Chapter One

Transnational versus National Activism.

A Systematic Comparison of 'Transnationalists' and 'Nationalists' Participating in the 2006 European and Belgian Social Forums

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Introduction

Is activism located at a transnational level any different from activism located at the national or even local level? More concrete: is there any difference in terms of backgrounds, attitudes, or behaviour among activists that are active on a transnational level and activists that restrict their activities to a national level? While the question may seem trivial, the answers to it are important to understand the apparently spreading transnational activism phenomenon and its repercussions for local grassroots activism. Moreover, the question of whether national and transnational activism is different and whether activists active on one of these levels differ from each other remains largely unresolved and heavily debated. Some scholars claim that transnational activism is a distinct type of activism (e.g., Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor 2001), while others maintain that transnational activists are in the first place just common national or local activists rooted in their local settings (Fisher et al. 2005: 105; Tarrow 2005a).

For more than a decade now, social movement scholars have been focussing heavily on the transnationalization of social movements, protest and contentious politics. One of the main issues is whether classic social movement theories are able to explain transnational movement phenomena (McCarthy 1997; see also chapter 8 in this volume). Much of this work focussed on the meso- or macro-level. Scholars examined, among other topics, to what extent political opportunities shifted from the national to the transnational level (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Sikkink 2005). Imig and Tarrow (2001), for example, undertook protest event analysis to investigate whether protest events targeted national or European institutions. Many studies have also focussed on the link and interplay between organisations operating at the local, national and/or transnational level,

and how much global issues shape national and local organisations (see especially della Porta and Tarrow 2005). So, to some extent, the contradiction between the national and the transnational level is arbitrary and we are more likely confronted with a continuum. But for the sake of the argument and the analysis a sharp difference will be maintained between national and transnational activism. Recently, studies started to tackle the micro-level aspect of transnational activism as well. At all kinds of meetings or protest events staged by the Global Justice Movement (GJM), students of social movements distributed questionnaires and interviewed participants (della Porta et al. 2006). Especially European Social Forums (ESFs), the periodical meetings of the GJM emulating the World Social Forum (WSF) initially organised in Porto Alegre, appear to have become the home turf of transnational activism scholars (e.g. Andretta et al. 2002; Agrikoliansky and Sommier 2005; della Porta et al. 2006; della Porta 2009). As a consequence, it is well documented who the people are that attend these transnational forums. They tend to be fairly young, highly educated, mostly women and with middle-class backgrounds; they have a left-wing political orientation, they tend to be motivated by diverse values such as democratisation, social justice, solidarity and anti-capitalism, and they distrust the traditional political institutions; many of them are committed activists with active movement memberships and a history of protest participation (della Porta et al. 2006).

Remarkably, very few of these available studies systematically compare transnational activists with national activists. Even the seminal work of Donatella della Porta and colleagues (2006) on the 2002 ESF in Florence, Italy, did not engage in a systematic comparison of national—that is, Italian – and transnational – that is, non-Italian – participants. To be sure, the authors did present some evidence on differences between the nationalities present in Florence, but rather than comparing national with transnational activists, their goal was to demonstrate that people from different countries have different backgrounds that reflect the diverging political cultures and social movement sectors in their respective countries. The point della Porta and colleagues make is that transnational activists differ from each other rather than that transnational activists differ from national activists. However, a systematic national-transnational comparison can be helpful to grasp the drivers of transnational protest and to test whether it really differs from activism that is confined within the national borders.

If transnational activism is something special that is 'produced' by particular prior characteristics, attitudes and behaviour, transnational activists would systematically differ from national activists. If transnational activism, in contrast, is similar to national or local activism, transnational activists would have a lot in common with national activists. Consequently, if both types of participants are fairly similar, chances are high that the same theories can be used to explain both transnational and national/local activism; but if both types of activists differ a lot also different theories are needed to explain their activism or, at least, existing theories should be revised to grasp the particularities of transnational activism.

This chapter, therefore, provides a systematic comparison of 'transnational' and 'national' participants taking part in the same social forums. Surveys among participants in Social forums offer an excellent design to test whether transnational activism is different from national/local activism. Consider the World or the European Social Forum. A part of the participants always are locals: they attend an international meeting but they do so in their own region, country or even city. Schönleitner (2003: 136), for instance, has described this 'regional imbalance' for the first WSF in Porto Alegre, Brazil: more than 60 per cent came from South America. Considerable efforts were taken to attract delegates from more countries at the second WSF, also held in Porto Alegre. However, despite these efforts, still more than 55 per cent of the participants came from Brazil alone. The other participants in the same event, people from abroad who travelled to participate in the forum, can be considered as 'pure' transnational activists. The opposite applies to the national social forums that are organised in many countries; almost all of the participants of these forums are nationals. Yet, among these nationals, some have previously attended social forums abroad and thus can be considered transnational activists. It is this double comparison that this chapter builds upon. A few hundred participants were surveyed in the ESF in 2006 in Athens, Greece, and in the Belgian Social Forum (BSF) organised in 2006 in Brussels, Belgium. Within both groups of participants, 'transnational' activists are compared with 'national' activists.

Hypotheses

As mentioned above, few studies have engaged in systematically comparing national with transnational activists or even in theorising on the differences between national and transnational activists. Thus, hypotheses will remain tentative and explorative. The largest effort to systematically chart transnational activism on a micro-level has been undertaken by della Porta and colleagues (2006). They sampled participants at the 2002 ESF in Florence and at the major anti-G8 demonstration in Genoa in 2001. Implicitly, this study, suggestively entitled 'Globalisation from below', claims that people who participate in transnational events share specific common features that may distinguish them from other activists. This becomes clear when the authors state, in the methods section of their study, that they excluded the Tuscans, living close to or even in Florence, from the Italian sample as 'they had a different profile from other participants in terms of sociodemographic dimensions (gender, age, education, social condition): geographically close to the event, Tuscans needed a lower commitment than Italians from other regions to participate in the ESF' (della Porta et al. 2006: 24, emphasis removed). This quote contains the main argument for expecting differences between national and transnational activists: costs to participate in transnational events abroad are much higher and this high barrier can

be compensated by, amongst others, a higher commitment. The fact that 'costly' participation in terms of time, money and risk requires a certain structural availability with less conflicting personal engagements is by now a classic postulate of the social movement literature (McAdam 1986).

Sidney Tarrow (2005b: 7) also recognises that 'forming transnational social movements is not easy'. A precondition for the formation of transnational movements, Tarrow ascertains, is the existence of a stratum of what he calls 'rooted cosmopolitans'. Although firmly domestically embedded and drawing on domestic resources and opportunities, these people engage in transnational contacts and transactions. They form a distinct segment in society that was less available before. 'They are a stratum of individuals who travel regularly, read foreign books and journals and become involved in networks of transaction abroad' (Tarrow 2005b: 34). Not all rooted cosmopolitans become transnational activists, to be sure, but they are available to become active in transnational claims-making processes. Tarrow does not make it entirely clear in what precise and measurable respect the transnational activist would differ from the traditional national activist, though. He suggests some differences, but does not advance a testable list of variables: 'they are better *educated* than most of their compatriots, better *connected*, speak more *languages,* and *travel* more often' (Tarrow 2005b: 43, emphasis added). In another publication, Tarrow (2005a) states that transnational and national activists are not separated and isolated, but form a closely knit continuum, which would imply that there are rather few differences between them. Elaborating on the idea of 'rooted cosmopolitans', Grenier (2004) identifies transnational activists as 'pioneers of global civil society'. They are not detached from local realities, but they have distinct capacities in terms of leadership abilities, education, financial and other resources, and motivation that allow them to connect local and global opportunity structures to pursue their causes. These kind of activists are very often also labelled as 'social entrepreneurs', referring here to business entrepreneurs, who are similar in risk taking propensity and creativity (Grenier 2004: 122).

Fisher and colleagues (2005) surveyed participants in five globalisation protest events and systematically compared local participants, living nearby the protest event, with non-local participants, living elsewhere in the same (or a neighbouring) country. As they had hardly any transnational participants in their samples, they could not focus on comparing transnational with national activists. Their findings about differences between locals and non-locals, though, are inspirational when thinking about national versus transnational activists. They find that non-locals are significantly more informed about the protest by organisations and less informed by the media, that non-locals attended the event more in the company of organisation members, and that non-locals, to a much larger extent than locals, received funding from an organisation to attend the demonstration (Fisher et al. 2005: 114–116). This suggests, similar to the arguments of della Porta and Tarrow, that non-locals and, thus, transnational activists may

be more organisationally embedded than their local or national counterparts. Organisations, this evidence suggests, reduce the thresholds and help people overcome the larger barriers (e.g., financially) to participate in protest abroad. If these organisations are then occupied with transnational and global issues, it is even more likely that activists who are members of such an organisation will take part in transnational actions. This is more or less what Diani (2005) found when he studied different social movement organisations in Glasgow and Bristol: those organisations principally more interested in global issues, such as Third World poverty, globalisation, ethnicity and human rights, are also more likely to take part in global actions.

The most elaborate study of national versus transnational activists, to our knowledge, has been undertaken by Isabelle Bédoyan and collaborators (2004). Drawing on a survey of protesters against the EU summit in Brussels, Belgium, in 2001, they test the idea that transnational mobilisation is more difficult than national mobilisation since there are practical, psychological and political barriers that are harder to overcome (see also Marks and McAdam 1999). Drawing on that premise, they find that transnational and national participants in the Brussels' march differed quite extensively. Their results underpin some of the findings mentioned above. The most important differences that they found are related to the demonstrators' *professional situation* (student vs. non-student), to their *organisational embeddedness* (more in company of co-members, more informed by organisations), to their *political interest* and to their more radical *opinions* about politics (more dissatisfied with democracy and representative system, more agree with radical movement strategy) (Bédoyan, Van Aelst and Walgrave 2004). Bédoyan and colleagues conclude that transnational activists 'are young, organized, and radical compared to their Belgian counterparts' (2004: 48).

Wrapping up, the modest available evidence supports the hypothesis that transnational activists differ from national activists in at least three aspects: social-demographics, attitudes and behaviour. First, transnational activists are expected to be younger, higher educated and to be made up more of students. Second, regarding their attitudes, transnational activists are expected to be more radical and critical toward democracy, but, at the same time, more interested in (broad) political issues. Third, and considering behaviour, it is foremost expected that transnationalists are more organisationally embedded (and this, in addition, more likely to be within organisations working on global issues) and have more protest experience than their domestic counterparts. Are these expectations warranted by the facts?

Data and Methods

The above questions will be addressed by means of survey data collected at two different social forum events. Social forums can be considered as the main gathering

moments of the GJM. Interestingly for our purpose, the social forum concept, and especially the transnational or global events, have been criticised for being 'champagne activism': 'open only to those who can afford the time and money to fly around the world … discussing global problems' (Glasius and Timms 2006: 225). Some claim that having sufficient resources or finding proper funding is one of the main issues at transnational forums. Furthermore, social forums are extensively prepared in so-called preparatory meetings, which alternately take place in different countries and these too require time and money (see chapter 4; Van Laer and Verhulst 2007). In the International Council, the organ that sets out the main political guidelines and strategic directions of the WSF, meetings are found to be even more costly and time consuming. Moreover, national level organisations are even being excluded from these preparatory meetings in order to avoid 'the logic of the nation-state' (Schönleitner 2003: 133). In any case, social forums are excellent occasions to scrutinise differences between national and transnational activists. Arguably, though, social forums cover only a part of the current transnational activism. International protest events, for example, may have led to a different dynamic and to different distinctions between national and transnational protesters. The data presented in this chapter only tackle part of the transnational activism puzzle.

One of the surveys presented in this chapter was taken among participants at the fourth ESF in Athens, Greece, 4–7 May 2006; a second survey was taken among participants of the third BSF in Brussels, Belgium, 16 December 2006. Paper versions of both the ESF and the BSF questionnaires were distributed at the forum venues itself: about 600 were distributed in Athens in the first two days and about 678 were distributed in Brussels. In Athens, paper questionnaires were distributed in and outside the main hall on the first and second day of the forum. Two interviewers selected each tenth person passing, kindly asked them to fill in the questionnaire and then leave it in a postal box at the main exit or at the stall of the University of Antwerp in the main hall. The initial response rate in Athens was rather disappointing (only 68 questionnaires were completed at the end of the four-day event). In the weeks and months after the forum, participants were therefore contacted via email and invited to participate in an online version of the same survey. Existing email lists (about 700 subscribers) were used and, on top of that, the Greek Organising Committee provided about 1,500 unique email addresses of people who had registered online. A news entry was placed on the official website of the Athens' ESF, inviting participants to participate in the study. The fact that all communication, practical information, and, more importantly, the ESF registration nearly exclusively went via the internet justifies the use of an online survey, in addition to the paper questionnaires distributed at the venue itself. About 440 ESF participants completed the online survey (see Table 1.1).

In Brussels, 108 paper questionnaires were completed on one day. The interviewers were positioned at the only entrance and exit of the forum venue. Every

Table 1.1. Response Rates of the ESF and BSF Survey, May and December 2006

	BSF Brussels	ESF Athens
Participants	800	35,000
Questionnaires		
Distributed (paper + electronic version)	678	3,000[a]
Response	205	510
Response rate (percent)	30.3	17.0

[a] The number of distributed questionnaires is a rough estimation of the total amount of email recipients and the amount of distributed paper questionnaires at the forum.

participant had to register when entering the building and then immediately received a paper questionnaire together with a postage paid envelope and a little pencil. Along with a very short introduction, each participant was then kindly requested to fill in the survey and leave it by the end of the day in the blue box at the same exit, or to send it via the post once home by using the postage paid envelope. In the weeks immediately afterward, another 87 respondents returned their completed questionnaires. Yet, although the paper version was rather successful (response rate of 29 per cent), the additional online version of the BSF survey was not a great success. For obvious reasons of privacy, the Organising Committee of the BSF did not agree to us sending an email to the BSF participants who had registered online. As a result, only the existing email lists could be used (about 100 subscribers); only 10 of these people participated in the online version. They all indicated also having received a paper version of the questionnaire at the forum. After processing and cleaning the data, a total amount of 510 ESF and 205 unique BSF participants had completed a useful questionnaire.

Since a good indication of the real composition of the entire population at both of these forum events is not available, it is impossible to test whether the returned questionnaires or those filled in online are representative of the BSF and ESF populations. Especially with regard to the Athens' online survey, it is difficult to estimate the bias caused by both the self-selection of respondents as well as the persisting inequalities in terms of internet use among ESF participants who are coming from different countries. With regard to the postal surveys, though, similar research at street demonstrations indicated that the response bias of returned postal questionnaires is minimal (Walgrave and Verhulst 2010). Of course, participating in a social forum is different from participating in a demonstration, but both can be considered as collective action events and the overlap in participants is probably considerable. As indicated by Fillieule and Blanchard (chapter 9 in this volume), differences may exist between people filling in the survey on the day itself or afterward once they are at home. Bivariate analysis comparing the two independent samples (those who filled in the survey at the BSF or ESF itself, and those who filled in the survey at home or online),

however, revealed no differences in terms of socio-demographic variables as well as general attitudinal or organisational backgrounds.

Table 1.2 provides some basic socio-demographic descriptives and information on the dependent variable. General socio-demographic features indicate a highly educated (even hyper-educated), slightly male, young to middle-aged constituency. The BSF respondents are, compared to the ESF sample, slightly older, mostly male and relatively less educated.

In terms of the nationality of the attendants of both forums, Table 1.2 clearly documents that the BSF in Brussels was a truly domestic event. Almost 90 per cent of the attendees had Belgian nationality. A few French participants appeared at the BSF, but all of the other nationalities are negligible or entirely absent. This confirms the finding of many other scholars of transnational activism that most GJM events are dominated by local, national activists, and thus are not that

Table 1.2. Sociodemographics, Nationality, and Previous Transnational Participation of ESF and BSF Participants

	BSF Brussels	ESF Athens
Sociodemographics		
Gender (percent male)	55.2	52.7
Age (mean)	44.3	34.6
Educational level None/primary	1.0	0.4
Lower secondary	4.9	2.0
Higher secondary	12.7	8.6
Higher non-university	28.3	8.4
University/doctoral	50.2	77.3
Missing	2.9	3.3
Nationality		
Belgium	89.3	11.8
France	5.4	6.7
Netherlands	1.0	1.6
Spain/Portugal	—	7.5
Italy	1.5	10.0
Germany/Switzerland/Austria	—	7.6
Scandinavia	—	5.9
UK/Ireland	—	9.4
Turkey	—	3.5
Greece/Cyprus	0.5	22.5
Balkan/Eastern Europe/Russia	1.0	9.0
Non-EU	1.5	4.5
(Previous) transnational participation		
No transnational participation	84.4	17.6
Transnational participation	15.6	82.4
Total	100	100
N	205	510

global in terms of its participants (see, e.g., Lichbach and de Vries 2004; Fisher et al. 2005). The opposite applies to the ESF participants. Organised in Greece, a fair amount of participants held Greek nationality, but the ESF was a truly transnational event with wide international attendance. The Belgians in the ESF sample seem to be over-represented (approximately 12 per cent). This is probably caused by the fact that the research team was Belgian, reducing the threshold for Belgian participants to take part in the survey. Moreover, some Belgian participants apparently forwarded the email invitation to their own contacts.

Two separate comparisons will be drawn: one among BSF and a second among ESF participants. The BSF participants were asked whether they had participated in the second WSF (January 2002) or in the fourth ESF (May 2006). At the second WSF, a large Belgian delegation was present and it was on that occasion that the BSF was founded. The fourth ESF was the most recent transnational social forum to have taken place at that time. BSF participants who indicated that they attended one or both of these transnational events were defined as transnational activists (16 per cent); the ones who did not attend any of these events were considered as national activists (84 per cent). This straightforward categorisation is rather rough and contains a lot of noise. People may have participated in other transnational events than the two mentioned, but it is the best measure available. Among the ESF participants, a comparable but not identical distinction was made as different questionnaires were used for the BSF and the ESF. Participants from Greece were considered to be national activists, unless they indicated to have participated in one of the following events: the first ESF in Florence (2002), the second ESF in Paris (2003), or the third ESF in London (2004). In that case, these Greek participants were considered to be transnational participants. All other people travelling from abroad to the Athens meeting were also classified as transnational activists. As for the categorisation of the BSF participants, here again some of the Greek ESF participants may have participated in another transnational event than the three mentioned.

As the figures in Table 1.2 show, about 82 per cent of the ESF respondents are classified as transnational activists. There is a striking contrast between the amount of transnational activists at the BSF compared to the amount at the ESF, which suggest a different logic for both events. Since the fundamental idea of a social forum is to provide an 'open space' (Whitaker 2004) where social movement organisations and activists can meet, debate, exchange experience and learn from each other, the level of each event consequently might attract more national (in the case of the BSF) or transnational (in the case of the ESF) oriented organisations or activists. Different levels of the social forum process (local, national, regional and global) are very much related, adopting the same organisational proceedings, drawing on the same democratic and participatory principles and addressing the same topics on neoliberal globalisation (Glasius and Timms 2006). Yet, as Glasius and Timms (2006) describe, each forum has its own specificities. Especially the local and national chapters very often show

typical features that merely refer to the 'higher level' social forums as a source of inspiration, but that have still distinct organisational forms or address specialised local topics. This too is an argument that national social forums in general do attract more nationally oriented activists, and that regional social forums attract more transnationally oriented activists, with only a small overlap.

The analyses below consist of a systematic comparison of the national and transnational activists as defined above: to what extent are they different? Note that the BSF analyses draw on a mainly Belgian sample and basically compare Belgians with Belgians, while the ESF analyses compare Greeks with other nationals. Differences between national and transnational activists in the case of the ESF, then, may not only be due to the difference between different types of activists, but also to their different national backgrounds. This caveat must be kept in mind, especially when taking into account variables on which Greeks in general differ from other European populations.

Finally, although differences between national and transnational activists are expected, at the same time, these differences are not anticipated to be very large. After all, all surveyed participants attended the same events and they more or less overcame the same barriers. Also, Greek ESF participants, for example, were confronted with language thresholds when attending the ESF: many ESF sessions, meetings and workshops were organised in another language than Greek, which might have discouraged participation. Moreover, the ESF analyses lump together many nationalities in the broad 'container' category of transnational activists. Bearing the features of their respective countries, there probably are substantial differences within the transnational activist category that may counterbalance and compensate each other. Still, a rough comparison is presented here, as it is the most straightforward way to test the main argument of national versus transnational activism.

Analyses

Table 1.3 contains two logistic regression analyses predicting transnational activism in contrast to national activism. The first column contains the results for the BSF and compares participants with and without previous international social forum experience. The second column documents the comparison between Greek (national) participants without previous experience in social forums abroad, and those ESF participants with previous (Greek) or current (all other nationalities) transnational experience. A binary logistic regression was applied since the dependent variable has only two possible outcomes (national or transnational). As the ratio between the number of cases and the number of variables is rather low, and in order to reduce the number of missing cases, the final models exclude non-significant variables in a backwards procedure. For the specific coding of the different predictors, see Table 1.4 in the appendix. Three

Table 1.3. Logistic Regressions Comparing National with Transnational Activists at BSF and ESF

		BSF Brussels	ESF Athens
Socio-demos	Age (low-high)	n.s.	n.s.
	Gender (male-female)	n.s.	2.387*
	Education (low-high)	n.s.	n.s.
	Student (no-yes)	n.s.	n.s.
Attitudes	Forum identification (low-high)	2.343*	n.s.
	Satisfaction democracy (low-high)	n.s.	n.s.
	Political interest (low-high)	n.s.	n.s.
	Expected outcome forum (low-high)	n.s.	.709***
Behaviour	Organisational involvement (low-high)	1.341*	1.619***
	Member transnational organisation (no-yes)	n.s.	2.211*
	Info-channel social forum (open-closed)	n.s.	2.088*
	Travel organised/reimbursed (no-yes)	—	1.348***
	Protest frequency (none-frequent)	1.947**	—
	N	177	458
	Nagelkerke R2	.229	.250

*, **, *** Coefficients in the table are odds-ratios and their significance: *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001. A backward (likelihood ratio) stepwise procedure was applied.

sets of independent variables can be discerned, each of them referring to the different hypotheses described above: a first set of socio-demographic variables (age, gender, education, and occupational status [student or not]); a second set of attitudinal variables (self-identification with other forum participants, general satisfaction with democracy in one's own country, general political interest and expected outcome of the forum); and a set of behavioural variables (organisational involvement, member of a transnational organisation or not, information channel about the forum, re-imbursement/organisation of travel, past protest frequency). The parameters presented are odds ratios: coefficients larger than 1.0 indicate a positive effect; parameters smaller than 1.0 denote a negative effect.

First of all, both models manage to grasp a considerable part of the differences between national and transnational activists. The Nagelkerke R^2 of the two models is not particularly high, but it is satisfying. Moreover, the explained variance is very similar: local Greek and transnational ESF participants on the one hand, and BSF participants with a transnational participation track record and BSF participants without such a record, on the other hand, are more or less equally different. The ESF model yields more significant predictors. This is most likely due to the much larger number of observations on which the ESF analysis is based (458 compared to 177).

As expected, the main finding is that organisational embeddedness makes a big difference. The more people are part of and embedded in an organisation,

the more likely it is that they participate transnationally. Organisations seem to systematically lower the barriers for transnational mobilisation. Organisational involvement (a scale of four distinct organisational variables, see the appendix) is a significant predictor of transnationalism. And more importantly, confirming Diani's (2005) findings, especially those people who are a member of transnational organisations focussing on global justice, Third World issues, or human rights are sparked to take part in transnational activism, at least among ESF participants. Among the BSF participants, transnational organisation membership was not a significant predictor, but the bivariate correlation went in the expected, positive direction. How organisations exactly perform their barrier reducing function can be seen in the two other organisational variables. Organisations, first of all, inform their members in many ways about upcoming international movement events. Technically speaking, transnational activists are more mobilised via closed mobilisation processes, while national activists are informed through open channels such as mass media, friends and posters (Walgrave and Klandermans 2010). Again, this mobilisation variable is not significant for the BSF, but the bivariate correlation goes in the same positive direction. Secondly, organisations take care of the practical worries of their members' transnational participation: they organise the trip, arrange accommodation and they pay for the expenses. In short, in terms of organisations, our data strongly corroborate previous results (Bédoyan, Van Aelst and Walgrave 2004; Fisher et al. 2005). Transnational activism is, much more than national activism, a predominantly organisational embedded activity. This implies that, at transnational movement events, we do not in the first place encounter the movements' grassroots and rank-and-file, but rather the organisational elites. Apart from their organisational distinctiveness, transnational activists, much more than mere national activists, are experienced and veteran protesters. Protest experience was only assessed by means of past protest frequency in the BSF sample, but it is likely that the same would be true for the ESF crowd. Again, this suggests that transnational activism is not the practice of novices, but rather an activity performed by experienced and weathered activists. Only after a certain activist career can people take their activism a step higher to the transnational level. Likewise, on a national or local scale, we are more likely confronted with occasional passers-by who are merely interested in the social forum as an individual, grabbing a taste of it, but who are not a member of or are not representing any organisation. In the BSF sample, for instance, among the national activists, 55 per cent were attending the forum 'as an individual' compared to only 22 per cent among the transnational activists (figures not shown in table).

Regarding both of the other dimensions of activism, socio-demographic background and attitudinal dispositions, we can be brief: they are much less helpful in distinguishing both activist types than the organisational and behavioural variables. Only gender makes a difference in the ESF sample. Transnational activists at the ESF meeting are more likely female than national ESF

activists. Structural differences between Greek society and other countries might offer a tentative explanation. First, it might be the case that, in general, female Greeks are less active in social movement organisations compared to other organisations. More likely, the fact that our ESF research design drew mainly on internet surveys probably skewed the Greek sample in terms of gender: of all European countries, Greece is, after Ukraine, the country with the far least internet access. More than three-fourths of the Greeks, in 2005, declared that they had no access to the internet at home or work. In most other European countries, that figure lay below one-third (European Social Survey 2006, round 2). Furthermore, internet access in Greece, the figures show, is very much a privilege of the male population, both in lower as well as in higher social strata. Interestingly, neither age, nor studentship nor education are significant predictors of transnational activism, which goes against the findings of previous studies.

Finally, our attitudinal predictors are not very performant either. Neither general satisfaction with democracy in one's country nor political interest proved to be an important predictor of transnational activism. An interesting result, yet only for ESF activists, is the expectation that the forum would be successful in disseminating the movements' ideas and boost mobilisation.[1] Transnational ESF participants are much less optimistic than their national counterparts. We can only speculate that the Greeks' self-confidence, maybe overwhelmed by the success of having the ESF in Athens, was boosted. One of the organisers of the Greek ESF explained that for many Greeks – often activists rather isolated from other activists in the world – the ESF was indeed an eye-opener, as they 'realised that they were part of a big family engaged in a common fight. Even the organizations most hostile to the EU have found in the ESF the political space they needed to express themselves' (Anastasia Theodorakopoulous, cited in Delmas 2007: 141). Also, the transnational and, as we showed, the more experienced and weathered activists may be more realistic in their expectations about the effect of the ESF than their less experienced and maybe more naive colleagues. Moreover, both the euphoria characteristic of the first ESFs and the media attention are decreasing (Rucht and Teune 2007). This is probably why experienced activists are more sceptical about the ESF's potential impact beyond the GJM. Finally, yet only at the BSF, transnational activists tend to identify more with the forum and other participants than national activists. Despite the clear indications of transnational activists being more of an 'elite' kind of activist, this result can be positively interpreted as a commitment to represent not only one's own organisation, but rather also the broader movement and movement's grassroots. Either way, firm conclusions regarding the attitudes cannot be drawn; neither can the claim be corroborated that transnational activists are particularly more committed or have consistently different attitudes than national activists.

The models presented here are incomplete. To really test Tarrow's 'rooted cosmopolitans' thesis, for example, information should be included about the private, non-activist related travelling behaviour of the activists and about their

command of foreign languages, etc. (see chapter 9 in this volume). That the organisational variables are dominating the models at the expense of the socio-demographic and attitudinal predictors may also be caused by the fact that we did not dispose of the most adequate indicators. However, it makes sense that especially organisational embeddedness matters. As Marco Giugni and colleagues claim in this book, the transnationalisation of collective action and activism probably is a dissymmetric process. Some aspects are more affected by transnationalism than others. The increased role of organisations might be one of these aspects.

Conclusion

In this chapter, transnational and national participants in local and international social forums, the typical meeting place of the GJM, were systematically compared to each other. Participants were surveyed in two social forum events in 2006: the BSF in Brussels and the ESF in Athens. In both samples, transnational activists were distinguished from national activists by drawing on a nationality criterion and on the self-reported participation in previous transnational social forums. Furthermore, transnational activism is considered as physically moving across borders, which does not include those activists who might report that they are pursuing global causes and issues without actually travelling abroad. The extent, to which activists in fact conceive their engagement as being transnational activism, is a question that Ariane Jossin more adequately tackles in the next chapter. Here, we explicitly focussed on activists being geographically active on a transnational level or a national level. We recognised the shortcomings and limitations of this operationalisation, but consider it to be a first step to further study the relation between national and transnational activism.

The relevance of our exercise is empirical as it is theoretical. Empirically, very few studies directly assessed whether the geographic level of activism really makes a difference. Some asserted that transnational activism is just an extension of national activism; others claimed it to be something entirely different. Theoretically, the geographic level of activism is relevant as large differences between the two types of activists might challenge mainstream activism theory, which has been devised for activism within the confines of the national state.

So, is transnational activism then any different from national activism? Substantial differences were found between the people who were merely active in their own country and the people who travelled abroad to participate in movement events. Particularly important was the organisational embeddedness of the transnational activists. Much more than national activists, transnationalists tend to be formally backed by and engaged in organisations; they tend to officially represent these organisations in the forum; they often belong to the decision-making circle in their organisation; their travel and accommodation have likely

been arranged for them and their expenses are frequently paid by their organisation. This is not to say that personal motivations for being active on a transnational level are not important, on the contrary, they are. For instance, we also find transnational activists (although only at the BSF) identify more strongly with the social forum process. But, as Jossin also concludes in the following chapter, the backbone for transnational activists is largely an organisational one: (national) groups and networks function like an anchorage for those activists who want to stay active on a transnational level. Thus, while our data only offers a snapshot of an activist career, Jossin already offers some hints that the same (organisational) factors are important in sustaining transnational activism.

Social movement and protest theory has recently witnessed an increase in attention for informal networks, micro-mobilisation contexts, etc. (see e.g., McAdam 1988). Also, in thinking about transnational activism and especially about the GJM, it is a common practice to emphasise the informality, networked, non-hierarchical and direct character of participation practices and action repertoires (della Porta 2005). The evidence presented here suggests, in contrast, that, much more than in national activism, organisations play a key role in producing transnational activism. The explanation is simple: transnational activism entails more costs than national activism. Organisations, probably more than informal arrangements, can help potential participants in overcoming these problems and taking the thresholds. The barrier-lowering capacity of organisations has been known for a long time (Klandermans and Oegema 1987). Yet, these qualities of organisations become again more relevant in a new context. As the cost of participating in national events has probably gone down over the years – protest participation is up and protest has become normalised – organisations have probably lost some of their indispensability regarding national activism. Examples of mobilisation without formal backbones abound in the recent protest literature. The scale shift of activism to the transnational level, however, brings organisations back in. In the end, we do not need a separate theory to tackle transnational activism, but we can simply rely on the existing mobilisation and participation theories with a renewed respect for the strength of organisations. Transnational activism is simply national activism with more restrictions.

Note

1. The question was formulated as follows: 'How big are the chances that the BSF/ESF will boost mobilisation or give visibility to the common targets of the movements participating in the BSF/ESF?'

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Appendix

Table 1.4. Independent Variables and their Operationalisation

	Range	Operationalization
Attitudes		
Forum identification	1 'low' – 5 'high'	Rescaled summation of three 5-point scale questions: 'I have a lot in common with the other people present at the BSF/ESF', 'I identify strongly with the others present at the BSF/ESF', and 'I feel committed to the other people present at the BSF/ESF'
Satisfaction democracy	1 'low' – 4 'high'	4-point scale question: 'In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy in your country?' with 1 'completely dissatisfied', 2 'dissatisfied', 3 'satisfied', and 4 'completely satisfied'.
Political interest	1 'not at all' – 5 'very much'	5-point scale question: 'How interested are you in politics?'
Expected outcome	1 'little chance' – 7 'high chance'	7-point scale question: 'How big are the chances that the BSF/ESF will boost mobilisation or give visibility to the common targets of the movements participating in the BSF/ESF?'
Behaviour		
Organisational involvement	1 'low' – 5 'high'	Participants were first asked whether they represented an organisation at the forum or just participated as an individual. If they were a delegate, respondents were further asked to indicate what position they had in this organisation and whether they got paid for the work they did for this organisation. These three questions resulted in a new scale ranging from 1 'non-delegate', 2 'unpaid, active member' 3 'paid, active member' 4 'unpaid staff', to 5 'paid staff'.
Member transnational organisation	0 'no' – 1 'yes'	Respondents were asked whether they were an active, passive or board member of the following organisations: church or religious organisation, student organisation, union or professional organisation, political party, women's right organisation, sport-recreational organisation, environmental organisation, art/music/educational organisation, community organisation, charity organi-

		sation, global justice organisation, third world organisation, human rights organisation, peace organisation and anti-racist or migrants' rights organisation. If respondents were an active or board member of a global justice, third world or human rights organization this variable was coded as one. All others were coded as zero.
Info-channel social forum	0 'open' – 1 'closed'	If a respondent was informed about the forum via radio or television, newspapers, posters, flyers, family, friends, people at school or work, or via personal email, this variable was coded zero. Those who got informed via member magazines, websites or email lists of an organisation, or via people within an organisation, were coded as one.
Travel organised/ reimbursed	1 'not at all' – 6 'completely by an organization'	Participants were asked whether they had organised their trip to the ESF by themselves or whether it was an organisation that arranged travel and accommodation. Also we asked them whether the costs for their ESF participation were reimbursed 'completely', 'partially' or 'not at all' by an organisation. Both questions were simply multiplied to indicate the extent to which an organisation was responsible for travel and expenses.
Protest frequency	1 'low' – 6 'high'	6-point scale indicating protest frequency during the last 5 years: 1 'never' 2 'only once' 3 'between 2 and 5 times', 4 'between 6 and 10', 5 'between 11 and 20', 6 'more than 20'

[1]The question was formulated as follows: 'How big are the chances that the BSF/ESF will boost mobilisation or give visibility to the common targets of the movements participating in the BSF/ESF?'