

Social Organization in the Movement: The Network of Local Circles

The success of Gülen-inspired projects relies on the numerous local circles of businessmen, professionals and workers in Turkish cities, towns and rural areas. The model of the local circles arose within the *cemaat*, a type of social group that evolved in Turkey after the formation of the Republic and the outlawing of the Sufi orders and the abolishment of the *madrasas*. Practicing Muslims who wanted to preserve the Islamic heritage while adapting to modernity formed circles around scholars and intellectuals who promoted various approaches such as focusing on Qur'anic studies, the blending of religious devotion with a mild form of nationalism, or individualized spiritual practices. These groups of readers and listeners around pioneering figures were later called *cemaats*, a grassroots movement of practicing faithful Turkish people who did not want to abandon their faith tradition while embracing the modern age. Within the *cemaats* were established the *sohbets* or small groups that have no formal membership, no initiation rites, require no building to convene the group and have no public insignia or recognition of membership. Rather, they consist of people who meet regularly to read Qur'anic commentary, the prophetic tradition and Muslim scholars, to share ideas and needs of people in the group and to determine service projects that the group chooses to support financially.

Among the noteworthy scholars of the era who attracted the attention of a large number of citizens was Said Nursi, who promoted a harmony between science and reason, on the one hand, and revelation and faith on the other. While Nursi was strongly influenced by the spiritual tradition of Islam, his focus was on educating the faithful against the onslaught of philosophical naturalism and materialism. As discussed in the previous chapter, Mr. Gülen in his early adult years was an active part of a *cemaat* around Nursi's teachings and experienced the fellowship and effectiveness of this form of organization.

As Mr. Gülen's ideas caught hold in Turkey in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a result of his sermons and writings, he encouraged the *sohbet* structure as a way for those inspired by his ideas to get together and discuss the relevance of these ideas for contemporary Turkish society. The Turkish people were familiar with local circles and many of them already belonged to such circles, based on their work, neighborhoods or special interests. It was natural, therefore, for these circles

to focus on the ideas being preached by this imam who was drawing large crowds and inspiring new hope for the future of Turkey and especially Turkish youth.

Data in this chapter come from interviews with movement participants who are part of local circles. In the spring of 2007, Dogan Koc interviewed a local circle of 12 businessmen in Ankara, as well as an interview with a businessman in Istanbul who is in the textile business and makes a substantial contribution every year to Gülen-related projects. He also interviewed a group of supporters in Houston, Texas, that consisted mostly of graduate students.¹ In spring 2008, I conducted nine focus groups with local circles of Gülen supporters in Turkey. In Istanbul I interviewed one group consisting of eight wealthy businessmen; another local circle of 16 young professionals, mostly engineers; a group of 4 doctors and an administrator at Sema Hospital; a local circle consisting of 12 blue collar workers; and a group of women who belong to a local circle. In addition, in Bursa I met with a group of three businessmen who are major donors to Gülen-inspired schools there; a group of eight doctors at Bahar Hospital; and a circle of 13 blue collar workers who meet in local circles around Bursa. Finally, in Mudanya, a small village in the outskirts of Bursa, I interviewed a group of ten men from various occupational backgrounds, including a salesclerk, an elementary public school teacher, a retired civil servant and the owner of a well established restaurant.

In addition to these focus groups, I also conducted one on one interviews with five people who belong to local circles and make substantial monetary contributions to Gülen-inspired projects both in Turkey and abroad. These interviewees include: two journalists, a wealthy entrepreneur in the food industry who owns a major company in Turkey, the owner of a major textile company and the principal of one of the Gülen-inspired schools.

The focus groups and individual interviews are representative of movement participants in terms of social class, occupations, large and small cities, gender, age and length of time in the movement. As a result, data reflect the diversity that exists in the local circles as well as among the many individuals who are part of these circles. Analysis in this chapter is framed sociologically in terms of the organizational theories of commitment discussed in Chapter Chapter 1, I present data to show that the contributions made by movement members, including wealthier sponsors, both **demonstrate** commitment to the ideals of the movement and simultaneously **generate** commitment to the movement.

Structure of the Local Circles

Local circles are typically organized in two ways: (1) according to location and neighborhoods; and (2) according to education and jobs. For example, doctors in the same general area will meet together as will dentists, lawyers, accountants,

¹Data from these interviews were first described in Ebaugh and Koc (2007).

teachers, factory workers, etc. While Gülen movement participants may also belong to larger professional organizations associated with the movement that has periodic gatherings, they meet weekly or twice a week in smaller groups of about 10–12 people. In these small meetings, participants talk about a variety of things, including religion, technical work, family and any aspect of life that is raised by members. Sometimes the group reads from the Qur'an or the Prophetic tradition; on other occasions, the group may host a speaker. More frequently, the members in a given group simply come together to share their lives, whatever might be important that particular week. As one member said, "What is most important is coming together and sharing with one another. Every week I close my Friday night and tell my friends not to call me or plan anything. Meeting in my local circle is the most important event of my week."

The group of workers in Bursa meet in local circles of 20–25, once a week with newcomers to the Gülen movement and once with people who have been in the movement a longer time. As one worker said, "In our culture we have values which have been lost so we read motivational materials such as Gülen books or videos or works by Nursi or something from the Prophetic tradition." Because they are not as wealthy as the businessmen, they cannot support an entire school or ten scholarships as some businessmen do but perhaps three of them support one scholarship. In addition, the group in Bursa has created Kor-Der, an association that organizes activities in 120 townships around Bursa to spread the service message of the movement, to garner donations and to determine needs in the local villages. Therefore, while the workers' group is not able to make large donations of money, members donate many hours of time soliciting assistance from others to support service projects.

As one businessman explained,

"Being in the same type of business means that we have a strong basis for coming together and understanding one another. We also network and refer customers among us. Then we have a basis for discussing projects that need doing in our community and how we can help with these projects. We also see the results of our efforts which encourage us to be even more generous."

In fact, helping one another to be successful in their businesses is promoted by Mr. Gülen. In 2007 Tuskon, a Gülen-inspired business association with 1,500 members, sponsored a conference in Istanbul for a thousand business owners from developing countries such as Africa and Central Asia at which they were coached in ways to grow their businesses. Assisting one another in a given industry and networking among themselves is one reason that the Gülen business community in Turkey is known as one of the richest communities in the country.²

Organizing on the basis of natural groups, such as professions or occupational groups, also facilitates recruitment. Groups that share strong distinctive identities and dense interpersonal networks are highly organized and hence readily mobilized. The "bloc recruitment" of preexisting solidarity groups represents the most

²Baskan (2004).

efficient form of recruitment.³ Movements that focus on preexisting or “natural” groups and that link their vision of change to that preexisting group culture are more effective than efforts to recruit lone individuals. Individual recruitment requires greater resource investment and is much slower than bloc recruitment.

All of the local circles I visited were gender-segregated. When I inquired about women members, in each circle I was told that the circles are open to women but that the women prefer to meet by themselves and were more comfortable with other women. In the case of the engineers, for example, about 10% of women engineers meet in mixed circles. There are parallel local circles for women engineers where the remaining 90% meet. The same holds true for doctors, nurses, dentists, accountants, blue collar workers, etc. One reason for the segregation, I was told, is logistical. The women prefer to meet earlier in the day before their children are home from school activities and require their attention. Also, for safety reasons, women do not like to be out after dark when many of the male circles meet.

The issue of the role of women in the Gülen movement was raised repeatedly throughout my interviews. Critics of the movement, both in Turkey and in Houston, Texas, maintain that women in the movement are viewed and treated subserviently, are expected to fulfill the traditional roles of raising the children and taking care of the home, are encouraged to wear the headscarf, are discouraged from social interactions with men and are discouraged from public leadership roles.⁴ In my interviews with women, in Turkey and in the United States, I discovered a wide array of differences among women both in their judgments of how they are treated within the movement and in observing the roles played by women in movement activities. For example, in San Antonio, Texas, a covered woman has been the spokesperson and master of ceremonies at the annual Ramadan dinner which is attended by hundreds of people from the community. This has not been the case in Houston, Texas, where a man has always lead the event and served as president of the local group. In Turkey many of my female interviewees value the fact that they are allowed to teach in the Gülen-inspired schools and hospitals while wearing the headscarf, something forbidden in the public institutions in Turkey. Many of these women find empowerment in being able to decide for themselves what to wear as well as a space in the Gülen-related institutions to exercise their individuality and abilities.⁵

³Tilly (1978); Oberschall (1973); Snow, Zurcher and Eckland-Olson (1980); McCarthy and Wolfson (1996); Melucci (1999).

⁴See the Conclusions chapter for a description of the interviews I conducted with critics of the Gülen movement.

⁵The issue of women in the Gülen movement has been understudied by academic outsiders, especially scholars also well versed in Turkish culture, who can bring a systematic and non-ideological perspective to the topic.

I interviewed in one women's local circle in the Asian part of Istanbul. The group consisted of a mixture of women from varying occupational backgrounds including one former and one current teacher in a Gülen-inspired school, a lawyer, an accountant, a secretary, a salesperson and a stay-at-home Mom. When I asked how they felt about being excluded from male circles, I was corrected in the following way, "We are not excluded. We don't want to meet with the men. We feel more comfortable meeting among ourselves. Then we can talk about what interests and concerns us which is different from that of the men."

The circles of women, I learned, operate similarly to those of the men. The groups meet every week, read from the Qur'an, the Prophetic tradition, Mr. Gülen's writings and other inspirational books. The women then discuss the topic, especially how it relates to their own lives. They also discuss their families, problems they might at home especially with their children and service projects that need their help. Those women who work outside the home make financial contributions to Gülen projects. The women also engage in *kemes*, that is, the Turkish practice of making hand-crafted articles (e.g. embroidery, crocheting, artwork, etc.) that they then sell and give the profits to projects in need of assistance.

An essential part of every local circle is supporting some needy project, either in Turkey or in another country. When asked how the group learns about needs in the community, I was told repeatedly that the Gülen-inspired community is tight-knit and people know which projects need help. Some people have been in contact with and supporting educational projects for years and know what is going on in the educational field. Others are connected to the hospitals and know what needs exist there. Still others travel outside Turkey and are aware of needs in other countries. Word circulates which projects are especially in need at a given time and people in local circles get together and decide what they can do.

In addition to financial giving throughout the year, twice throughout the year Muslims celebrate special festivals that call forth the sense of sharing with the needy. During the month of Ramadan when every practicing Muslim fasts from sunrise to sunset and makes a special effort to live a virtuous and disciplined life, there is also the requirement of sharing one's abundance with those in need. Almost without exception, Muslims around the world are particularly generous during Ramadan with their charitable contributions.

The second festival is Eid-ul-Adha, the Day of Sacrifice, that occurs right after hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca that is required once in a life time for all able-bodied Muslims who can afford it. On the Day of Sacrifice Muslims sacrifice animals who have been deemed *halaal* or fit for sacrifice, in remembrance of the sacrifice that Abraham made to God. They not only eat the meat themselves but distribute it amongst their relatives, neighbors and friends and finally, one-third is given to the poor and hungry. The goal in many Muslim communities is to join together to see that no impoverished neighbor is left without sacrificial food during this day.

At the time of Eid-ul-Adha several months prior to my interviews, a group of businessmen from Bursa traveled to Darfur, Sudan, where they bought three bulls to slaughter and gave as food to poor people there. They also met other businessmen

there whom they convinced to get involved in building a school in one of the Darfur cities in order to make sure that the youth there are being educated.

Raising Money for Gülen-Inspired Projects

A major, if not *the* major focus of Gülen's vision for Turkey and for human-kind, is the importance of quality education for the development of the human person and, simultaneously, for bringing Turkey into the modern era of the twenty-first century. To achieve this goal, he advocated the opening of schools first in Turkey and eventually throughout the world. To do this would require the commitment of everyone in the movement, including administrators, teachers, tutors, students and the financial support of everyone to his/her ability. As a result, every circle in which I interviewed stressed ways in which the circle members support some educational projects, including dormitories, preparatory classes, building schools and providing scholarships for needy students to attend these schools.

Every school has its own independent accounting system and accountants who manage the budget and financial books. They are all accountable to the local and state authorities, as well as to the trust's sponsors. The local sponsors are knowledgeable about the status of the ongoing projects at any given time, for they are personally responsible for many of them, either as construction contractors, accountants, serving on the board of directors, teachers, principals, etc. It is quite easy, therefore, for them to monitor how the donations are used, thereby achieving transparency in financial issues. Moreover, as one businessman explained,

“First of all, I want you to know that people in the Gülen movement have gained the trust of people in every strata of life. People who support the activities of this movement do not worry about whether the support reached its destination, they don't chase it. However, if we want to look at it, all kinds of information is available in every activity, we can be sure by looking at them.”

Likewise, a local businessmen in Houston who finances Gülen-related projects commented, “Even if I don't know the details of their activities, I know these people very well and I trust them. Therefore I make donations knowing they are well used.”

In Mardin, for example, a city in southeastern Turkey, a circle of local businessmen met over a three year period (1988–1991) and came to realize that the state was unable to provide the necessary education for students not only in their city but throughout southeastern Turkey to compete on university entrance exams. Most of the businessmen had been attending Mr. Gülen's public sermons, in which he emphasized the importance of education and called for the building of modern schools. These businessmen were inspired by the success of the Gülen schools in Izmir, Istanbul and Gaziantep in distinguishing themselves from their counterparts by their research-based education and unprecedented success in international science competitions. During visits to these schools, the men witnessed that the people who donated to the schools included not only businessmen, but also workers, teachers, and civil servants.

In Mardin, these businessmen reached out to more and more people with whom they shared an educational vision and whose help they solicited in sponsoring the schools. Some pledged money, some promised to seek individuals who would pledge to contribute money, others offered to procure construction materials and equipment as donations from their suppliers, and still others committed an amount of physical work in the construction effort. Currently in the Gülen-movement schools in Mardin, every teacher supports the monthly expenses of at least one secondary or high school student.⁶

In a focused interview with a dozen businessmen involved in the small textile industry in Ankara we heard many stories about how the businessmen first became involved with Gülen-inspired projects. For example, in 1985 an imam came to a local mosque and asked the businessmen there for help to open a school for children in the city. After he left, the men gathered together twice each week to discuss the matter. The group made a commitment to assist with the building of the school. Some gave money, others solicited pledges of financial support from other businessmen in the city and others provided goods and services such as concrete, desks, and even volunteer labor. Within a short time, Samanyolu College opened its doors to the first high school class.

The group of businessmen continued to meet routinely, to monitor the needs in the school and to initiate additional projects that they supported. For example, in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a massacre in Azerbaijan. People there needed help. The Gülen community in Ankara responded; 18 businessmen from different parts of Ankara went to Azerbaijan to deliver money and goods that they had gathered from Gülen-inspired people in Ankara. As one of the businessmen said, “That was an important trip for me. I learned a lot from those people in our group. They were very different people, most of them were not educated like me, but they all affected me in their understanding of Mr. Gülen’s teachings and in their lifestyles. Since that trip I am very involved in the Gülen movement.”

Another businessman in the focus group told a story that typifies the way in which many people get involved in the movement. One day in 1988 he met a law student who was being financed by one of the businessmen that he knew in his living complex. He asked the businessmen to introduce him to some of these underprivileged law students who could not afford law school. Several days later a group of law students showed up at his store. However, they did not ask for money but talked about country and world problems. A few weeks later they invited the man to their house where there were ten law students gathered from all over Turkey, most of them from poor families. Still there was no talk of money. Some of the students again visited his store and met his son who was having difficulty in school. They offered to tutor the son whose grades improved dramatically with tutoring. There was still no talk of money. The man, after a year of knowing these students

⁶Kalyoncu (2008).

personally, initiated scholarships to help them complete law school. He continues since 1988 to provide such scholarships to needy law students.

The above story typifies actions of Mr. Gülen himself in the 1970s and 1980s when he lived on or near university campuses throughout Turkey. He served as a teacher for a time and spent many years supervising students in high school and university settings. In Bursa I interviewed a gentleman who, along with his brother, shared a house with Mr. Gülen while he was attending university in the 1960s. He recalled the many university students who would visit Mr. Gülen in his second story apartment for tutoring and encouragement. He commented that, in his opinion, this cadre of university students who gathered around Mr. Gülen was the beginnings of the Gülen movement in Turkey.

Financial Contributions

Financial giving is an inherent characteristic of participants in the Gülen movement. Repeatedly, interviewees commented that everyone involved in the movement makes some kind of financial contribution depending on his/her circumstances. There was widespread agreement among people in the various local circles that the amount of donations vary between 5% and 20% with 10% of yearly income as an average and a small group of individuals who make contributions above 20%.

Organizational theorists argue that the success of a movement is highly dependent on contributions of “resourceful actors” or elites. Whether they are influential politicians, prophets, successful businessmen, or business firms, these individuals are “resourceful actors” because they have the capacity to contribute a significant part of what it takes to bring about the goals of the movement. The mobilization of a large group happens only when it is facilitated by contributions from such powerful elites because they provide two types of resources: first, elites have access to and often control large resource pools; and, secondly, elite involvement can confer legitimacy and visibility to a social movement, a second resource essential to the success of a movement.⁷

The wealthy industrialists whom I interviewed in Istanbul, including the owner of a major electronics company, the owner of a well established furniture business, and a man whose family owns a shipping company each give about \$1 million a year to Gülen-inspired projects, a sum that represents 10–15% of their income. Two of the men are among the five supporters who financed the latest Gülen-inspired hospital in Istanbul. In Bursa, a businessman gives approximately \$3.5 million per year which is one third of his income. Another businessman gives \$3–4 million per

⁷Fireman and Gamson (1979); Olson (1965); McCarthy and Zald (1977); Garner (1996); Melucci (1999); Della Porta and Diani (1999); Morris and Staggborg (2004).

year to eleven schools in Albania. A third man gives money to schools in ten countries and said he now has brothers in all these countries and not just locally in Turkey.

We asked the group of a dozen businessmen in Ankara whether each of them contributes financially to Gülen-inspired projects and, if so, approximately how much they give each year. Each of the 12 men said that they contribute as they can to the movement projects. Amounts of contributions varied from 10–70% of their annual income, ranging from \$20,000 to 300,000 per year. One man, in particular, said he gives 40% of his income every year which is about \$100,000; however, he said he would like to give 95% but is not able to do so and still maintain himself and his family. Another man said, “We wish we could be like the companion of the Prophet and give everything we have. But it is not easy.” This group of businessmen consisted of older men who have been together as a group for many years and have accomplished numerous Gülen-inspired projects in Ankara as well as in other countries. Currently, each of them has managers in their stores who carry on the daily business affairs. The business owners spend 2–3 hour in their stores every day and then come together almost every day to discuss issues related to the projects they are supporting. The group, therefore, provides a tight community of like-minded individuals working for common causes. Cetin maintains that “the solidarity of the group is inseparable from the personal quest and from the everyday affective and communicative needs of the participants in the network... Yet, it is epiphenomenal, not the ultimate aim or end in itself, by itself, but it accompanies action naturally as a result of the accomplishment of the service projects.”⁸

Another very successful businessman in Istanbul whom we interviewed provided insight into the sums of money being contributed by the supporters of the Gülen movement to local projects. He is 48 years old and is in the textile business. He contributes 20% of his \$4–5 million yearly income to movement-related projects. Eighty percent of his good friends are also participants in the movement and contribute as they can to projects. He says he has established very sincere and fortunate friendships through participation in activities in the movement. He learned of the movement when a friend in 1986 invited him to a *sohbet* where people come together and have discussions, both about Mr. Gülen’s writings and about local projects that need support. Asked what benefits a person gets from supporting Gülen-inspired projects, he replied,

“I do not get any worldly benefit by supporting the Gülen Movement. If I receive anything in the hereafter, we will see that over there. I hope that I will be able to please God through these activities and the time that I spend with these beautiful people. Other than this, neither I nor other volunteers have any other expectations. After giving your heart to these charitable activities, God never leaves you in trouble. We give and He gives more back to us. He multiplies what we have in our hands. I don’t think my contributions are big enough, however, in the sight of God, there is nothing small and valueless if you do that for Him and for humanity.”

⁸Cetin (2010).

Some of the businessmen and professionals donate one third of their annual income, after taxes, to movement projects. For example, a businessman in Istanbul allocates one third back into his business, one third for the support of his family and the remaining one third to Gülen-related projects. While I was unable to ascertain his yearly income, his business is worth over \$1 billion and is among the most successful business enterprises in his economic sector in Turkey. I can surmise, therefore, that his yearly income amounts to multi-millions of dollars. Several people in the movement identify him as one of the largest contributors to the service projects, especially the schools.

The substantial contributions made by wealthy businessmen and entrepreneurs in the movement are important not only for their financial consequences in terms of what can be accomplished in terms of building and sustaining expensive projects but also because such support gives legitimization and visibility to the movement. Throughout interviews frequent mention is made of the “businessmen” who are able to make possible the service goals of the movement.

It is not only the wealthy business owners, however, who contribute financially to the movement but every local circle contributes as it is able to the support of educational projects. The group of young entrepreneurs in Istanbul, many of them engineers, belong to a professional organization of about 1,000 members, all of them participants in the Gülen movement. The group donates about \$2 million a year to Gülen-inspired projects. About half of that comes from members themselves and the other half from monies that are solicited by members from family and business associates.

The 10% average for giving within the local circles applies not only to the businessmen and professionals but also to blue collar workers, in Istanbul, Bursa and in Mudanya. Many of these Gülen-inspired participants work as salespersons, book-keepers, city employees, maintenance workers and employees of factories. The average annual salaries of these workers varied but it is common to make \$15,000–30,000 per year. Yet, there was general agreement that the average donation for members in the circle was 10% for most years. If an individual cannot make a 10% monetary contribution, he pledges to solicit contributions from his acquaintances to make up the difference. One worker in Bursa related the incident of arranging for his boss, who knew nothing of the Gülen movement, to visit Albania to see a Gülen-inspired school there. He was so impressed that he now makes a significant financial contribution to the movement every year. Many of the people who are asked to contribute to specific projects are not members of the movement who are already giving. Rather, they are family, friends and acquaintances outside the movement who are willing to financially support needy students or worthwhile service projects, especially during the month of Ramadan when every practicing Muslim is expected to give to charitable giving.

The workers’ circles tended to support scholarships rather than schools since the latter is a “bigger item” in terms of financial resources. It usually costs about \$1,800 per year to stay in one of the Gülen movement dormitories and workers feel they can afford that type scholarship, either alone or with another circle member.

The workers also help members among themselves who are in need. There are also dormitories in their neighborhoods and members in the circles often know of needy students in these dorms. Also, students visit members and let them know who needs help. Often the children of circle members can stay in local dormitories free of charge and such living arrangement is often favored because it is more conducive for study and for meeting the kinds of friends their parents prefer.

An interesting practice within all of the local circles in which we interviewed is that of publicly announcing one's yearly pledge to Gülen-inspired projects. While great emphasis was placed on the fact that contributions are entirely voluntary and that respect is shown to individual circumstances, interviewees acknowledged that there is competition among circle members regarding how much one can donate. This was especially obvious among the wealthier donors who often challenged one another to increase their pledges. Along with competition, however, several of the participants stated that hearing that one's colleague who makes approximately the same income is pledging to donate a given amount is motivation to do the same. One engineer said, "There is some competition. We know generally what everyone makes and we can compare. When I see that he is giving 10%, it encourages me to do the same."

There are about 50 local interfaith dialog groups in the United States that consist of individuals who are inspired by the teachings and life of Mr. Gülen.⁹ These groups are independent organizationally even though members across groups may know another and share ideas and projects informally. The Institute of Interfaith Dialog for World Peace, Inc. (IID) was established in August 2002 in Austin, Texas. One year later the headquarters moved to Houston. IID organizes activities in more than 16 cities in the southern states, including Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas and Mississippi. The purpose of the nonprofit institute, as well as others across the United States, is to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding.

To achieve this purpose, the institute organizes and supports numerous activities in each of the cities in which it has members. These include an annual Ramadan interfaith dinner, a yearly award dinner to honor people in the local communities who make major contributions to interfaith dialog, workshops throughout the year, an annual retreat and numerous interfaith trips to Turkey. These activities are supported financially by contributions on the part of volunteers committed to the institute, most of them Turkish Muslims who are inspired by the teachings of Mr. Gülen. Many of them are Turkish students attending universities in the southern United States, even though there are a handful of businessmen and professionals who are also involved.

Based on the Turkish model of local circles that support Gülen-inspired projects, a large percentage of IID's budget is provided by relatively small contributions on the part of over 500 Turkish and Turkish-Americans in the southern states of the

⁹Michels (2008).

U.S. who support projects of IID. About half of these supporters are local students. In the first several years of IID, its annual budget was under \$25,000. By 2006 it increased to \$500,000 and in 2008 IID collects almost \$1 million per year in donations. About 80% comes from the local American Turkish community and the remaining 20% from the non-Muslim local community.

Numerous graduate students, many of them on small stipends from Turkey or from their American universities, pledge \$2,000–5,000 every year even though such pledges means great sacrifice on the students' part. It is not unusual for a student on a \$1,500 per month stipend to give \$100–150 per month to IID which amounts to roughly 10% of his/her income. Some of the students also work in second jobs in order to contribute some money to the activities of IID. And many of them look forward to graduating, having good jobs and being able to contribute more of their income at that point. As one student said, "Being a graduate student it is hard to donate big amounts, but hopefully after I graduate, I will be able to make bigger and better donations."

Approximately 50% of IID members are professionals and businessmen in the community, many of whom have completed education in the United States and have opted to work there for the time being. It is the contributions of these individuals which constitute the largest proportion of IID's income. One local businessman, for example, who is an engineer and has some real estate investments, gives \$50,000–70,000 every year to IID which is 40% of his income. He single-handedly finances an Iftar dinner each year. In 2006 he also paid for the tickets for 12 Americans to visit Turkey in an interfaith trip sponsored by IID. He regrets that his busy schedule prohibits him from greater involvement with IID activities; however, he feels he can make an impact in IID projects by providing substantial financial support. In addition, he joins friends every week at *sohbet* (group meetings) to discuss the ideas of Mr. Gülen and how to operationalize them in local projects.

While emphasis has been placed in the organizational literature on the importance of money and legitimacy as resources for successful action, some theorists maintain that volunteer labor has not received equal attention. Much of the impetus for action as well as the day to day activities that propel a movement toward its goals depend on the labor of movement members. Decentralization of authority and a structure whereby tasks are undertaken by committees of volunteers enhances the vibrancy of a movement.¹⁰ This fact is evident in IID as well as in other local Gülen groups. Direct financial contributions do not capture the full picture of donations to Gülen projects. Participants donate time, talents and food to the various activities sponsored by IID. For example, dinner and luncheons are frequently organized by IID. Women in the organization are continuously asked to prepare Turkish food for these gatherings, both small and large, and neither the cost of the food nor the labor involved in preparing it is financially compensated. The design and maintenance of websites, designing fliers and brochures, creating videos related to the activities of IID, organizing events, leading interfaith trips to Turkey, hosting people from other

¹⁰McCarthy and Wolfson (1996); Morris and Staggenborg (2004); Byrne (1997).

faith communities into their homes during Ramadan and networking in the inter-faith community are done by volunteers of the movement. It is not unusual for many IID members to spend 20–30 hours a week in Gülen movement activities, and many of these movement participants are full time students in local universities. If these activities were outsourced or calculated in terms of costs, the donations from IID members would be very substantial.

Some social movement theorists argue that a formalized structure with a clear division of labor leads to a more successful movement and that a centralized decision-making structure increases task effectiveness and the mobilization of resources.¹¹ However, other research shows that bureaucratic arrangements are less effective at mobilizing grassroots participation and that decentralized structures are more successful in motivating and involving member participation.¹² In the case of the Gülen movement, the decentralized authority and administrative structure promotes member involvement and a sense of responsibility on the part of the millions of participants who maintain a personal stake in the movement achievements.

Motivation Driving the Financial Contributions

When asked why they give \$1 million or more dollars each year to movement projects, the group of businessmen in Istanbul gave the following reasons: to make better human beings as Mr. Gülen encourages; to educate our youth; to please God; to earn a reward in the next life; to be part of a bigger movement to better the world; to provide hope to our people in Turkey and around the world. Two of the businessmen were among the first members in the movement who had heard Mr. Gülen preaching in the 1970s and were very impressed with his ideas and came together with other local businessmen to see what they could do to carry out his vision.

The president of a large textile manufacturing company said he is motivated by Mr. Gülen's ideas of service.

“We get associated with the movement people and this motivates us to get involved with the projects. What are my favorite projects? What is dear to my heart is that I can see these students who graduate and pick up posts in government and become righteous people in government and other offices. When I see these former students in these positions, I am so glad. I see that my society and government is improving in terms of righteousness and free of corruption.”

A wealthy businessmen in Istanbul who is a major contributor relayed a story of the first fund raising meeting to build the very first Gülen-inspired school, an event at which Mr. Gülen gave a motivational speech. He said it was important to help needy students and then gave historical examples from the life of the Prophet and

¹¹ Gamson (1975); McCarthy and Zald (1977); McCarthy and Wolfson (1996); Melucci (1999); Morris and Staggborg (2004).

¹² Gerlach and Hines (1970); Curtis and Zurcher (1974); Jenkins (1983); Byrne (1997).

his companions. At that event I saw people writing checks, giving cash and some offering gold rings and bracelets. "I was deeply impacted by that scene that I saw, giving so immediately and generously. From this first impact, I thought this is something I wanted to be part of. I then saw the successes of the projects and I became part of the movement." He went on to elaborate on other examples of giving that influenced him. He saw blue collar workers with families who were making very little every month but dedicating 20% of their income to support, perhaps, half or one-fourth of a scholarship for a needy student. He realized that these people might be taking public transportation but giving to help students. Later he got involved in fund raising meetings and saw what people were doing to raise money for Gülen-inspired projects, some donating keys to their cars, giving their gold watches and women offering their jewelry to support students. A person in Izmir baked pizzas and sold them from a cart to raise money to build a small dorm in a neighboring small town. The more he witnessed these examples of giving, the stronger was his motivation to do his part to support the worthwhile projects. He made a commitment to donate one third of his income to furthering his business, one third to supporting his family and the remaining one third to Gülen projects.

An engineer, when asked why he gives 10% of his yearly income to the movement, said, "There is no reason other than the pleasure of God. The opposite is it is just working for yourself, greed." And we in the Gülen movement, he continued, are devoted to the spirit of service to humanity which Mr. Gülen taught us.

The blue collar workers were inspired by the fact that Mr. Gülen seemed authentic and, as one worker said, "I was impressed when I heard him that he did not preach one thing that he did not practice himself." Another worker said that he saw fighting and blame on the part of other groups in society but with Gülen he saw love and positive things. He also liked the fact that Mr. Gülen did not have a beard like most imams and taught that Turkey and the Islamic countries must embrace modernity, science and globalization. Another worker expressed the fact the he wanted to get educated but did not have the opportunity. He feels he is now doing something to help someone else be educated.

In several of the local circles, I heard people express the fact that whatever God has given is meant to be shared and that God wants people to be vehicles for the sharing. As one worker said, "We have seen others in the past who are altruistic and share with others as God's vehicle,- so we only feel humble of what we can do."

There is a Turkish tradition that promotes the separation of the donor from the recipient so that a sense of obligation is not created in the one being helped. Also, the giver is seen as a transfer agent from God rather than as a beneficent provider. A businessmen in Bursa who donated land for a school building did not send his own children to the school so that he would not mix personal motivation with doing good works. Another person commented, "We do not want too many details about what we are supporting such as which students get scholarships because it gets too personal. Rather, we donate to a pool that helps needy students but nobody knows who is supporting which ones." However, some of us are in touch with the students receiving help so we know in general how our money is being used.

The 48 year old businessman in Istanbul had this to say,” People in the Gülen movement turn their ideas into projects, they tell how they accomplished their success. People trust them, if they ask for a project, they expect it from the Creator, not from creatures, and that’s why I believe they reach success. If anybody from the movement comes to my city and asks for help, I try my best to help them and I encourage my friends around me to do the same.” He went on to say that such giving is done in a spirit of serving the Creator by serving his people and that often a result of such giving is that strong ties are developed among the givers. As Cetin maintains,

“Participation in services takes relatively permanent forms of networks. Individuals come and go and replace one another but the projects are always there and continue. Individual needs and collective goals are not mutually exclusive; they are one and the same thing. These two and the action of the Gülen Movement coincide and interweave closely with one another in daily life...The participation in services around a specific goal and the tangibility of the products yield and strengthen solidarity.”¹³

An engineer said that people make an investment in their lives with their money and then get a reward in the afterlife if it is invested well. Students, he feels, make a big investment for their lives and he wants to help them make that investment so that they can live productive lives, earn eternal rewards and help others to make that investment once they are educated.

While personal monetary success is not an overt motivation for giving, a number of interviewees at all socio-economic levels commented that often giving to worthwhile projects brings material rewards to the giver: businesses make even greater profits and workers see salary increases or job advancements. These successes are seen as God’s blessings on those who give. As one worker said, “When someone gives they see abundance in their incomes; God gives them abundance.”

Confidence and Trust in Gülen-Inspired Projects

In every local circle in which I interviewed, members expressed their trust in how their donations were being used. Repeatedly, interviewees said they never worried how their money was being used because they know it is being well spent. Another frequent comment was, “We see results.” By this they meant that they see students who are performing well academically in the schools and prep courses. They see students from the Gülen-inspired schools who are accepted into top rated universities in Turkey and abroad. Many of them become members of the movement, often when they are in university. It is also common for some people in the local circles to travel to Central Asian and other countries that have Gülen-inspired schools and to see the contributions these schools are making. Supporters also hear stories about patients who are treated in Gülen-inspired hospitals and are very pleased with their

¹³ Cetin (2010).

humane treatment by the doctors and staff. The narratives of the many needy people being helped by Kimse Yok Mu, the relief association, are repeated in the local circles and reinforced in the media. Since the Gülen-inspired communities maintain a higher degree of communication through *sohbet* circles and the media, the success stories of Gülen-inspired projects are told and retold, thus assuring contributors that their monies are being well spent and providing tangible results.

Recruitment into the Movement

Many participants in the movement first heard of it when they stayed in the dormitories, attended university with people in the movement or went to one of the preparatory courses. Others heard of it through family or friends. For example, a businessman in Istanbul had a brother in medical school who invited him to Ankara when he was in high school. He stayed with 20 medical school students in one of the Gülen-related dorms. He said immediately he could tell these students were different from other university students in terms of their values, aspirations and attitudes toward one another. He gave the example of sleeping late the first morning and one of the students stayed to make him a big breakfast before going off to study. He was influenced by the group and wanted to know what inspired them to live together in the dorm. He learned that many of them had scholarships to stay there financed by local businessmen. When I became a businessman, I remembered my experience and wanted to be part of the movement by becoming a sponsor for needy students.

Like many of those I interviewed, an engineer first heard about the Gülen movement in university. He was reflecting on his life and trying to find meaning. His cousin introduced him to Gülen-inspired people who were students at the university and living together in a dorm. He joined them and became part of their community.

Other engineers in the group, as well as a number of the doctors I interviewed, first became acquainted with the Gülen movement when attending prep courses in various cities throughout Turkey. One engineer, for example, was looking for intellectual company in his life and did not find it in the far right nationalist group to which he belonged. He said, "When I found Gülen-inspired people at the prep course, I found everything I was looking for. I found religion, nationalism, science, intellectualism and a world view that I could support." He then heard Mr. Gülen speak. He was calling everyone not to fight but to understand one another. He said we are all human beings, on the same ship. As a nationalist, he said, everyone becomes your enemy. When you hear Mr. Gülen, you see that all are really brothers, on the same wave-length. He showed us how Christians, Jews and Muslims all come from the same roots. "Mr. Gülen opened our eyes to see we are friends with other people. Before we saw them as different from us, he taught us to see them as close to us." He went on to say that we can help one another, even in our careers and businesses, and that we need to think globally and support our friends to even go abroad rather than just focusing on Turkey.

A factory worker enrolled in a state sponsored prep course in Istanbul but saw that the students who completed the course were not very successful in scoring high enough to enter university. He met some students who were enrolled in a Gülen-inspired prep course who were much more serious about studying and getting an education so he transferred into that course. There he came to know and respect members of the Gülen movement, especially the teachers in the course who were very dedicated and spent time with the students beyond the required classroom teaching. He wanted to know what motivated them and began to talk with them about Mr. Gülen and his ideas. He was very impressed and wanted to be like them.

Generating Commitment

A major empirical finding of Kanter's study of American utopias that has subsequently influenced the commitment literature is that for a community to survive, three basic challenges of commitment have to be addressed.¹⁴ First, individuals come to see their own interest as sustained by group participation.¹⁵ Secondly, individuals feel an affective solidarity with the group,¹⁶ and, thirdly, the individual experiences a moral, transcendent authority in the group.¹⁷ These mechanisms can be summarized as strategies by which the group attempts to reduce the value of other possible commitments and increases the value of commitment to the group; in other words, processes both detaching him or her from other options and attaching him to the community. In particular, Kanter's research shows a positive correlation between sacrifice and investment in terms of generating commitment. The more costly the sacrifice, the greater the value placed by the individual on the goals of the group. Data in this book support Kanter's contention by showing that financial contributions to Gülen-inspired projects not only manifest belief in the goals of the movement but that the giving itself is a commitment mechanism for involvement in the group.

In Kanter's conceptualization, the goals of the group become fused with one's own sense of purpose and meaning in life. Group goals nourish one's own sense of self and the group becomes an extension of oneself, thus inextricably linking person and group, thus meeting the first of Kanter's basic challenges for group survival and success. Interviews with supporters in the Gülen movement demonstrate that they identify the goals of the movement as their own personal goals. Being part of the Gülen movement, participating in the local circles, and making contributions to the projects supported by the movement is central to their identity.

¹⁴ Kanter (1968).

¹⁵ Konovsky and Pugh (1994); Rioux and Penner (2001).

¹⁶ Van Vugt and De Cremer (1999); Fine (1986); Jacobsen (1988).

¹⁷ Hales (1993).

The affective bonds that evolve in the group in the course of working together on meaningful projects fulfills Kanter's second organizational challenge. The fact that many local circles are based on individuals who share occupational or business interests further adds to the solidarity created in the group. The more closely an individual is integrated into a group, the greater will be the degree of his/her participation.¹⁸ Participation is an expression of belonging to a certain social group and receiving individual rewards for being part of the larger collective. Also, the more intense the collective participation in a network of relations, the more rapid and durable will be the mobilization of a movement.¹⁹ The Gülen Movement facilitates and thus increases an individual's willingness to get involved in service projects through his/her relationship with other like-minded, similarly intentioned people.

The third challenge, the experience of a moral, transcendent authority in the group is provided by the continuous discussions of Mr. Gülen's teachings as well as sharing readings from the Qur'an and the hadiths of the Prophet. Thus, the goals and motivations behind the service projects are more than just helping other people. Rather, they are rooted in the notion that they are part of God's continuous creation and caring for his people.

Kanter argues that a further mechanism for individual commitment to group life and group goals is that of sacrifice. The giving of one's time and resources to the group not only indicates commitment to the group but also creates that very commitment. As people in the Gülen movement give of their personal resources to group life and group projects, the very act of giving has the consequence of intensifying commitment to the group and its ideals.

The basic Islamic ideals that motivate members of the Gülen movement to contribute time, energy and financial contributions to Gülen-inspired projects function, simultaneously, to build strong commitment on the part of individuals to the movement. A major strength of the local circles is the constant discussions of these concepts based on the Qur'an, the prophetic tradition and the works of Mr. Gülen. The circles, therefore, provide the spiritual motivation for giving and remain far more than simply money raising venues. Whether consciously or not, the structure that has evolved within the Gülen movement is rooted in sound organizational principles and is reflected in the growth of the movement worldwide.

¹⁸ Klandermans (1989).

¹⁹ Melucci (1999).