

## 5 Social movement scenes

### Infrastructures of opposition in civil society

*Sebastian Haunss and Darcy K. Leach<sup>1</sup>*

In their efforts to create change in the larger society, social movements enter into relationships of coalition, competition or conflict with other political actors, becoming embedded in a wider set of social and political networks that structures activists' opportunities and choices. Theories of civil society and theories of social movements can both be relevant starting points for investigating these relationships. In this article we discuss a particular kind of network, overlooked in both of these literatures, that often constitutes an important part of a movement's sphere of action.

Civil society authors have focused on weak and strong ties between individuals, networks of trust, and the creation of social capital (Cohen 1999; Cohen and Arato 1992; Putnam 2000; Skocpol and Fiorina 1999). Social movement scholars have investigated the impact of personal ties on recruitment (della Porta 1992; Diani 1995; McAdam 1986; Ohlemacher 1996; Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson 1980), organizational membership (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984), and interorganizational networks (Diani and Bison 2004). They have also looked at the roles such ties play in the formation and transformation of collective identities (Cohen 1985; Haunss 2004; Melucci 1988, 1995, 1996) and the development of certain cultural forms (Eyerman and Jamison 1998; Fantasia 1988). For the most part, however, movements' environments have been conceptualized as "political opportunity structures", incorporating such components as the society's formal political structure, the relative openness of conventional channels of interest representation, and the availability and position of potential elite allies (Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi 1995; Tarrow 1994).

There is a similar gap in both of these literatures. On the social movement side, there has been little investigation into social structures that help constitute movement cultures and identities, as opposed to simply structuring their strategic and tactical choices or directly affecting their capacity to mobilize. On the civil society side, while most have argued that civic participation fosters feelings of generalized reciprocity and trust which in turn help sustain democracy (Putnam 2000; Skocpol 1999), some have noted that more radical social movement groups may be an exception to this rule. That is, they often cultivate attitudes which *undermine* representative democracy, either because they reject/neglect democratic values or because they see the representative form as

not democratic enough. As Fung notes, “those associations that are most capable of offering political resistance may be unlikely to foster a range of civic virtues such as tolerance, generalized reciprocity and trust, and respect for the rule of law” (Fung 2003: 522–523). In the movement discussed below, for example, the social network we refer to as a movement scene fosters a high degree of trust *among its members*, but not a generalized trust in existing social institutions or a feeling of reciprocity with citizens outside the scene. More work needs to be done to differentiate the cultural attributes that are cultivated in different kinds of movement structures and to investigate their influence on various forms of democracy – including those the movements may be trying to bring about.

One of the reasons for these shortcomings is that research in both of these areas – and on civil society – has focused too exclusively on formal organizations as its unit of analysis. Movements and civil society are both fluid structures that change over time, have blurred borders, and can take on a range of organizational forms. When operationalizing network connections in a particular social movement or civil society actor, scholars often fall back on reductionist approaches and concentrate on the more readily quantifiable links and interactions. Putnam has been criticized for overemphasizing the role of organizations in his analysis of the changing structure of civil society (Cohen 1999). In the study of social movements, resource mobilization and political process models have been similarly challenged for having too narrow a focus on formal organizations and institutional relationships. While organizations certainly play an important role in most social movements, a movement cannot be reduced to its constituent organizations.

We argue that a closer examination of social movement scenes would be beneficial for two reasons: first, because scenes constitute an important non-organizational component of civil society that shapes the kind of contribution social movements make to democracy; and second, a scene is often an influential social structure in the environment of a social movement that is more stable than interpersonal networks, but that is still generally not embedded in formal organizations. We begin by defining the concept of a scene and illustrating it in the context of the German autonomous movement. Then we discuss four ways in which scenes can affect the character and development of a movement, and close with a discussion of what might be gained by incorporating scenes into our conception of civil society as well as our analysis of the structural environments within which social movements develop and grow.

## Scenes

What are scenes and how do they differ from other similar social structures? In the only systematic study that has been done on scenes (Hitzler *et al.* 2001) three salient characteristics emerge that are shared by those groups they consider to be scenes.

First, scenes are social networks made up of like-minded individuals who are involved in face-to-face interaction focused around a particular topic. To be part

of a scene, it is not enough just to share the scene's signs and symbols. One must also share its convictions and be actively and directly engaged with other members. This engagement, however, is generally only a part-time activity and does not structure the totality of a person's everyday life.

Second, scenes are self-constituted dynamic entities whose internal and external boundaries are constantly in flux. The transition between core members and those less integrally involved is fluid, as is the transition between members and non-members. Neither the boundaries of a scene nor its membership criteria can be determined from the outside, because a scene is ultimately constituted through a process of self-identification and mutual recognition. This process also marks social territory, lending distinction to scene members by establishing membership criteria and a common identity that distances them from other social groups.

Lastly, the geographic aspect of scenes is expressed in the fact that they form around recognized scene locations – meeting places like bars, clubs, parks, street corners and parts of town – where being part of a scene can be physically experienced and the signifiers of membership can be enacted. Knowing where such places are located is often itself a badge of membership. Since scenes are not just collections of random individuals, but networks of both individuals and groups, one can often become part of a scene simply by being connected to a group or circle of friends that is itself part of that scene.

Incorporating these points and based on our own research, we offer a general definition of a scene as *a network of people who identify as part of a group and share a certain belief system or set of convictions, that is also necessarily centred around a certain location or set of locations where that group is known to congregate.*

It is important to note here that a scene always has two dimensions: it is at once both a social structure and a geographical location. This geographic and social duality – its simultaneous designation as both a network of people and the infrastructure that sustains it – is the most distinguishing feature of a scene. As a social group, a scene has its own culture. In addition to shared convictions, those who are part of a scene often share distinct dress codes, aesthetic tastes, social norms, linguistic patterns, signs and symbols, and sets of knowledge that differ from those of the larger society. Where a social movement and a scene are tightly connected we speak of “*movement scenes*”. But not all scenes are related to a movement; many are purely life-style oriented. Until now, it is only this subcultural aspect of the scene as an alternative life-style that has garnered scholarly attention.

As the discussion thus far suggests, scenes are less rigid and more intentionally constructed than milieus, more directly interactional and less culture-oriented than subcultures, and less demanding and all-encompassing than countercultures. In fact, *movement scenes* are social spaces where subcultures, countercultures and social movements meet and influence each other. In contrast to milieus, scenes are less determined by cultural and economic capital, even though they are usually not independent from this. They are actively enacted and

reproduced by their participants – scene membership is more a product of conscious decision than of social position. On the other hand, being part of a scene, in contrast to a subculture, is also more than just an expressive act or a question of style. Even though expressive forms play a central role, scenes can not be reduced to “sign-communities” (Hebdige 1979). They are more an attempt at *building* social structure than they are an expression of it.

To move now from the abstract definition of a scene to a more concrete setting, in the following section we describe the scene surrounding the German autonomous movement. We contend that the features of this particular movement scene can be found in the environment of other movements as well, and therefore can serve to flesh out the general concept. Our description of the movement and its venues and discourses is based on a deconstructive textual analysis of articles published in movement newspapers between 1988 and 2001 (540 issues) and extensive fieldwork conducted by the authors for separate projects, including a year of participant observation in an autonomous anti-nuclear group (2000–2001), several years of participation in an autonomous cultural centre and in the Berlin and Hamburg scenes more generally, and in-depth interviews with 32 movement participants in six Autonomien-style groups from various German cities.

### **The autonomous movement scene in Germany**

The German autonomous movement developed out of remnant strands of the post-’68 New Left. Activists from Frankfurt’s “Spontis” who rejected the parliamentary path of leading figures like Joschka Fischer and Daniel Cohn Bendit, along with radicals in the anti-nuclear movement whose political agenda went beyond ecological issues to include a system-level critique, were the first to call themselves “Autonome”. Influenced by writings of the Italian “autonomia operaia” they developed their oppositional politics around a militant anti-authoritarian subjectivism and opposition to the dogmatism of both the old and new left. In contrast to the Italian conception of autonomy as a form of working-class organization, autonomy in the German case more closely resembles the civic concept of individual autonomy and self-determination. The frame of reference for the Autonomien is not the working class or “the people” but a “politics of the first person”. As such their vision of social change tends to be centred around local projects and a belief that oppressed groups must mobilize around their own interests in solidarity with other such groups, rather than mobilizing *on behalf of*, or claiming to speak for anyone but themselves.

As a movement, the Autonomien first became visible in the mid- to late 1970s as the militant wing of the anti-nuclear movement. In 1980, with the rise of squatters’ movements across Europe, the Autonomien became part of a growing “alternative” scene in Berlin, at one point involving up to 100,000 people, that was characterized by a local infrastructure of bars, retail collectives, info-shops, concert venues, squats, living projects and alternative media groups. These locales played a central role in the self-conception and self-construction of the

Autonomen, and many have since become a part of the autonomous/radical leftist scene. In the 1980s a potent Autonomen identity emerged containing the following core elements: a radical oppositional subjectivism and emphasis on self-determination, the devaluation of paid work, Punk and “hardcore” music, a distinctive clothing style, communal forms of living, and a commitment to the ideal of participatory, non-hierarchical organization.

In the last 25 years the Autonomen have been concerned with a number of issues ranging from community organizing and squatting to anti-nuclear struggles, anti-fascism, anti-racism and solidarity with international anti-capitalist and social justice struggles. Most of these issues have been recurrent themes in the movement without ever being its sole focus. Though it is virtually impossible to formulate one overarching principle of autonomous politics, it is safe to say that the Autonomen have never been a single-issue movement. Wherever they have been active, however, the central values underlying their engagement have been autonomy, self-determination and a general rejection of formal authority.

Throughout its history the autonomous movement has always been embedded in local scenes. These radical leftist/autonomous scenes, which still exist in many German cities, consist of dense webs of alternative locales and institutions run either by the activists themselves or by people sympathetic to the movement. These projects, whether they are for-profit commercial establishments or non-profit voluntary associations, generally reflect the movement’s preference for non-hierarchical, collectivist-democratic structures of “self-administration” and are relatively autonomous from the dominant institutions of the larger society. Together they form a set of locations where movement activists can have regular meetings, attend panel discussions on political topics, go to a party, find a cheap meal, see a political film or just talk politics over a drink.

Scene venues are usually geographically concentrated in one neighbourhood (or, in larger cities, in a small number of neighbourhoods). This concentration has important consequences. First, it positively affects the movement’s ability to react quickly to political challenges. An action can be mobilized in as little as a few hours by distributing flyers and posters through the network of bars and shops that are sympathetic to the movement. These postings also make it easy for people who are curious about the movement to find out about movement activities. Second, the concentration and diversity of the infrastructure promotes an overlapping of informal social networks, cultivating a community based on close social ties and a shared culture. Activists and sympathizers not only meet at political events but also at parties, concerts or in bars where, interspersed with small talk and gossip, information about political campaigns and first-hand accounts of protest actions are exchanged. Verbal communication thus becomes an important part of the movement’s information infrastructure, with all of the advantages and disadvantages that entails. On the one hand, word of mouth communication is an efficient way of quickly transmitting certain kinds of information. On the other, one has to frequent the right bars, parties or events regularly or at least maintain close contact with those who do in order to stay abreast of the movement’s activities.

Like all movements that exist for longer periods of time the Autonomes are constantly faced with problems of commitment and continuity. As mobilization cannot be maintained at the same high level over time, other ways must be found to bind activists to the movement. One strategy for accomplishing this goal is formal organization; the maintenance of cultural spaces in close proximity to the movement can be another. Inasmuch as the Autonomes reject formal organization they have had to rely on the latter strategy.

In the autonomous movement the scene is the social structure in which sub-cultural attitudes and preferences are negotiated, maintained and transformed. The following brief analysis of autonomous movement discourses illustrates the importance of this structure for the movement, revealing that the Autonomes have used the scene to align their attitudes and preferences with their political values, norms and convictions; that is, there has been a close connection between scene and movement or, in more abstract terms, between their collective action frames and their everyday practices. This integration of everyday practices, subcultural preferences, and collective action frames generates what we call *commitment frames* – collectively shared concepts of political activism as an expression of a subcultural identity that is also necessarily expressed in one's everyday life-style choices. Because of their integrative character, commitment frames form strong anchor points for processes of collective identity in social movements (Haunss 2004: 243ff.).

As became evident in our analysis of key movement discourses from the last 20 years, the scene has been a central reference point in processes of collective identity in the autonomous movement. In contrast to their public image as “black bloc” street-fighters, the Autonomes are a very self-reflective, discursive movement in which almost every issue of their political agenda has been repeatedly subjected to critical internal scrutiny and debate. Debates over three perennial issues have generated by far the highest number of contributions in the movement's publications:

- organizational structure and process,
- the meaning of militancy and its proper form, and
- gender relations.

In the discourse on each of these issues, commitment frames were forged that connected scene and movement and formed the central building blocks of the autonomous movement's collective identity.

The debates about organizational structure and process revolved mainly around the question of whether the Autonomes should adopt a more formal organizational model. Autonomous movement organizations are usually organized around an informal plenum where in principle everyone has the right to speak and a right of veto in decision-making. There have been some attempts to modify this structure, but they have ultimately failed, due to a feature of autonomous politics mentioned above – the commitment to a “politics of the first person”. According to this principle, authentic individual experience is the

necessary starting point for political engagement. If no one can speak legitimately about anyone's suffering but their own, then any structure in which representatives decide on others' behalf without a specific mandate is necessarily illegitimate.

While organizationally, this radical principle of self-representation dictates a preference for directly democratic structures, interpersonally, it is expressed in the saying, "the way is the goal" – that accomplishing movement goals such as equality and emancipation requires that egalitarian and non-oppressive forms of interaction be learned/practised in the everyday process of struggle. The separation between political and private life is rejected, and there is an expectation that one lead a life-style consistent with one's political beliefs. While political activities are organized in the movement, the scene becomes the place where autonomous principles organize a broader range of life-style practices. A formal organizational model would have undermined this close link between life-style and politics. Such an approach was repeatedly proposed and consistently rejected, even though radical life-style norms often alienated potential recruits and made it more difficult to join the movement.

The second set of debates, about militancy and legitimate forms of political action, focused on two interrelated questions: (1) which forms of violence were acceptable and (2) whether or not the movement should take on the form of a militant avant-garde organization. Without going into too much detail, what is interesting for our current purposes is that in these debates a conflict between two collective action frames emerges, in which movement and scene are positioned very differently in relation to one another. We can label these frames the *movement militancy frame* and the *revolution frame*.

From the perspective of the *revolution frame*, militancy is understood and justified as a necessary component of revolutionary change. In this frame, only militant actions are valued and expected to lead to fundamental social change. An avant-garde function of militant organizations is more or less openly stated, and local movement activity is interpreted as part of a wider framework of worldwide revolutionary movements. In this frame, immigrant youth gangs and "international revolutionary movements" are more common referents than the scene or other domestic movements. The life-style model embraced in this frame – that of the clandestine revolutionary fighter – stands in stark contrast to the image they associate with the "petit bourgeois revolt" of the movement mainstream and the scene. Yet in the absence of any contemporary German guerilla movement, the scene – despite its devaluation – is still important as the space in which the habitus of the revolutionary fighter is cultivated.

In contrast to the revolution frame, the scene is the central point of reference for proponents of the *movement militancy frame*, the stronger of the two currents in the movement. In this frame militancy is not inflated as revolutionary action but propagated as a useful collective action strategy in situations where non-militant means of action are regarded as being too limited. Here a distinction is made between political violence directed against property (which is condoned) and violence against persons (which is not). In this perspective the decision for

or against militant forms of action is largely a tactical one that needs to be discussed with those involved. From this perspective the scene is the space where discussions about militant forms of actions take place, and most of the texts published around this issue are addressed to the scene as much as to the movement.

Since the revolution frame called for clandestine organizational forms in which no easy integration of the activists' daily practices and their political programme was possible, only the movement militancy frame was capable of binding these two areas, and thus of serving as a commitment frame. The last set of debates – those around gender relations – have been a constant feature of the autonomous movement from the beginning. These debates have revolved around four main points:

- the necessity of separate women's organizations;
- issues of sexual violence;
- sexuality and desire; and
- more general debates about patriarchy.

In keeping with the autonomous principle of a politics of the first person, these issues were only discussed in a very personal and concrete manner. Movement debates about sexism and gender have almost never been carried beyond the boundaries of the autonomous/radical leftist scene and have therefore had no impact on public perceptions of the *Autonomen*. This contrasts sharply with the internal importance of these struggles, especially as evidenced by recurrent conflicts around sexual violence and harassment. These conflicts have revolved mainly around the questions of who should have the right to define sexual violence and what the sanctions for offenders should be.

With respect to the question of how to deal with offenders, the penalty usually proposed for men accused of rape was expulsion from the scene. That this was regarded as the severest possible sanction (compared, for example, to humiliating them, stripping them of responsibilities, or even beating them up) is a telling indicator of the importance of the scene to activists. Among those involved in these debates, there was an assumption that the scene was integral to the activists' political and personal lives, so much so that expulsion from the scene would be tantamount to expulsion from political engagement itself. Given that movement engagement usually lasts no more than a few years, expulsion from the scene might seem to outsiders to be a relatively weak sanction. The fact that activists saw it as the most severe possible punishment, points to the remarkable strength of a countercultural movement identity that is anchored in the scene.

Commitment frames that emerged in each of these debates integrated collective action frames with the activists' everyday practices, and thus played a central role in the construction and maintenance of an autonomous collective identity. A movement scene facilitates this process: when a movement's goals are compatible with the cultural orientation of a nearby scene, the movement can tap into the scene's networks and connect them to the political project of the



movement. In the case of the Autonomen this integration was very successful, so that movement and scene have become almost indistinguishable. The transition between the two has become fluid, with entrance to and exit from the movement largely mediated through the scene.

It is important to note that the three debates we have highlighted here are not unique preoccupations of the autonomous movement. In fact, inasmuch as they emphasize the issue of finding an appropriate relationship/connection/boundary between political ideals and personal behavioural choices, the debates among the Autonomen about militancy, organizational structure and gender all reflect central axes of concern for any movement wing or faction intent on accomplishing deep structural and cultural change without reproducing within the movement itself the very forms of oppression it is trying to eliminate in the larger society.

### **The function of the scene for social movements**

Building on the roles a movement scene has played for the Autonomen, we can generate a few tentative hypotheses about the relationship between movements and scenes in general. Our separate and combined analyses of the autonomous movement (Leach 2005; Haunss 2004) suggest that scenes may have at least four important functions for social movements.

#### ***Movement scenes can be a mobilization pool for social movements and a site for the development of oppositional consciousness***

Because they offer a life-style and at the same time, as part-time communities, require only a relatively low level of commitment, scenes attract a much larger group of participants than the movement does. Just as membership in the countercultural core of a scene requires that one submit to a more thoroughgoing life-style transformation, engagement in the movement requires a higher level of commitment than the scene and often the willingness to engage in high risk activities. In the autonomous movement – as in for example the women's and gay rights movements – certain parts of the scene's infrastructure have developed out of and in support of movement activities. Their subcultural attractiveness stems in part from this political history, which provides scene venues with an additional flair of authenticity and edginess. Subcultural activities like concerts and parties in turn have brought a large number of people into contact with the movement who would otherwise not have had anything to do with the Autonomen.

This overlapping of scene, movement and sub- and counterculture blurs the distinctions between them. In a relatively large transitional zone it becomes quite difficult to distinguish whether people actually belong to the movement or are just culturally involved in the scene. Someone who is active in the movement can safely be presumed to be connected to the scene in some way, but s/he may or may not be a member of the sub- or counterculture. Scenes offer a "soft"

way of joining a movement, with subcultural identification as the first step. The decision to make a larger political commitment can be left open for a relatively long period of time.

***Movement scenes can be sites of experimentation with alternative forms of self-governance***

For a movement like the Autonomen whose ultimate aim is to create a “power-free society”, the scene is an invaluable space in which to experiment with alternative ways of structuring daily life. Students of social movements have long noted the importance of institutional space for a movement. The political process model, for example, has noted the key role played by Black churches in the US civil rights movement (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984), or by the Catholic church in the Polish Solidarity movement.

What we are talking about, however, goes beyond that role. A scene is not just a place to be, it is a particular *kind* of space that allows a movement to “be” in a particular way. For the relationship between scene and movement to function smoothly, the scene must be structured in a way that reflects the principles and central values of the movement. In the cases highlighted by political process theorists, movements made use of existing institutions that were outside the main halls of political power but nonetheless fairly integrated into the logic of the system. As established bureaucratic structures with a degree of political leverage and credibility, these institutions could provide a relatively safe space for movement groups to meet and most importantly, social capital in the form of a cohesive network of people with an effective system of communication.

However, the very characteristics that made these institutions useful umbrellas for other movements would make them problematic as scene locations for autonomous movements. In order to experiment with *alternative* structures of self-governance and decision-making, a movement needs a space that is free of external control, or at least some agreement must be reached allowing the movement maximum autonomy from the institution whose space they are using. Indeed, for an autonomous movement, the utility of a space depends very much on how that space is structured, not just whether the institution is sympathetic and willing to help. To the degree possible, the scene should consist of “free” space that is not already hierarchically organized or subject to pre-existing rules that run counter to the principles of the movement.

***Movement scenes play a central role in processes of collective identity***

As shown above, by providing a place where life-styles and collective action frames can be linked, scenes help to generate commitment frames, which are central building blocks in processes of collective identity. One such commitment frame of the autonomous movement is the anti-patriarchy frame connecting a feminist political analysis with the call to abolish patriarchal structures in the activists’ private lives. The general injunction to realize the revolutionary goals

of the movement in the everyday practices of the movement and in personal interaction is another such commitment. When a social movement manages to interject its political identity into the life-styles and practices of one or more scenes, this can create an atmosphere whereby that identity is constantly regenerated, stabilizing and rejuvenating the movement from one wave of protest to the next.

The Autonomes have constantly maintained a very close link between movement and scene. In this way they have profited from the youth-culture attractiveness of the scene and maintained a relatively constant level of mobilization, despite the so-called “crisis of the autonomous movement” that has been repeatedly proclaimed by movement activists since the late 1980s. The movement discourses of the 1990s regularly and explicitly problematized the relationship between movement and scene as too intimate and exclusive, but nevertheless, a constant exchange of personnel, ideas and styles between movement and scene has de facto broadened the reach of the autonomous collective identity beyond the limits of the movement itself.

### ***Movement scenes can serve as movement abeyance structures***

Scenes offer not only an easy way into the movement; they also offer an easy way out. Taylor and Whittier have described this possibility for activists to “hibernate” in the scene during times of low mobilization, characterizing the structures of a scene as “social movement abeyance structures” (Taylor 1989; Taylor and Whittier 1992). As they point out, these structures provide highly committed radical activists the chance to leave the question of further activism open for a time, for example if the movement as a whole starts to take a more reformist turn. Beyond being temporary abeyance structures, scenes also make it possible to retreat permanently from movement activities without having to sever all ties to it. In the scene former activists can stay more or less sympathetic to the movement without actively engaging in movement activities. As they do not break completely with the movement, they may still be available for later mobilization under certain circumstances.

In addition to serving as a shelter for activists in times of low mobilization, scenes function as abeyance structures in another sense as well, by serving as culture-carriers for movement traditions, norms and history. Scene locations such as movement archives, book stores and movie-houses can do this in a very concrete and explicit way, acting as the institutional memory of the movement. But to the degree that scene organizations are also organized according to the principles of the movement and operate according to movement norms, they also preserve those norms and traditions in their praxis, keeping them alive and modelling them for future generations of activists. Bars, communes, book stores, housing projects or print shops, for example, that are run as collectives, can continue to work out the kinks in this structure and pass on the lessons they learn, though in times when militant activism ceases to police the boundaries, such groups also show a tendency to re-adapt to the dominant culture over time.

Generally speaking, with the exception of the first, which probably applies equally to all movements, these four functions seem especially important for a certain broad category of movement that includes what have been called, “left-libertarian” (della Porta and Rucht 1995), “expressive” (Rucht 1990), and “non-violent direct action” (Epstein 1991) movements. Movements like these, that operate with a predominantly value-rational orientation rather than an instrumental one, that reject traditional forms of organization, and aim to transform fundamentally the logic and institutional structure of society, may find it especially critical to have space in which to put their politics into practice.

### **Movements, scenes and civil society**

Thus far in the discussion, we have introduced the concept of a scene and distinguished it from other social structures such as community, subculture, counter-culture and milieu; illustrated the role of scenes in the construction of movement identities, through an analysis of internal debates within the German autonomous movement; and outlined four functions that scenes linked to social movements can have for the movement. In this concluding section, we will outline some of the implications of our investigation for the study of social movements and for investigations into the nature of civil society and the relationship between associations and democracy.

First, with respect to research on social movements, our case suggests that where scenes arise around social movements, they can have a strong impact on movement trajectories and longevity, and that therefore, the relationship between scenes and social movements merits further investigation. The recent cultural turn in social movement research notwithstanding, there has been a tendency in theories of social movements to overemphasize formal organizations on the one hand and institutional political opportunity structures on the other. As geographically embedded social networks, scenes are a structured part of the environment of some movements that do *not* comprise formal organizations, but may nevertheless have an important impact on their behaviour. Especially for the kind of movements mentioned above, the presence of a scene and its relationship to the movement is an aspect of the political opportunity structure – alongside such factors as the openness of political institutions, the stability of political alignments, the availability of influential allies and divisions within the elite (see also Purdue *et al.* 1997; Tarrow 1994: 87ff.) – that can critically affect a movement’s trajectory.

There is much to learn about why scenes come into being around some movements and not others, why the relationship between movement and scene takes different forms from one movement to the next, and the consequences of each form for the movement. With respect to the latter question, we have argued that scenes can function in at least four different ways to support movement progress, by serving: (1) as a mobilization pool; (2) as a social space in which movements can experiment with new organizational structures, deliberative styles and modes of interaction; (3) as a “free space” for political debate and the

exchange of information, in which new ideologies and collective identities are constructed and reproduced; and (4) as a set of “abeyance structures” that can be the institutional memory of the movement, preserving and transmitting movement culture, ideals and practices from one generation of activists to the next. We have seen in the German autonomous movement that there has been a strong symbiotic relationship between scene and movement, which has for the most part proved beneficial to the movement. But this relationship can work out differently from one movement to the next. Scenes can hinder as well as facilitate progress toward movement goals. The influence scenes have on movements very much depends on the kind of relationship that develops between them, and that relationship is not always a complementary one. More work needs to be done to flesh out the various kinds of relationships that exist, the conditions that give rise to them and their consequences for the movement.

A second area of scholarship in which the concept of scenes may prove useful is in the study of civil society. There are two points here. First, we argue that for certain kinds of investigations, it would be meaningful and productive to conceptualize scenes as a distinct sector of civil society. As in social movement research, the tendency in research on civil society, especially on the question of associations and democracy, has been to foreground participation in formal organizations at the expense of other forms of association. But at least in the German social movement sector, and we suspect elsewhere as well, social movement activists are seldom loyal to any one movement or social movement organization. Individual activists frequently move from one group to another, often participating in several different issue-based movements within a period of months or even weeks. Their participation in the *scene*, however, is much more constant. And while some collective decision-making goes on in social movement groups, it is in these informally structured locales and networks – in their politically oriented *Wohngemeinschaften* (living groups), movie theatres and scene bars – where the more intensive political debates, strategy discussions, and even action planning goes on. In short, it is primarily in the scene that they have the sustained interaction to learn the skills and attitudes of democratic engagement. For that reason, it seems to make little sense to think of “associations” only in formal organizational terms. At least in the context of these kinds of movements, the scene may be the more meaningful and relevant form of association on which to focus when investigating the relationship between associations and democracy.

While *including* scenes in our conception of civil society, it is also important to distinguish between movement scenes and the more traditional kinds of voluntary associations, such as fraternal organizations, parent–teacher associations and bowling leagues, that are the usual referents for studies on associations and democracy. Just as traditional voluntary associations are said to produce broader engagement in the political processes of a democratic state (Putnam 2000), the alternative structures and networks of movement scenes also generate substantial political action. The form of that engagement, however, as well as its impact on democracy, is likely to be substantially different.

The central argument in relation to associations and democracy has been that by teaching citizenship skills and fostering civic virtues such as trust, respect for the rule of law and a sense of generalized reciprocity, voluntary organizations encourage political participation, which is generally conceived of in conventional terms to include such activities as voting or writing to one's political representatives (Putnam 2000; Skocpol and Fiorina 1999). This kind of participation helps stabilize democracy in that it supports the legitimacy of existing political institutions and serves to prevent any obvious move toward a less democratic form of governance. But scholars have qualified this claim by arguing (1) that the contributions made by social movement organizations may differ substantially and in conflicting ways from those made by traditional voluntary associations; (2) that the degree to which associations are themselves democratically organized affects how well they can cultivate democratic civic virtues and participation; and (3) that associations with the same organizational structure may still make very different contributions to democracy, depending on the political context in which they operate (Fung 2003). To the degree that scenes are closely aligned with social movements, are made up of democratically structured groups and networks, and constitute an important part of a movement's political context, these findings all suggest that movement scenes may make a distinctive contribution to democracy.

Our second point with respect to scenes and civil society is that the *relationship* between scenes and social movements may be an important variable in assessing the democratic contributions of both kinds of association. We can theoretically consider not only the direct effects of both movement organizations and movement scenes on democracy, but also how various relationships *between* scenes and movements may mediate the contributions of each. For example, movements embedded in scenes may make a different kind of contribution than movements that do not give rise to scenes, and movements that are closely connected with a scene may make different contributions than those with a more antagonistic relationship.

There are certain tensions inherent in the relationship between movement and scene. Most significantly, scenes tend to be more experience-oriented while movements reach out and are more project-oriented. Scenes can, therefore, become lightning rods for ambivalence about competing instrumental and expressive logics within the movement. In the autonomous movement these different logics have repeatedly led to conflict, particularly around the question of whether the movement should focus its mobilization efforts only within the scene or reach out more to groups outside of it. That such an outreach strategy has never been able to gain hegemony in the autonomous movement is due mainly to the intimate connection between scene and movement. In contrast, the women's movement in Germany was also embedded in a similar structure of women's centres, bars, bookshops and a growing social support structure. But in the case of the women's movement, a growing distance between the movement and its scene developed throughout the 1980s. Professionalization on the one

hand and “spiritualization” on the other led to a growing differentiation of the scene and a growing alienation between the women supporting scene institutions and the women active in the movement. The resulting differentiation of activist life styles has led to the development of parallel, redundant and largely disconnected activist structures and a shift within the movement’s scene to a strategy of what Rucht (1990) calls “subcultural retreat”.

In the German gay movement as well, a growing alienation between movement and scene took place throughout the 1980s which led to a more or less rigid separation between the two, and finally to the dissolution of the movement into a traditional lobbying organization. In this case the separation of lifeworld and politics – scene and movement – had the effect of gradually stripping the movement of its ability to mobilize significant numbers of activists (Haunss 2004: 256ff.).

These examples suggest that different kinds of relationships between movement and scene yield different kinds of outcomes with respect to political engagement. Where there was a close connection between scenes and movements, as in the German autonomous movement, scenes allowed the movement to construct commitment frames that stabilized collective movement identities and, as such, helped to sustain the movement and foster their particular style of civic engagement. In the women’s and gay rights movements in Germany, where the relationship between scene and movement became estranged or antagonistic, respectively, subcultural retreat and traditional lobbying – two other forms of civic engagement – were the outcomes.

In closing, we have argued that scenes are an important non-organizational element in the environment of some social movements. Their most distinguishing feature is that they are simultaneously a network of people with a shared set of beliefs, tastes and convictions and a network of places where those who identify with the scene congregate and feel welcome. Our investigation of the autonomous movement and other movements in the German social movement sector suggests that where there is a close connection between scene and movement, scenes can help movements sustain mobilization, develop alternative forms of organization and self-governance, construct collective identities and reproduce their culture over time. Where the relationship between movement and scene becomes antagonistic, scenes can also divide or marginalize the movement, push it toward subcultural retreat or conventional forms of interest representation, and otherwise impede its ability to mobilize. Because of this variety of effects scenes can have on movements, we believe that the relationship between scene and movement may also be an important intervening variable, mediating the movement’s response to the political opportunity structure, and, as a distinct non-organizational sector of civil society, mediating the movement’s impact on the quality of democracy.

## **Note**

1 Authors listed alphabetically for convenience.

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