Chapter 2
On the Web and Contemporary Social Movements

An Introduction

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Abstract The environmental movement in the 1990s marks the beginning of a new era for civic engagement. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, revolts opposing austerity measures and cuts on social policies offer the current version of civic action. Social movements have evolved towards global action or global activism. We witness the trans-nationalization of activist networks. Using information and communication technologies as basic tools, social movements have promoted cooperation, found supporters and organized demonstrations and protests worldwide. New technologies—the Internet, mobile phones and tablets—have showed its capacity to strengthen civic society and consolidate democracy around the world. Scholars have described new forms of democracy rooted in citizen participation (deliberative democracy, associative democracy), also enhanced with online mechanisms. Civic engagement and activism have adapted to virtual societies, maximizing their organizational linkages and networking skills. They represent these emerging participatory channels and have contributed to shaping contemporary forms of political participation.

Keywords Civic engagement • Contemporary social movements • Online activism • Participatory democracy • Virtual public sphere • Hybrid media system

2.1 Mobilization in the Digital Age

New technologies—Internet, mobile phones, tablets—have the capacity to strengthen civic society and consolidate democracy around the world. Civic engagement and activism have adapted to virtual societies maximizing their

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organizational linkages and networking skills in an attempt, on the one hand, to consolidate democracy in Western civilization; on the other hand, to promote transition processes in autocratic systems.

One of the most innovative effects of digital, transnational activism has been the revitalization of direct, global democracy, which is now closely related to the subject of e-democracy. Rheingold (2002), Grossman (1996) and Negroponte (1996) anticipated a future landscape of citizens engaged in politics through online activities.

Definitely, the interactive capacities of new technologies have enhanced citizen participation and deliberation creating a sort of *virtual agora* or *digital public sphere* where digital citizens discuss worldwide issues of mutual interest. In this discursive space, public opinion is formed and exerts influence on political action.

This introductory chapter aspires to provide with some sort of reasoning and analysis on the way activism has evolved in the last decades, the role new technologies are playing at this respect, the controversial side of IT, the emergence of new forms of democracy associated with citizen participation, consociationalism, and deliberation. These preliminary lines will help the reader get the most of the empirical analysis and particular observation of transnational protest and global activism which comes right after.

Once this has been said, our first reflection deals with Global Activism in the digital age. What is Global or Transnational Activism?

The notion of Global Activism is an intrinsic feature and effect of a globalized world and can evoke two main ideas. On the one hand, it can allude to the rise of social movements and protests which have taken place in different countries and even continents in the last decade, and recently after the austerity measures leading to the financial crisis. On the other hand, it can refer to activists coordinated action—on many occasions through information and communication technologies—which determines events taking place, sometimes simultaneously, around the world, pursuing the same cause.

In order to comprehend this concept, it is convenient to elucidate what the *digital revolution* is, as Global Activism is strongly associated with digital tools and with new media.

The *digital revolution* has generally been referred to as the *third industrial revolution* and implies the change from analog mechanical and electronic technology to digital technology, which has occurred since the 1980s throughout to present day. The *digital revolution* is both a manifestation and result of the emergence of information, communication technologies and, thus, inaugurates the *information age*. This revolution entails mass production and widespread use of digital logic circuits, and its derived technologies– i.e., the computer, digital cellular phone, fax machine. The important technological, social, economic and political consequences brought about explain its revolution-like nature. The *information society* represents the natural environment of this phenomenon.

The term *information society* became popular in 1980 through the work of Japanese sociologist Yoneji Masuda, *The Information Society as Post-Industrial*

Society. Masuda recalls on the notion of *post-industrial society*, which had been previously coined by Alain Touraine.

As continuation of the industrial society, in the *post-industrial society* information is a decisive factor of economic activity. Certainly, the *pre-industrial society* depends essentially on commodities; the *industrial society* is organized around the use of energy to produce goods; in the *post-industrial society* information—the creation, distribution, use, integration and manipulation—and information technology (IT) are the key elements of the productivity model. Therefore, technologies of information and communication represent the catalyst forces, which have pushed forward and enabled changes in politics, in the structure of society and in work organization. Moreover, people's capacity to get to know global events and react instantaneously through online communication has transformed the international society in a *global village* (McLuhan 1962). This "revolution" has marked a new age: the *information age*.

Together with the expression post-industrial society, the information society is frequently compared or identified with the following concepts: post-fordism, super-industrial society, post-modern society, knowledge society, Information Revolution, Liquid modernity, digital society or network society, among others.

On the whole, new technologies are not only a typical feature of the information society, but also a necessary condition or prerequisite for this society to exist and evolve. Nevertheless, their nature is not "democratic" as information and communication technologies have become another element of stratification among people and countries (the *digital divide*).

Finally, the use of information and communication technologies and strategies has played a major role in political participation, civic engagement, and governance processes in this new century. As a matter of fact, contemporary trends on democracy study the use of CIT to enhance citizen participation in democratic processes: E-democracy, E-governance, online politics (Bannister and Connolly 2012).

2.2 Contemporary Activism

Global activism finds its roots in traditional forms of protest and social movements. The elements, which are new and define the quintessence of contemporary activism, are the complex organization together with the implementation of information and communication strategies (Bennett: in Cyberactivism 2004). It seems convenient to examine its origins and initial forms of action in order to grasp the way it has evolved.

2.2.1 Traditional Activism. Origins and Evolution

It has originally crystallized in the *classic* manifestations of political participation: voting, party affiliation and associations. At this respect, Verba, Nie and Kim qualify voting, campaigning, community organizations and individual outreach activities, as basic forms of political participation. The Pew Charitable Trusts (2006) exemplifies the various forms civic engagement can take: individual volunteerism, organizational involvement, electoral participation, efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community, solve a problem, and interact with the institutions of representative democracy.

Traditional activism has evolved throughout history and expressed through demonstrations, consumer boycotts, signing petitions. Protest and mobilization are "later" forms of civic compromise. The literature of the early years drew a clear distinction between conventional modes of political participation and protest. The most recent form of this evolutionary transforming process is digital activism or global or transnational activism.

2.2.1.1 Protest and Social Movements

A protest group is by definition collective action of individuals aimed at achieving a set of common goals through influencing the decisions of a target. A social movement is a form of protest group that has, on the one hand, some degree of formal organization; on the other hand, a higher number of members. As a result, the more members a protest group has, the closest it gets to the concept of social movement (Opp 2009). Scholars maintain that most definitions of social movement contain the following elements: the goals or objectives to accomplish, the organizational dimension, a degree of temporal continuity, development of institutional activity—"lobbying", political and extra institutional, i.e., demonstrations (Snow and Oliver 1995).

A rigorous study of social protests, such as petitions, demonstrations, consumer-boycotts, highlights the sharp significance they attained in the 1980s and how nowadays they represent an important mechanism of political mobilization. Barnes and Kaase describe five criteria to identify protest activism: signing petitions, attending legal demonstrations, exercise the right to go on strike and occupy factories or buildings (Barnes and Kaase 1979).

Pacific protest has been widely accepted as a form of political expression aiming at reforming laws, influencing political processes, revisiting patterns of social behavior. We can find its roots in Ghandi's philosophy and testimony, or in the American Civil Rights Movement (1950–1970).

In post-industrial societies, protests occur not only among students and younger generations, but also reach middle-aged segments of population—professional people with a university degree.

2.2.2 Activism in the Twenty-First Century

The environmental movement in the 1990s marks the start of a new era for civic engagement. It was associated with mass demonstrations and protests coinciding with the summits or *fora* where world leaders discussed, negotiated, and reached agreements on "green" issues. We can bring into account global protests and demonstrations against the World Trade Organization ministerial meeting in Seattle (1999), or similar actions denouncing the war in Iraq.

More recently, the "Arab Spring", "Indignados" in Madrid, "Occupy Wall Street" in New York and the U.S.A., "Movimento Cinque Stelle" in Italy and other revolts opposing austerity measures and cuts on social policies, offer the current version of civic action.

Although each of these movements responds to particular causes and presents distinct features, some common, unifying elements can be distinguished.

First of all, most of these groups are convinced that global corporations and transnational economic regimes have eluded government policies and regulations concerning labor, environment, human rights, etc., shaping a political stage, beyond normal legislative, electoral, and regulatory processes, that Beck (2000) calls sub-politics.

Moreover, they all use New Technologies, the Internet, in various ways to achieve goals. The formulas *digital politics*, *Internet politics* and *digital activism* express this trend, which exemplifies in electronic voting, digital campaigns, chat-rooms, or virtual mobilization through Facebook and Twitter (i.e.: hence the name Twitter Revolutions).

Certainly, the new tools of social media have reinvented social activism (Gladwell 2010). In his Foreword to "*Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movements*", Peter Daulgren reveals the key aspect of digital activism when he alludes to the implications that ICTs, information and communication technologies, have for various forms of social movements in the twenty-first century (Daulgren: in Joyce 2010).

As a matter of fact, the Internet reduces organizational and coordination costs (Pickerill 2003). Not only digital tools benefit newer, resource-poor organizations; but also older, more conventional, better-funded political organizations. For the former, the Internet amplifies and reduces the cost of pre-existing communication routine; for the latter, the Internet presence is powerful (Norris 2001). This sort of "equalizing" or "balancing" character of the Internet among different type of organizations is of great concern.

New studies remark how the use of ICTs by activists or less formal actors has multiplied its influence and impact on political parties (Grofman, Trechsel and Franklin 2014).

Considering activism in a wide sense, the formula **digital activism** refers to contemporary forms of political participation strongly anchored in tools and mechanisms provided by the Internet—new social media. While traditional forms of civic engagement have lost force, new modes of participation have emerged and

flowered since the 1970s. Public concern for the environment and subsequent action in favor are good examples of this new wave of social movements, transnational policy networks, Internet, or digital activism. In short, civic compromise is not dead. It has transformed itself in terms of the *who*—the agents or collective organizations, *what*—the range of strategies implemented and *where*—the focused targets or goals (Inglehart 1977).

Digital Activism converges with Global activism when opponents around the globe share a common goal and coordinate themselves in order to achieve it using Internet dynamics (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001; Gerlach 2001; Lichbach and Almeida 2001; Rheingold 2002). The "Internet dynamics" amplify and economize communication in political organizations (Agre 2002).

In an effort to summarize some of the features of activism in the twenty-first century, the scale or dimension of transnational activism is global and to a great deal the goal, too. It presents as well networked complexity, openness to diverse political identities, and capacity to sacrifice ideological integration for pragmatic political gain (Bennett 2003a, b). Finally, the Internet, social networks are indispensable to accomplish mutual targets, considering that members or supporters of these social movements might find themselves on different continents. For example, in terms of time and tactics, when they convoke protests simultaneously around the world.

2.3   The Other Side of Transnational Activism

Since the beginning of the chapter, the potential benefits of new technologies for political participation in its various forms have been outlined. Nonetheless, among scholars, there are some who reason out "the average positive effect is small in size" (Boulianne 2009). Therefore, certain drawbacks have been identified and we need to reflect on them to draw conclusions and form a whole picture of the question.

What does networked complexity mean? I take the formula used by Bennett to cast light on the challenges related to new technologies in comparison with traditional forms of activism.

Thus, it is necessary to explore the nature of the links created by virtual tools among Internet users. This issue directly appeals to the character of digital culture: it deals with affection, emotion, feeling, in and off the cyberspace. The central concern is to what extent the personal bonds that have emerged, developed and have been conveyed through the net can result in effective activism.

Certainly, new media facilitate activism and even in a more diverse, rich way allowing for all sorts of individual choices. At this respect, Wellman describes "networked individualism" as the ease of establishing personal links that enable people to join more diverse and more numerous political communities than they would ordinarily join in the material world (Wellman 2000).

However, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, based on connections with people who have rarely met in person, are said to generate **weak ties**. Although some scholars stress the cohesive powers of weak ties (Granovetter 1973), some

others argue that social networks' linkages are not likely to result in high-risk activism (Gladwell) by themselves without being completed with traditional activism.

What's more, some unavoidable consequences of weak ties have to do with the fact that this sort of online, loosely linked structures lack hierarchy, ideology, is weak too and decision-making procedures vague or unclear. All in all, hierarchy, ideology and decision-making are said to be indispensable elements for high-risk activism.

In addition, it has been pointed out that web-activism or Internet politics have little likelihood to reach the apathetic or uninterested. They exercise influence among those already engaged in political affairs in the same way traditional forms of political communication—newspapers, radio, TV-do.

Finally, it is convenient to keep in mind that new media are not available to all citizens (digital divide), which would make online mechanisms fully ineffective for this category of the population.

All in all, I recall Bauman's brilliant line of reasoning on liquid modernity and on the frailty of human bonds as a metaphor to depict the fragile nature of digital ties and the "liquid" affection originated. I doubt that online tools can be effective by themselves without conventional ways of mobilization. At this point of my research, the use of new technologies of information and communication has had great impact, but together with classic activism. The potential these channels have for social change will work out to complement and enhance traditional forms of civic engagement.

2.4 A Virtual Public Sphere: A Global Civic Society?

What are the digital tools relevant to activists? These tools are essentially computers and mobile phones. Computers enable to connect to all Internet applications. On the contrary, simple mobile phones allow only texting and calling. Yet, the eruption of smart phones and tablets has enlarged the potential and capacity of mobile phones making them more similar to computers and, thus, vital for social change (Joyce 2010).

Joss Hands emphasizes on mobile devices. He shows the importance of "speed" –of communication, decision-making, and tactical shifts—in the context of mobilization and direct action. In this respect, he recognizes that the introduction of mobile communications –either a simple mobile phone, a more sophisticated 'smart-phone', or other networked mobile computing devices—has had a major impact for the faster coordination and organization of this kind of activities, which he describes as 'mobilezation'.

Regarding the notion of public sphere, the key elements, according to the classic configuration, are the existence of communicative spaces in society where ideas circulate, debate is generated, and public opinion is formed. The communicative actors who exchange views and have discussion are citizens and power holders. Mass media, and now new media, are essential to the creation and development of

any public sphere, physical and virtual. The publics, which integrate this sphere, participate in discursive interactional processes (Habermas, Dewey). Thus, "dialogical" interaction among individuals is the central feature. Certainly, the situation where people are exposed to media but do not engage in talks or dialog with each other cannot result in a public sphere. Yet, the media are as well ineludible, as the discursive processes occur through them: citizens have an encounter with the media and interpret reality, reflect about the issues presented; then, they interact with others –in person and/or online, in small or larger conversations or chats.

The theory of the public sphere refines and adds complexity when it is described as digital, virtual, considering the role played by the Internet in the dialogical processes. Moreover, scholars have referred to multiple public spheres, to counter public spheres (cf. Fenton and Downey 2003; Asen and Brouwer 2001) and even to a global civic society. To sum up, there is not a single public sphere, but multiple spaces for political debate. And citizens from all over the world can shape these public spaces.

The discursive processes originating in and nurturing the public space are necessary to deliberative democracy. In other words, deliberative democracy cannot start out without the reality of a public space, where today converge old and new media. Yet the communicative spaces do not entail or guarantee democracy *per se*. As a matter of fact, the discussion, the debate, the exchange of arguments, views and reasons should result in ulterior, subsequent actions taken by the power holders. If there is a gap, deliberative processes are not effective and citizen participation in public issues—participatory democracy—fails (Bennett and Entman 2001).

Indeed, digital technologies offer new forms of horizontal and vertical communication that promote civic engagement and deliberative democracy (Norris 2001). Internet has meant a revolution for democracy as well, due to its global dimension and its immediate effects in real time. Certainly, the "web" offers unexpected opportunities in the areas of information, communication, and political mobilization around the globe, in addition to the well-known electronic voting. Moreover, Internet dynamics are ideal for new social movements that have used this tool to publicize ideas and proposals, to gather supporters around the world, or to galvanize transnational strategies by establishing virtual forums open to all who wish to back up such actions. Through the network, people can become member of pressure groups, join organizations, contribute with funds, receive emails about political issues and make proposals to the authorities, intervene in "online" discussions, circulate electronic petitions, pass on announcements or activities, call for demonstrations.

Castells supports the same line of reasoning in his second volume of the *Information Age Trilogy: the Power of Identity*. He examines the role of social movements and resistance in the network society and chooses the Zapatistas to this purpose, defining them as 'the first informational guerilla movement'. Castells comes to the conclusion that the use of new technologies—the Internet—allowed the Zapatistas to diffuse information throughout the world instantly, and to develop a network of support groups whose efforts crystallized in a movement of international public opinion.

Not only digital technologies have facilitated mobilization, but they have also stimulated citizen support to global associations. This current trend has gone parallel with the relative fading of party identification and membership (Tarrow 2005).

A global civic society engaged in global causes is taking shape (Keane 2003). This global civic society operates in a virtual public sphere and generates the international public opinion Castell describes. The strengthening of the "public sphere" or civic sphere in these new dimensions—both *cyber* and global—is necessarily related to mass media and new technologies, which foster connections, sharing views, exchanging ideas, arguing and discussion among world citizens.

To sum up, new media contribute to the creation of a *global civic society*, which operates in a *virtual public sphere* or *virtual agora*. Citizen deliberation—expressed through digital tools and social networks—has "enlarged" the 'habermasian' notion of public space. The public sphere is now global and not necessarily limited to the physicality of a space. It can also occur virtually: either based on micro media (e-mail lists) or on middle media Internet channels (blogs, organization sites, e-zines). Some authors stress the capacity of the Internet to create new forms of democratic public spheres and, what's more, to support the already existing ones (Buchstein 1997).

2.5 The "Hybrid Media System"

The world of Politics—political communication, campaigning, mobilization—has gone through major changes as new media have emerged. In an attempt to describe the current state of the media system, we observe 'interactions between old media and new media, and their associated technologies, genres, norms, behaviors and organizations'. This is a "hybrid media system" based upon the principles of adaptation and interdependence among actors (Chadwick 2011). The hybrid media system mirrors a new system of communication integrated by traditional media and new media. The impact this system can have on democracy and civic engagement has increased as new media enhance and expand the potential of conventional media.

Global activism fortifies democratic participation and civic engagement and benefits from this hybrid media system. In a similar line of argumentation, digital activism inserts itself in this dual, hybrid context and profits from it: firstly, because the use of Internet tools and new technologies is inherent to digital activism; secondly, because of the parallel interaction between traditional (old) activism and digital (new) activism.

To sum up, digital activism fortifies democratic participation and civic engagement. It results in greater achievements when it operates on a complementary basis with traditional activism. In other words, the virtual mechanisms facilitate mobilization of individuals but do not drive social change (Keck and Sikkink 1998). The real or physical mobilization—not just online—is needed to promote that end. For

instance, the ten thousands protesters that took to the streets in Moldova in the spring of 2009 were brought together through Twitter.

In short, we advocate for this holistic perspective—of new forms and tools together with conventional ones—when approaching democracy, participation and civic engagement in the twenty-first century.

2.6   Representation in Question. The Shift from Government to Governance

Representative democracy has repeatedly been identified with the notion of democracy itself. The essence of representation resides in the celebration of regular, free, fair elections where political parties compete to be in office. The legitimacy of the system is, thus, grounded on parties and elections.

In Western countries, scholars have observed a certain erosion of the representative model: not of democracy itself but of the functioning of representative institutions. Representation has not supervised, restrained and controlled the government effectively (Hirst 2009). This trend does not apply to transitional regimes: they undergo a different path and revolutions have occurred to establish regimes based on electoral democracy, e.g., "the Arab Spring".

Paying special attention to Western countries, the financial crisis that broke out in 2008 and the austerity measures introduced have raised a wave of protests and disenchantment among citizens all over Europe. They are concerned and fear the disintegration of the welfare State, and alert on the increasing poverty income limit.

The current, growing state of disaffection and distrust among citizens has more to do with the poor performance of particular representatives than with a crisis of the representative model. There is a huge "distance" separating the elected from their electors. The latter feel that once the former win the elections, they behave as an elite, as an oligarchy, and do not really pay attention to citizens views, and are not even interested in citizens to be involved in the political process.

Some scholars suggest the convenience to revive political parties while others emphasize the importance acquired by discursive, collaborative processes among citizens and representatives via platforms, networks and associations (deliberative democracy, associative democracy). Deliberative democracy and associative democracy do not intend to replace representative government. On the contrary, they complement and amplify representation with the revitalization of civil society, which takes on a leading role in negotiated governance dynamics, either through deliberative, dialogical processes or consociational practices.

Deliberative democracy presupposes citizens deeply involved in public decision-making and problem solving. Through the implementation of particular techniques and mechanisms, citizens get together to discuss public issues and eventually come to some conclusions or recommendations on what lines of actions should be taken. It is convenient to emphasize that the key actors in this model are

not politicians or experts, but the citizens who work actively with the municipalities or other governmental institutions to create synergies to face issues of common interest. Organizations such as the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD) and the Canadian Community for Dialogue and Deliberation (C2D2) are good examples of today deliberative practices. Their followers and supporters have grown exponentially in recent years.

According to Carcasson and Sprain, the core principles of deliberation are tough choices, public judgment, democratic governance, inclusiveness and equality. These two scholars also distinguish the particular roles for each actor. Beyond the classic mission of taxpayers, consumers, constituents, or voters, citizens are now vitally involved in public affairs. The government must promote tools for public participation and ultimately nurture citizens' deliberative capacities. The media and the experts assume great responsibilities in engaging citizens and encourage high quality of public discussion.

Regarding **associative democracy**, we need to refer to Paul Hirst and his book *Associative Democracy: New Forms of Economic and Social Governance*, which is rooted in Émile Durkheim's (1957) conception of democracy. Hirst (1994) proposes new theories and formulas to reorganize economic and social governance in Western societies, as liberal democratic capitalism and collectivistic state socialism seemed to have come to a point of stagnation. Hirst denounces that modern representative democracies offer low levels of government accountability to citizens and of public influence on decision-making. He then advocates for the adoption of a new model of democracy, associative democracy, to address these problems. Associative democracy requires (1) devolution of functions of the state to society (except public funding); and (2) democratization of organizations in civil society. The result would be constitutionally ordered democratically self-governing associations, which would receive public funds proportionate to membership and, thus, provide for services like education or healthcare. On the whole, consociational practices would pave the way for the "post-political thrust" from government (control by the state) to governance (regulation, accountability, civil society involvement), which Hirst points out.

To some extent, Hirst's 'doctrine' is encapsulated in the notion of 'big society' elaborated by the UK Conservative Party in its 2010 general election manifesto. The substance of this notion, or the way this big society is formed, lies in taking power away from politicians and attributing it to local people and communities (e.g.: localism and devolution). The transfer of power takes place at the domestic level—e.g., domestic policies. In an article published in 2012 by *The Guardian*, Anne Power, professor of Social Policy at LSE, admits the complementary functions developed by both the state and the civil society and states the convenience to balance the power of each. Prof. Power remarks that the current financial crisis and the austerity measures implemented have had a negative effect for community infrastructures. She finally stresses the leading figure of the citizens and the need as well for intergovernmental cooperation to face transnational challenges.

2.7   Sum Up

New technologies—Internet, mobile phones, tablets—have the capacity to strengthen civic society and consolidate democracy around the world. In postindustrial societies, significant institutions of representative democracy –parliaments, political parties, Government departments—have established web sites where they outline their goals and tasks, put official documents, release updates and announcements. These web pages enhance government transparency and accountability. Regarding political parties, online instruments have contributed to fundraising, to improve management and organization, to diffuse ideas or publicize electoral programs.

Campaigning and voting have substantially benefitted from the whole potential of digital technologies. Indeed, the development of social media and digital marketing strategies in the 2008 Barack Obama campaign has transformed the classic mechanisms of political communication. In the recent 2012 presidential election, both candidates—Barack Obama and Mitt Romney—have laid special emphasis on *cyber* politics.

Electronic voting technology has been improved and become rather popular in the last decade. As a result, countries such as the United Kingdom, Estonia, and Switzerland have implemented this voting system in governmental elections and referenda. E-voting has also been used in Canada municipal elections and primary elections in the United States and France.

In transitional regimes, digital tools have had a gigantic influence in the promotion of democratic change. The use of Twitter in the coordination of different revolutions and protests has resulted in the locution *Twitter Revolution* (Morozov 2011). At this respect, it is convenient to mention civil opposition against fraudulent voting in Moldova (2009), Iranian election protests (2009–2010), and the dissolution of authoritarian regimes in Tunisia (2010–2011) and Egypt (2011).

Activism is evolving towards global action or global activism. We witness to the trans-nationalization of activist networks. Inspired by altruistic solidarity, social movements have promoted cooperation, found supporters and organized demonstrations and protests worldwide. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, thousands of people have gathered against austerity measures and social injustice—from Toronto, New York, Madrid, Athens, Lisbon, London, etc.

Finally, new media and communication technologies, coexisting with traditional ones in a dual arena, have enhanced collective action, nurturing as well deliberation and discursive methods of decision-making (virtual public spheres). The hybrid media system will invigorate political participation, through both representative and participatory channels, and will contribute to the gradual formation of a global civic society engaged in mutual challenges and concerns. Direct democracy is not going to replace representative government, but supplement and extend representation turning representative government into richer representative governance where the presence of civil society will be remarkable.

On the whole, the potential of civic engagement—global activism, e-democracy and again their controversial side—remains largely to be explored and developed throughout the new millennium.

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