labour, that convince the ‘militant’ or activist element of the former Cobas school by saying to them that it was impossible to continue without an organizational shape” (int. 5, p. 7). The movement intervenes on these processes already in action with effects of hybridization between trade-unionist and social conflict. During protest campaigns (“I think that the strong element that shook us as well as all the others was precisely this movement”), it becomes obvious “that beyond your job in your working field you must face the great transformations of society. According to me, with Genoa this necessity has become evident. I do not believe that the Cobas have changed objective with regards to their proper working fields, but I believe that they have been influenced by some elements: firstly some social areas not strictly related to labour refer to the Cobas not because they are teachers, workers etc. but precisely for political positioning. ... We have verified this from Genoa onwards, due to the fact that the Cobas are not just the Cobas School, or the Cobas Healthcare or something else, but they are the Cobas that organize demonstrations against the war, the Cobas that are involved in the processes of social forums, from India to Cancun, etc.” (ibid., 11-12).

Not only do non-workers aggregate in trade-unionist associations but they also discover the multiple memberships of their activists. Overlapping membership is mentioned by the Sin.Cobas representative who, during a Critical Mass, notices: “when you saw the bicycles you also met people that you knew and that were part of your organization and you did not even know that they had a bicycle. And so you spontaneously felt like asking ‘what are you doing in all this?’” (int. 2, p. 16). Similarly the Cisl interviewee reports on membership in the volunteering world of Cisl supporters: “we made a survey on the number of people enrolled in the Cisl in Milan over the past autumn and we found out that among 110,000 members at least 5,000 are active on voluntary service. Half of them do so on activities about which I was speaking earlier, however they do not feel represented by the Cisl for such activities but rather by associations who have more visibility like Emergency, Arci, Acli etc. that, from Seattle on, have developed greater sensitivity and initiative on globalization issues. One of the reasons for which we thought ‘let’s start acting directly’ is because we understood that part of our members, maybe 2,5-3%, which is not small in absolute values, refer to associationism in which these activities, these good practices are developed” (int. 7, p. 4).

Multiple memberships highlight the fact that “while the decisional centre of enterprises is modified, one should pay attention to an increasingly international model of trade-unions but also to the role played by the so-called stakeholders, i.e. to the consumers’ network towards which the trade unions should be careful. It is not easy because the tendency in trade unions is to be conservative and to do what is immediately visible. But thanks to the ‘Patto per la pace’ [Pact for peace] and to the Cisl of Milan we are becoming more active on these issues. This is also a new way to represent needs and interests” (ibid.).
Also in the solidarity field, contamination mechanisms derive from the overlapping membership of the associates. As the president of the Chico Mendes cooperative notices: “rather than to charity activities, rather than politics, attention to the labour world has been natural from the beginning; this is also because people who joined the cooperative were already active either in the church, or in a trade union, or in organizations involved on some kind of special aid, and found in fair trade a more concrete thing to do, and so it was natural to arrive at this point ... I think about our associates and I know that they participate actively in this movement, so there is contamination on all these levels and it is precisely what we want” (int. 19, p. 7 and p. 9).

4.2. The structural dimension of campaigns: networking
Apart from the overlapping membership of activists, another element to consider are organizations; social movement organizations are frequently embedded in a series of networks, coalitions and coordinations that express a plurality of topics, action strategies, organizational modalities and methods of decision-making which may generate tolerance, knowledge, contamination and mutual confidence. This is the case, for example, with the ‘Roundtable for Peace’, [Tavola per la pace] between the organizers of the Genoa Social Forum, the European Social Forum of Florence and the World Social Forum. “Tavola per la pace” brings together, on the basis of opposition to the war and in favour of nonviolent conflict-resolution, traditional labour organizations (such as Cgil and Cisl) and solidarity associations (such as Arci, Acli and Manitese) which perceive their common development as “an original space for the meeting of associations, voluntary services and local agencies that fully respect their different roles” with the purpose of “developing the ability of the different associations of civil society to act in the network by emphasizing their sensitivity, competences and resources”.

The emergence of protest cycles at the beginning of the new millennium increased the opportunities for being part of the network, of interacting on the same themes with similar actors in Italy, but also with elements active on different campaigns at the international level. International relations between trade unions and within the broader movement on globalization, in the context of common campaigns, are particularly emphasized by critical trade unions. As the Sin.Cobas representative puts it, attention to the international dimension (see infra) “has enabled, from 1996 onwards, collaborations in the South and with other labour organizations such as the anarco-trade-unionist Spanish Cgt ... it has made possible, in the framework of European protest marches against unemployment, precarious work and social exclusion, the European demonstration in Amsterdam, which was also one of the first large European demonstrations”.

In spite of the scepticism of other trade unions – for example, the Cub representative notices that there is “an attempt to start sharing campaigns against privatizations, welfare and if possible other multinational groups” – organizations emerging from the movement seem to be facilitated in making contacts at a transnational level. In the case of the MayDay initiative, action immediately crosses borders. Even for the more critical groups of the European Social Forum, frequent international meetings have become an occasion for organizing transnational collateral initiatives. For example, at the London European Social Forum “they took the opportunity of a highly attended event to organize the first European assembly on precarious work ... given that we had these contacts with northern Europe, we thought that using an event that attracted many people was an appropriate move in order to organize an assembly on MayDay 2005 – which interested us – and to try to understand what possibilities there were to organize a European network for MayDay at a European level, because in Europe there are already several MayDays: from Berlin, to Ireland, etc. however they are not connected to ours. ... So what we are trying now is to shift from the centre and to explain that if we manage to talk about these issues at a European level we are really making

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2 The ‘Tavola della Pace’ and the ‘Patto per la pace’ are two different organizations: the first arose at a national level in 1996, the second was founded in Lombardy in 2001 as a regional branch of the national organization.

a step forward, also because they are writing a European constitution so if we start talking between
networks we can also react at a wider level not limited to the city” (int. 8, p. 3).

Common participation in protest cycles also promotes contact-making with active organizations
outside the labour world. At a local level, during the public transport mobilizations, workers have
met activists from other movements: “we went around all Italy because we were in vogue and many
people called us: society, social centres, small aggregations of persons, etc. we have been
everywhere and travelled around Italy to bring this message” (int. 6, p. 12). At a supranational level,
as the Sin.Cobas representative reminds, “participation in international events enabled us to have
contacts with other social movements, not only trade-unions. Here the concrete experience of the
European protest marches goes in the same direction because apart from the trade-unions I have
already mentioned there was also the movement of French unemployed ... and in Italy during the
past years part of the social centres have been introduced, mainly the ones that afterwards founded
the Disobedients [Disobbedienti], some from the northeast, some from other places. So there were
different actors, from the trade unions to the traditional subordinate workers. To a certain extent this
was also acknowledged from the beginning, the awareness that you cannot build a trade union and
the alternative to collaborative trade unions just in the workplace, based on a merely unionist
perspective, but you also need to be in contact with the social movements and that you need to go
out of the workplace and therefore watch also the international dimension, and in this perspective
the European one was the most immediate that was being constructed” (int. 2, p. 5).

Similarly, in the solidarity field, aggregations and transformations occurred during a series of
protest campaigns generally promoted and supported by a network of different organizations. As
already mentioned, mobilizations against the first Gulf War and then against the bombing in the
former Yugoslavia provided an opportunity for active associations in the solidarity field to meet, in
Italy against centre-left parties (and governments) that supported armed intervention. Manitese
made contacts with other organizations during the Global March against the exploitation of child
labour (int. 13, p. 3). The main working modality of networks active on solidarity issues is precisely
campaigning. As an activist of the Forum on critical consumerism reminds: “the campaign against
Banca Intesa was promoted by the Budgets of Justice [Bilanci di giustizia] but then we organized it
together, and also the ‘buy nothing day’ is not promoted by the Forum on critical consumerism but
by ‘Terre di Mezzo’ [Lands in between, independent street paper] ... however these campaigns are
all organized together” (int. 14, p. 6).

“Un Ponte per” was founded in 1991 after a campaign started at the end of the bombing in Iraq:
“the political campaign related to the problem of embargo in Iraq; through an action of civil
disobedience –such as the one on the export of dates– we tried to denounce all the rhetoric of this
war which favoured the people that initiated and conducted it. On this campaign we have worked a
lot with all the actors that were involved in the pacifist movement at the time, which was basically a
continuation of the one emerging from the Vietnam war. So, already at that time, ‘Un Ponte per’
was working in the network and collaborating with other pacifist groups on the ground” (int. 11, p.1).
According to a volunteer of Emergency, another objective of the association “is to spread a
culture of peace and solidarity. This, particularly at the beginning, was realized through a
commitment in the international campaigns on the abolition of landmines which in Italy was
promoted by several movements –not only Emergency– and showed how important it was to work
on this purpose also because in 1997 Italy joined the Ottawa treaty which abolished the production
and trade of landmines. This is also something that Emergency continued to promote: in 2001 it
participated in several campaigns” (int. 18, p. 6).

The network enables the meeting of different actors active on various issues. For example
according to the Arci representative: “one of the more important and useful things of the last years’
experience is the fact that network-logic has been concretely affirmed and that everyone has been
able to take steps backwards. This is an extraordinary fact from the point of view of the political
apparatus that emerged from below and did not exist earlier ... however we were already active on
some issues, but we were alone. Clarifying that it is better to work together, that this is a further
resource and that this logic is more useful for the people to whom you want to bring results: this idea starts to be affirmed. I think that one of the most positive aspects of this logic is precisely this reflection on the networks (int. 17, p. 18). The precarious side of some ad-hoc experiences – which emerge to coordinate specific campaigns – is not perceived as a weakness but rather as an opportunity for future initiatives. The same representative claims: “now we are at the stage in which this very elastic and open model is used when needed, and we know that this is the system and the model: a platform is proposed and all the people who agree join each other. Then, as it arose, this stuff may disappear, but what you still have is the method. The following phase is to construct platforms from below, starting from real issues, bringing into the network the responsible subjects of civil society that are active on such issues, and then to articulate on the tasks, on common platforms, with common processes, this is certainly what produces the better results. The key elements are almost always the actors of civil society such as Arci, Acli, the Lilliput network and the more independent and generalist organizations that are almost always present whilst other subjects connect or disconnect according to the particularities of action and their opportunities” (int. 12, p. 19).

The logic of the network as an instrument for the coordination of activity facilitates the involvement of different political actors: “we realized that single persons are important... but we felt the necessity of finding means to make contacts with associations or groups inherent in the already existing proposals on the ground, and then the following step has been to try and do something larger also towards the city, therefore, we took the step of promoting the Forum on critical consumerism with Lilliput and Intergas, with the groups on fair purchase in Milan” (int. 15, p. 2).

The network is kept together mainly through a tendency towards mobilization on concrete goals. As an example, among organizations active on critical consumerism, “there is a constant consultation with other organizations on decisions that should put together various experiences and activities in order to try and construct a network capable of moving beyond single activities and propose to citizens a plurality of initiatives that start from finance, Mag [an organization supporting co-operatives and associations' projects which could not be backed by traditional financial loans] and Banca Etica [Ethical Bank] to commercial activities, to the pressure on enterprises to take more social responsibilities … it is good that we work altogether on such issues” (int. 19, p. 5).

Networking also allows the organization of collective demonstrations: “we did a big demonstration with the social centres after the death of that guy [Dax] and apart from some small events – some broken shop windows – it was a peaceful demonstration with high visibility. Therefore what happened was precisely the outcome of this work and the fact that we work in this way” (ibid., 11).

A form of protest that favours networking and successively “contamination” (or cross-fertilization) are the “solidarity assemblies”, a series of assemblies where organizations have been hosted in order to publicize their work. As one of the organizers explains “the initiative called ‘solidarity public assemblies’ is one where these issues assume their most visible form... our goal is to inform on ethical consumerism and, apart from these methods, there are lifestyles: we do not plan ‘solidarity assemblies’ if at least eight associations are not with us. We form a network, we bring our own experience but we also want other associations to bring their peculiarities ... we create what might be called a ‘logistical pot’ in which everyone puts their ingredients” (int. 20, p. 3). Therefore, “we organized event-days dedicated to different associations, where Legambiente [environmental association] brought this group on alternative energies; the social forums contributed with a very interesting and well-organized piece of work on war, the association Libera focused on the issue of saving, recycling, survival of books. Certainly all these things have an impact on us … perhaps not all of us … in Acea there are 12 persons and one participates in the event … that’s fine! These are different things: crossfertilization is obvious, banal, normal and actually one should be contaminated! It is the nice aspect of being together” (ibid., 9). On the same initiative a volunteer reminds: “we hosted Ya Basta and their products such as Rebelde coffee [made in Chiapas from the Zapatist communities] ... so what is the problem? We also host Pax Christi. In the first stand that we made on a square, a huge one, we gave space to different associations and there were many of them
… it happened one day that Pax Christi was next to the movement of the *lucciole* [prostitutes] and they did not know each other, they represent two completely different worlds but the nice thing was that they got to know each other and they talked to each other” (int. 14, pp. 6-7). In the words of another volunteer: “I believe that in these years ‘Un Ponte per’, as well as other groups has been enriched and mixed in a positive sense” (int. 11, p. 9).

4.3. Shifting identities
Recognition of similarities across countries through action in international networks enables the construction of a supranational identity. In a scale shift process (Tarrow 2005; Tarrow and McAdam 2005), activists begin to define themselves as part of a supranational subject. From this perspective the Sin.Cobas representative reminds: “from the analytical perspective we realized that what was not yet called globalization but internationalization of the labour force was one of the central processes of recent times, obviously together with the rise in temporary work and income. The desire for projection at an international level was already clear in the Sin.Cobas symbol which contains the acronym ‘Solidarity. Unity. Democracy’. This is not the case: in the same years in France there emerged rank and file unions with Solidarité, Unité, Democratié (“Solidarity, Unity, Democracy” – Sud), and given that we had this contact with our French comrades, the common idea was that we had to become a European trade union … In some way, this implied evoking a European trade union rather than constructing it, evoking it by including such words in the symbol” (int. 2, p. 4).

Symbols and myths help far-away actors to identify with one another –as in the case of the “zapatist experience, regarding which we already had projects of support, starting from Cobas Alfa, we went to the intergalactic meetings because we interpreted them not as the last event of an old history but as the first event of a new one, so, from the beginning, we related towards it spontaneously. For example during the first days of the January 1994 strike in Alfa we went to block the highway and we received news from the Zapatist insurrections and someone had a poster of Zapata, I don’t know where he found it, but he brought it. So there was somehow a spontaneous identification between the two subjects of rebellion ... who cares if one is an indigenous peasant and the other is an industrial worker. Both these things and the protest marches enabled the Sin.Cobas to act not merely on a trade-unionist ground, such situation allows one to meet in Nice and in other places” (int. 2, pp. 6-7). A mechanism of shifting identities is also declared in the solidarity field where international cooperation leads to interaction with organizations based in other countries, as in the case of “Un Ponte per” (int. 11, p. 3). Analogous effects are signalled also by the representative of a more traditional organization such as the Acli: “in the beginning of the nineties, a group of young Acli members accelerated the number of practical actions on the issue of peace in the international area. There was a project of support for refugee camps in Slovenia after the war in Bosnia and there was a project that involved some thousand people over a period of years, and from there a sensibility for more practical actions matured, and there was a change in the international arena which led to this new structure, to a new way of looking at things” (int. 16, p. 1).

4.4. The campaign as deliberative arena: frame-bridging
Networking is also considered an antidote to single-issue claims. Participation in campaigns of social struggle is reflected in frame-bridging actions on several issues. In the words of our interviewee: “we participate in networking, according to the principle that associations must avoid their being virtual or the hyper-specialization that de-localizes them, our principle is that they must re-localize and their roots must emerge, which means to re-collocate in their own cities in their own territory, to be loved by the people around them, to have contacts, etc.” (int. 20, p. 4). This working method, inspired by the process started in Porto Alegre, is applied in cooperation projects both in Italy and in other countries: “there has been an attempt to start a project from below in Iraq, constructing thematic-meetings with civil society and the international NGOs; so Iraq acted as a kind of laboratory, even though it all started in Porto Alegre” (ibid., 3).
The link between labour issues and other themes of the movement on globalization also enables contacts with the confederated labour organizations. The Fiom representative describes both “the mobilization on the G8, on war, the European Social Forum in Florence”, as well as the discussion of international issues such as “the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”, as “the more important campaigns” (int. 1, p. 8). Between peace and labour, “the link is clear at the level of the Fiom directive group. In fact we think that exercising control through the war of markets and resources is the main reason for which companies expand beyond Italy and are based in those countries where rights are denied and almost always the instrument for denying rights is internal oppression or the international oppression of international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and, if the rules of neoliberalism are not respected, you arrive at military intervention” (ibid.).

The link between democracy in the factory and democracy at the international level, together with an awareness of the flexibilization of the labour market, is considered by the Fiom to be a fundamental element for participation in the first initiatives of the movements: “democracy in the workplace but more generally democracy as the only possible chance to change this society: this is one of the reasons that determined our desire to be an intrinsic part of the movements. It is not by chance that Fiom and not other trade unions were in Genoa, Fiom broke the taboo of liberal orthodoxy before other labour organizations so we realized long ago that flexibility was not an objective situation that could not be modified but a precise political choice by the international labor organization that is liberalism. The other issue was that of democracy not only in the factory but at an international level: eight countries could not decide for six billion of people. So democracy in the choices at a global international level was a key element, the issue of democracy in the division of wealth at the international level and, going further down, the issue of democracy in the workplace” (int. 1, pp. 3-5, passim). Therefore the link between Fiom and the movements was introduced naturally.

Meanwhile the question of critical consumerism also reaches a more moderate trade union such as the Cisl. Its representative explains the link between labour and critical consumerism: “today, more than in the 60/70ies, to say it with a slogan, you change the world both as an employed worker but also as a consumer. Certainly today, for better or worse, the figure of the consumer definitely has greater impact than in previous years. Then one question is the struggle in favour of the consumer generally speaking and another is to develop, as a consumer, the concept of critical consumerism. Let me give you an example: we were involved, even though on a small scale, in all this Banca Intesa episodes. Banca Intesa was an ‘armed bank’ [involved in the weapons’ trade] and we collaborated with the networks also linked to the trade union so today Banca Intesa is no more an ‘armed bank’. Once a worker’s strike was enough to say ‘you, the bank, should not do such thing anymore,’ whilst nowadays consumers have acquired more self-awareness” (int. 7, p. 3).

Also in the solidarity field, traditional organizations such as Arci, Acli and Maniitese have joined the networks and projects where different subjects meet, where contamination and the link between various issues is produced. These networks have promoted in Italy important campaigns and demonstrations on peace issues, together with various other themes. As an interviewee reminds: “the Pact for Peace was founded after Genoa and aims at providing a basis for confrontation on the issues of peace, international cooperation, the environment and globalization. The first work that we undertook was not to set up events and public demonstrations but to construct this pact, in other words a manifesto that we distributed in the associations, in the Rsu, in the Botteghe del Mondo [fair trade shops] etc. and that contains our views on certain issues because some subjects had put together a common analysis and common lines of action. The pact aims at being a place of dialogue, of confrontation and growth between organizations, groups and trade unions” (int. 16, p. 6).

A new emphasis is then put on the necessity of generalizing the action and the issues involved: “I like to think that the Acli area should be a more political one: I am here because I think that the issue of labour should be linked to a series of other themes. But I believe that the aggregation today is very much ‘one-spotted’ and that people are not looking for an association that gives you a
complete picture and offers you a process of evolution and confrontation ... I believe, instead, that starting from necessity one should offer a broader evolutionary process because many things are linked together” (ibid., 9).

Even in younger organizations such as Emergency a link has been set between different issues. A deeper investigation of globalization issues is introduced by an Emergency volunteer as “natural, in the sense that a large part of Emergency volunteers are, by all means, attentive to certain issues, and therefore even if such issues are not immediately related to Emergency projects, some curiosities, some questions and considerations are raised by all volunteers ... Emergency is specifically involved on something else, namely, health-care but for some time we have been emphasizing the importance of respect for human rights and the need to operate for solidarity even in Italy ... Emergency Italy was founded just a while ago precisely as an indicator of the fact that the association is ever more open, and Emergency is not simply an association exclusively dedicated to assisting war victims or the victims of landmines through emergency surgery” (int. 18, p. 10-11). Albeit with some difficulties, the Lilliput network is engaged on frame-bridging in order to link different issues: “what is more important now is the endeavour to find links between issue-areas, also because a discourse on the goals and the kind of social and economic organization to which we aim is rather missing” (int. 12, p. 11). Working with other subjects also develops an interest for other issues; according to the same activist: “we often work with subjects external to Lilliput, so last year, for example, we promoted together with others a campaign on the problem of water as related to the WTO summit in Cancún, another question that became rather important, while earlier it was not so” (ibid., 1).

Fair and responsible consumerism is also often framed as an expression of a wider, and not only charitable, approach to the problem of poverty. As the president of the Chico Mendes cooperative for fair trade observes, “our history has always brought us to search for the causes of poverty so this already pushes us to larger research. Therefore when we go out to talk we always say that making fair trade is for us not just about selling products but something more, even though this is the main activity, the specific one that gives us resources, we want to develop a mentality of attention to the causes of poverty in our populations which are based on economic, social and political causes ... not to mention peace issues ... the choice of non-violence has always been the ground and has been the one that made us grow and provided our cohesion, that enabled us to always choose dialogue in difficult moments” (int. 19, p. 7).

Also, according to an activist from the forum on critical consumerism: “the relationship involves shedding light on the elements that join us and not on the ones that divide us and so one do not merely focus on the exclusivity of one’s affairs but also concentrates on the common elements, and one acts on the basis of these, evaluating the initiatives of groups that you would not even have considered but that in some way you support or approve, because it goes in the same direction for which you are also working. I have the impression that groups such as the Leoncavallo [the most important social centre of the Disobedient galaxy], that still exist, are now less closed. Even their attention to lifestyles has been a recent turn, thanks to Luigi Veronelli who had the idea of Critical Wine ... they made something that they never considered among their fields of activity before” (int. 14, p. 7).

4.5. The shaping of informal links in protest campaigns

Participation in protest campaigns develops mutual acquaintance and dialogue. From this point of view, there is contamination during the meetings of leaders/spokespersons who dialogue with each other. As the Sin.Cobas representative argues: “In my opinion, contamination is a word that, from Genoa on, started to make sense. I remember that before Genoa I hated the word ‘contamination’ because I considered it a hypocrisy covering something else ... I must say, instead, that from Genoa onwards I’ve considered it a more real thing because there has been contamination first of all among leading groups, the people who usually meet and decide are physically always the same so after a few years being active together, in the same movement, you meet and talk to each other, you
start understanding each other, you find codes of communication, means by which to resolve the problems ... I think that there has been a contamination within the movement, first of all a contamination on the possibilities of dialogue and in succeeding to talk, which is not a small thing, even if in the different mobilizations you meet different organized and non-organized actors with whom you had nothing to share before ... for example what the hell could Sin.Cobas have to do with Arci before Genoa? What was the territory? You met in the groups. You probably did some stuff together at a local level but otherwise, generally, what on earth was the link? Instead, there you started to enter into dialogue and to discover that you can do stuff together” (int. 2, pp. 14-15).

The consensus method is introduced in this frame as a stimulus to a process of mutual understanding. Despite all the differences and the inter-organizational competition, a dialogue between trade-union leaders has been reopened: “in my opinion, from Genoa on, many have learned... in those meetings this method is now interiorized by everyone, so you see there Bernocchi [secretary of the Confederation of the Cobas] and the Cgil, that until six years ago … I’m not saying that they did not speak to each other, but almost. Now both of them know that it is impossible to come out with a position imposed on others, be it the Cgil or whoever. So I think this is the method that enabled the movement’s growth, because if the big associations or organizations are missing then something important is missing” (int. 1, p. 9). So Arci’s person responsible for organization remembers: “I used to attend the first meetings with someone from the Acli who had big problems in participating, because they took place in an occupied social centre ... now these subjects somehow have a dialogue and discuss among themselves and you have the Sin.Cobas delegate that talks freely to the Cgil representative. A year and a half ago they couldn’t even stand each other. Before there was considerable isolation and often, for example when we discussed with the Cgil on immigration we were told by the trade unions ‘ok, we discuss here about these things but we shall not extend the negotiations’ because the movement was considered just ‘noglobal’, in other words only in its negative and contesting soul and not like people who had new things to say and who might have even had the ability to interpret reality faster than others. So there was a big enclosure, and therefore to find ourselves altogether again discussing has not been easy, but I think that it has changed everything, even if sometimes some subjects play it strategically and participate only because they could not do otherwise ... However the sense of responsibility has been complexly proved by all. I find that it is precisely the interpretation of others that has changed” (int. 17, pp. 11-12).

During common campaigns, representatives of critical trade unions from different cities meet and (re)cognize themselves. As the representative of the Milan Slai-Cobas remembers, during the strikes of public-transport workers, “Radio Onda D’Urto has been fundamental for public-transport workers because it kept them in contact with all the other cities. In those days national coordination did not exist and I did not even know about the existence of a base-trade union in Florence, we only met on that occasion. At the time there was this whole business going on and until the 20th December, on the occasion of the approval of the national contract – which according to us was a swindle– 50 cities interrupted their activities after Milan” (int. 6, p. 7).

Campaigns are also an occasion for the meeting of groups normally deeply divided with regard to repertoires of action (like Acli and the Disobedients), or in great competition in the workplace (such as the confederated and the critical trade unions). With regard to the campaign against the war in Iraq, the Arci representative affirms: “I remember that during the first meetings the Acli said that they did not want to have any contact with the Disobedients and that if they were there they would not participate, the same for the Disobedients, whilst now, albeit with great effort, the ‘Stop the War’ committee is composed of various elements, from the Cisl to the Leoncavallo etc. so from there started a reflective process saying ‘let’s try to include as many subjects as possible and see if we can construct a strong common front on the event’” (int. 17, pp. 5). In fact, “the committee is the only place in which Cgil, Cisl, Uil and critical trade unions – that normally do not even speak to each other – coexist, and this is not unimportant. They discuss quietly there, but they do not have any relationship outside” (ibid., 9). The approach between diverse people is perceived as one of the
most important results of common action: “we try to construct networks between associations that work on inter-culture, ‘peace, twinning and labour at school, so this big project allows an approach between different people” (int. 11, p. 2).

Campaigns also constitute opportunities for mobilization beyond national borders and meeting-points for activists from various organizations of the movement. Transformations in transportation technologies and mass media facilitate both face-to-face and face interactions mediated by the web. As a Chainworker’s activist explains “using the Internet makes it much easier to cross the borders than in real life. The already-existing relationships with people in other situations are strengthened through international exchanges ... low-cost flights have also helped because we finally managed to participate in the meetings, seminars etc ... if you can spend between 30 and 50 euros to go to Barcelona you do it. Therefore we have now very good contacts with Yo Mango [a group that defines itself as “a form of social disobedience and direct action against multinational enterprises”, http://www.yomango.net ] from Barcelona, and then one thing generates another and the networks expand” (int. 8, p. 2).

Mobilizations from below enable a mutual familiarity that favours the construction of shared objectives. Knowledge allows to overcome prejudice. As an interviewee notices: “When the worker thinks about the students from Rome who mobilize he probably thinks: ‘he should go to work!’... Then when he sees the student in front of the factory, contamination is produced, produced by the feeling of doing something together ... The town hall employee who participates see the subjects in action and is probably also involved in the mechanism so he thinks ‘It might be right to do something together’. Not abstractly right, but useful because it helps me as well. However this is something that also needs care, that requires work, that needs to be explained to the workers because it is not natural. It is natural that one works here and goes home in the evening and that he is just related to his own trade-unionist activity and to his own mobilization. I believe that it is already an achievement if an act of cross-fertilization has been produced, that you share this process which in some way has an impact on you because you refer to groups that are not simply trade-unionist” (int. 2, pp. 22-23).

These meetings generate, for example, transformations in the repertoires of action. As the same interviewee observes, “Cassino always comes to my mind because there you have the image of a traditional worker. When we prepared the mobilizations, some students from Rome came to participate in the block and it was a bit of a discovery; apart from talking about demonstrations or watching them, to have them in front of the factory was a discovery for many workers, also our own, and the same happened in Genoa ... So of course contamination was produced there: the discovery that even other methods, forms of mobilization not linked to the workplace and to the strike, may make sense” (ibid., 21-22).

Even in the case of organizations active on solidarity issues, participation in common actions increases knowledge and reduces diffidence. With regard to the campaign on fair and responsible trade, it is reminded that: “at the beginning there was the classic confusion of people who do not know each other, a confusion on what one or the other does … diffidence … Acli, Arci, these elephants ... but then people met each other on some issues”. During the organization of a fair on concrete alternatives: (‘do the right thing’ with unexpected participation), ‘‘Terre di Mezzo’ and ‘the forum on critical consumerism’ worked together for the organization of a stand where several organizations participated in order to introduce to the visitors possible alternatives to the market economy: from fair trade to finance, to ethical banks, to environmental protection, with a series of thematic meetings. A modest amount of people was expected, but instead there were around 20,000 ... there was a queue from the morning to the evening up to the end of the street and this was the emergence of critical consumerism that arose from the meeting of these organizations, even though when one organizes things there are a few difficulties, but probably it is always like this” (int. 19, p. 8).

The anti-war campaign is quoted by all interviewees as a moment of contamination through the increase of reciprocal trust: “our association was immediately present in the ‘Stop the war’
committee which is, in my opinion, a very interesting milieu, because it is an opened space in the sense that if you do not participate for a while there is no problem ... and there is clear political thinking, with clear aims, and it has also been very clear on the initiatives that do not reach common agreement, the initiatives are then organized under a name that is not the one of the committee ... so there is also respect for diversity” (int. 11, p. 6). The campaign seems to have had positive effects in terms of knowledge and mutual trust. As the interviewee adds: “it is not easy, but during this year and a half, through this development we have also got to know each other and to soften some attitudes, and there is trust and respect for every representation within the committee” (ibid.).

5. Conclusions
By focusing on a series of Italian organizations engaged on labour and international solidarity issues, this paper has tried to shed light on the phase of re-mobilizations preceding the emergence of protest cycles against neoliberal globalization at the end of the past decade. Peace marches against unemployment and insecure work and pacifist campaigns have prepared the mobilizations of the new millennium by creating the possibility for different actors to meet and discuss. As already some research has observed, the movement which emerged in Seattle arises from a dense and composite organizational infrastructure that was constituted already during the seventies and eighties (Pianta 2001). During this stage of poor media visibility, various organizational networks active on different issues started to re-activate and inter-connect, generalizing their claims, extending beyond national borders, discovering alternative organizational forms and experiencing new repertoires of collective action.

As already shown, this process involved both labour organizations and the movements of solidarity with the global South. They glanced on the territory of protest through forms of action faithful to their tradition, but also through innovative and more effective repertoires in order to intervene in a global society characterized by the emergence of new social figures such as the precarious worker or the citizen-consumer. Beside innovations in their repertoires, novelties have also involved the organizational level: more traditional organizations tend to maintain a hierarchical structure but with a more participative conception of the organization; organizations founded during the waves of antiliberal protest are characterized instead by a reticular structure and decisional methods oriented towards consensus formation. As far as identity is concerned, participation in the mobilizations that started the new protest cycle reshapes organizational identities constructed in opposition to neoliberal globalization.

Leaving to one side structural changes of a social and political kind and the cultural and material resources available, we have tried to explain identity-shifts in the organizational formulas and strategies of action by identifying a process of contamination in action during common protest campaigns through a series of mechanisms such as multiple membership and organizational networking that simplifies the formation of confidential links, frame bridging and identity shift. A whole process of contamination is therefore set up thanks to the meeting between old and new movements during common mobilizations on the issues of peace or precarious work. Such process a is facilitated by the plurality of associative and thematic commitments on the part of the activists and by the affiliation of the organizations themselves in a series of networks, coordinations, mobilizations and campaigns that generate knowledge, mutual tolerance, trust and cooperation (see Andretta 2005) but also a generalization of the interpretative scheme (Gordon and Jasper 1996) and a link between various issues.
References


**Interviews:**
1 - responsible of the FIOM international office in Milan
2 - national secretary of Sin.Cobas
3 - national secretary of the Slai-Cobas
4 - national secretary of the Cub
5 - delegate of the Cobas School confederation in Milan
6 - delegate of the Slai-Cobas in Atm
7 - Cisl responsible for relations with the movements in Milan
8 - activist of the group Chainworkers
9 - Cgil former-responsible of the relations with the movements in Milan
10 - delegate of the Filt-Cgil in Atm
11 - voluntary of the association “Un Ponte per”
12 - activist of the Lilliput Network
13 - voluntary of the association Manitese
14 - activist of the Forum on Critical Consumerism
15 - activist of the Group on Critical Consumerism
16 - responsible of the Acli international department in Milan
17 - organizational responsible of the Arci in the province of Milan
18 - responsible of the volunteers in the association Emergency
19 - president of the cooperative Chico Mendes
20 - president of the association Acea